MARIO BAVA

ALL THE COLORS OF THE DARK



TIM LUCAS

Introduction by MARTIN SCORSESE

Foreword by RICCARDO FREDA







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VIDEO WATCHDOG · CINCINNATI OHIO

MARIO BAVA
ALL THE COLORS OF THE DARK

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Endpapers: A Hadean panorama from *Ercole al centro della terra/Hercules in the Haunted World.*

First Edition: July 2007

ISBN 0-9633756-1-X

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Printed in China

Per Mario e la sua famiglia

And in memory of my Bava squad:

Alan Y. Upchurch
Carlos Sylva
Bill Kelley
Mark Upchurch
Christopher Sven Dietrich





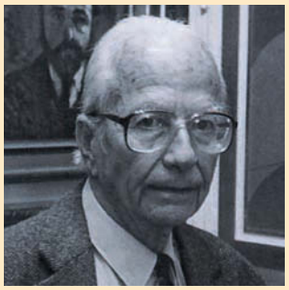
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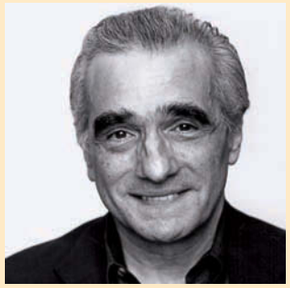
ALL THE COLORS OF THE DARK

"The Italian cinema produces masterpieces because it has few resources."
—Rene Clair

JAVUTICH *(Arturo Dominici) stands by as the undead Princess Asa absorbs the youth of her twin descendant Katia (Barbara Steele) in* LA MASCHERA DEL DEMONIO.

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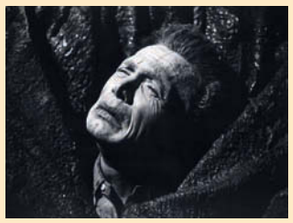
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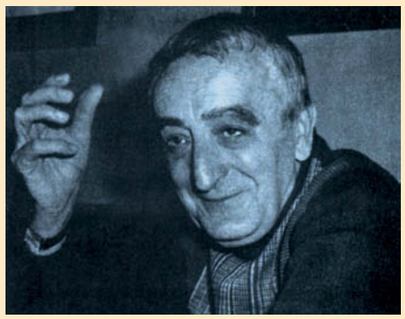
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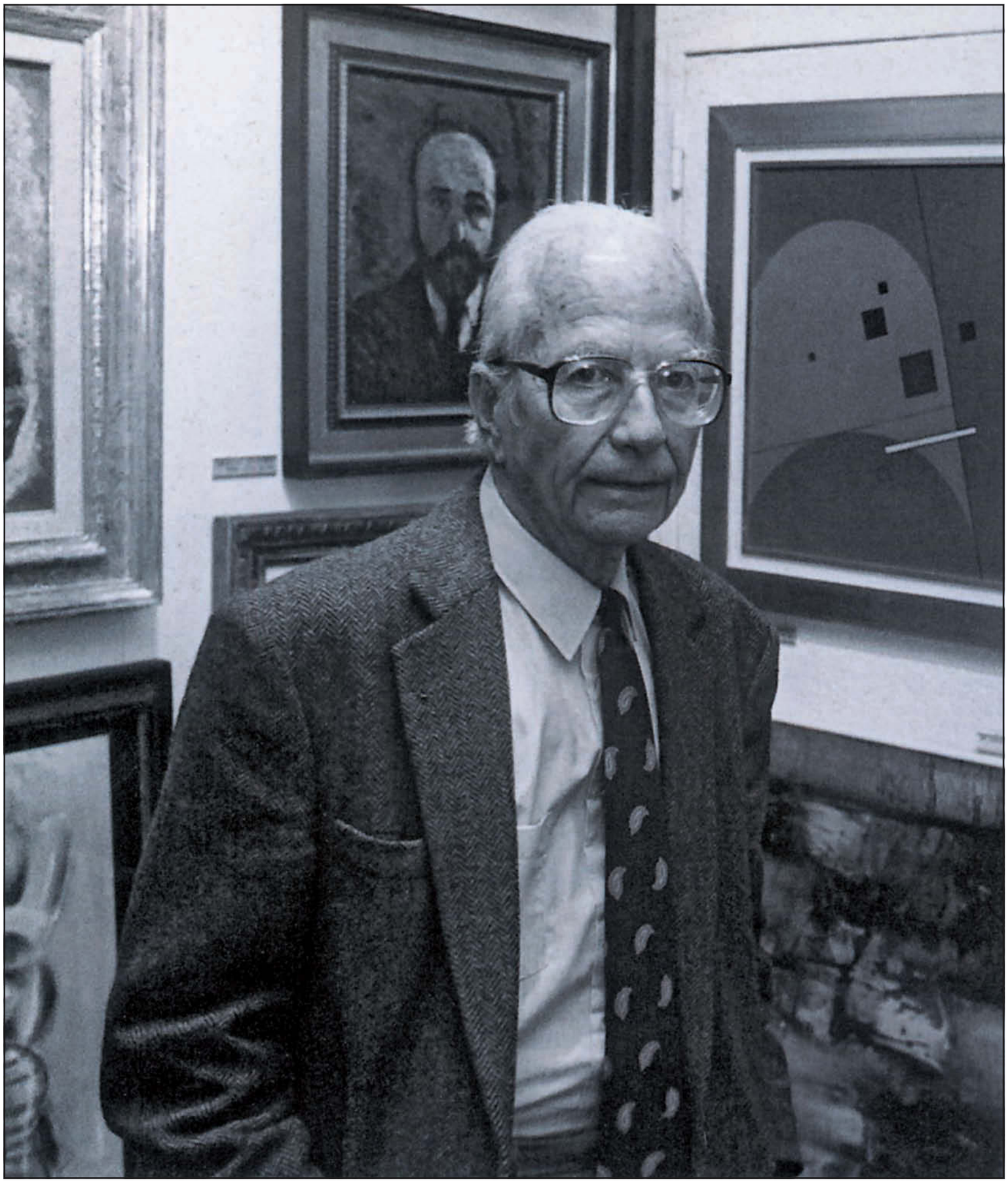


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Foreword

By Riccardo Freda

MY RELATIONSHIP with Mario Bava was divided equally between our personal and professional lives. Apart from working together on our films, Mario and I were also close friends. I am proud to say that he shared his dreams with me, as well as his memories.

I once accompanied him to his house to see the works of his father, an accomplished wax sculptor who specialized in making the likenesses of Saints, molding their faces and bodies out of wax and cloaking them in sacred vestments for the adoration of the devout. Perhaps his father's extraordinary talent showed Mario the way to his own artistic inclinations. His father was also a very talented inventor, from whom Mario inherited a predilection for the gadgets used in the making of motion pictures. Like him, I was also enamored of the field of trick photography and this quickly became a foundation for our friendship.

Bava became truly legendary for his trick photography and his ability was showcased in countless productions. Our debut as a team was *I vampiri*, a great success in which, for the first time on the screen, Bava triumphed in making a character grow old before the eyes of the audience without resorting to cutaways or dissolves. *Caltiki il mostro immortale/Caltiki the Immortal Monster* followed in 1959, which should be considered his first true venture as a director, as I abandoned the film for the last two weeks of production after arguing with the producers. After *Caltiki*, of course, Mario became a highly successful director in his own right and gradually, we lost touch with one another.

In any case, it must be said that Bava was, in effect, the true maker of many films, because his contributions qualified him to replace other directors of renown on several occasions—Pietro Francisci for *Le fatiche di Ercole/Hercules* (1958), Jacques Tourneur for *La battaglia di Maratona/The Giant of Marathon* (1959), etc. But it seems he cared little about this and, to be perfectly candid, he might have contentedly spent his entire life in the shadows had I not boasted about him and helped promote this important personality to the rank of director.

He was a simple man, always smiling, loving laughter and a good round of *bazzica scopa*—a card game to which he regularly challenged his fellow crew-members. And he very rarely lost his temper, a truly rare quality in this neurotic business of making movies.

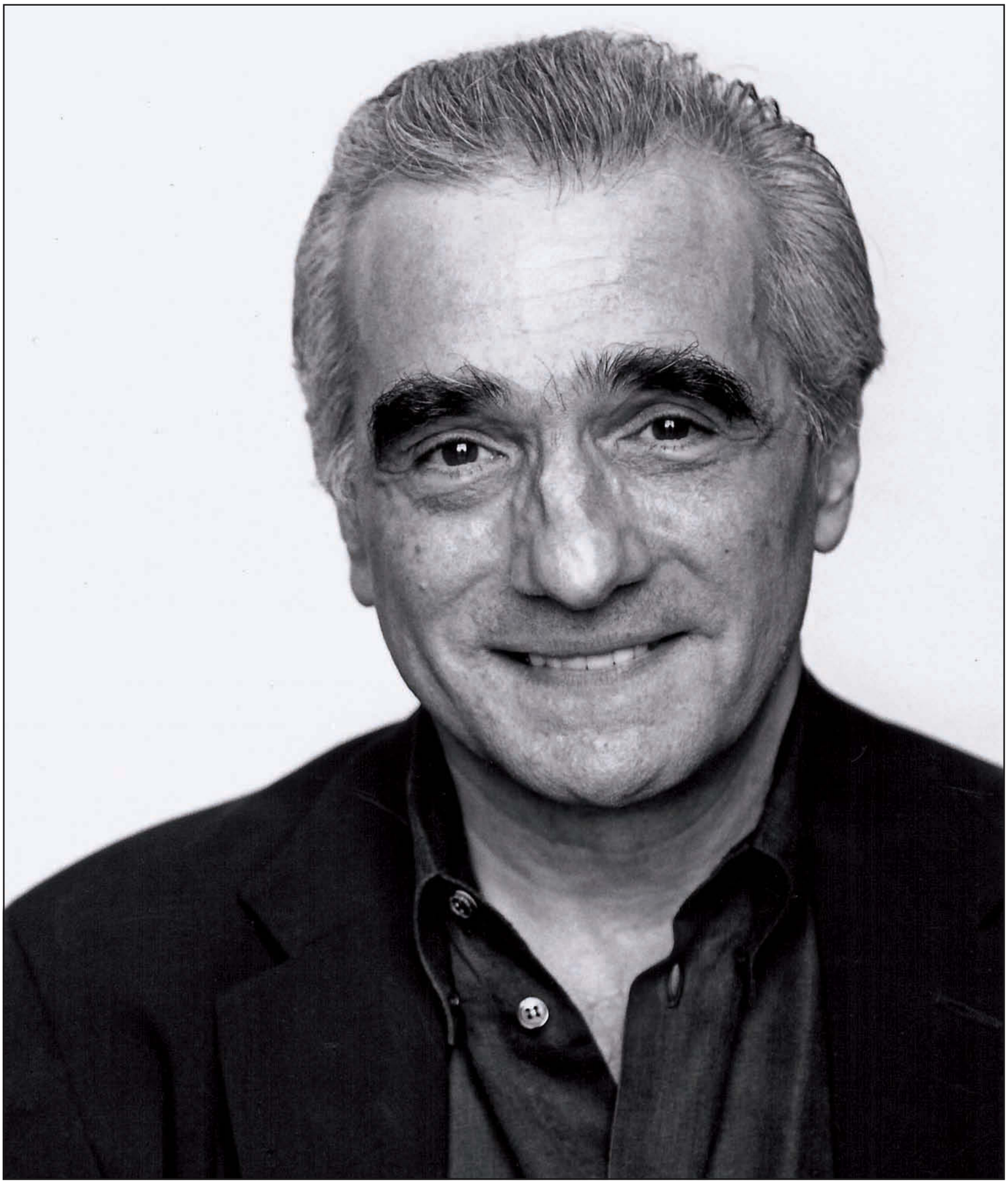
We made a lot of movies together, and on some of these his name does not even appear, such as *Spartaco/The Sins of Rome* (1953), for which he shot all of the scenes at the arena in Verona.

In summation, all I can say is this: the technical problem did not exist that Mario Bava could not solve with the greatest of ease. He displayed this remarkable ability in several short films which, I fear, are now lost—for instance, the one called *L'orecchio* (1946), which he made with the famous Italian actor Aldo Fabrizi. Here, with little means at his disposal, Bava managed to create special effects wholly comparable to those seen twenty years later in *Fantastic Voyage* (1966).

I am very pleased to have the opportunity to contribute these words, and to pay Mr. Lucas my respects for remembering a great *cinéaste* and a dear friend.



Rome, Italy
February 19, 1984



INTRODUCTION

By Martin Scorsese

IF YOU ASKED ME to tell you the plot of any given Mario Bava film, I don't think I could. I take it back—I probably could *now*, after having read Tim Lucas' exhaustive, perceptive biography. But if this book didn't exist, I would find it difficult. Why? Because the films are simply too entrancing.

Different directors have different strengths. Some, like De Mille or Hitchcock or Wyler, are great storytellers. Bava was not a great storyteller, but he didn't have to be and he wasn't trying to be. He was good—very good—at something else. He used light, shadow, color, sound (on- and off-screen), movement and texture to lead his viewers down uncharted paths into a kind of collective dream. Critics often compare movie-watching to dreaming but, in Bava's case, the comparison actually means something. When we dream, we're often swept into indescribable situations, without time for deliberation or reflection. We're left in states of bliss or terror, or both at the same time. When we wake up, we realize that we've been riding these emotional states like surfers riding a wave.

This is how I experience Bava's best films. Many directors try to capture a dream-like state, but they often make the mistake of signalling the audience, and the mood is spoiled—you realize that the tone has changed, as if there were a title on the screen announcing, "Now it's going to be like a dream." But, invariably, Mario Bava gets it right. He places his viewers *and* his characters in an oddly disquieting state where they're compelled to keep moving forward—even though they don't know precisely why, or where they're going. The atmosphere itself becomes the principal character, a living organism with a mind and will of its own. Bava was a master craftsman, and he knew how to create a mood, where every sound, every movement of the camera, and every object was weighted with mystery and unease.

I've kept going back to Bava's films throughout the years, and the ones I love never disappoint me: *Black Sunday, Blood and Black Lace,* the "Wurdulak" section of *Black Sabbath*, *Lisa and the Devil*. I can't count the number of times I've seen *Kill, Baby . . . Kill!* and, every time, it casts the same spell. It's a genuinely hypnotic piece of filmmaking, and it goes into a deeply unsettling direction that many filmmakers with bigger budgets and far greater resources have tried for and few have managed to sustain, or even find.

At this point, I want to add that the strangely discordant American titles of some Bava pictures only add to their dream-like disorientation. When *Kill, Baby . . . Kill!* came out here, the title led me to expect '60s Bond sub-genre guys in shades riding around in convertibles and models in bikinis—pretty much *anything* but a 19th century gothic tale set in a Transylvanian castle.

Among the many virtues of this fine book is the fact that it offers us a multi-faceted portrait of a modest man who was an artist in spite of himself, working in the least reputable film genres—horror, slasher movies, sword and sandal epics, science fiction, sex comedies, Westerns. We have to keep resisting the idea of official film history, a stately procession of "important works" that leaves some of the most exciting films and filmmakers tucked away in the shadows. Bava's career—like Sam Fuller's, Edgar G. Ulmer's, or Raoul Walsh's—demonstrates the liberating side of working without prestige or significance hovering over your head. The more disreputable the genre and the lower the budget, the less there is at stake and the freer you are to experiment and explore new territories. Especially when you're as talented and resourceful as Bava was.

Tim Lucas has devoted himself to getting the word out about Bava's greatness, to making sure his films are preserved and available on tape and DVD. This book is the pinnacle of his efforts. It deserves a place on the bookshelves of all serious film lovers.



New York City, NY
April 30, 2003



PROLOGUE

"Any magazine-cover hack can spread paint around wildly and call it a nightmare or a Witches Sabbath or a portrait of the devil, but only a great painter can make such a thing really scare or ring true."
—H. P. Lovecraft, "Pickman's Model"

IN HIS LATER years, Italian film director Mario Bava was fond of recounting an episode from his childhood which, he speculated, had played a critical role in determining his later approach to life and career.

Bava was what the Italians call a "*figlio d'arte*": a child of the Arts. His father—whose real name was Francesco (though he was called Eugenio)—was an accomplished sculptor, renowned throughout his hometown of Sanremo for carving beautiful, life-like statues of the Saints from a fleshy resin. Eugenio was equally involved with science and technology at the dawn of the 20th century, using his knowledge of sculpture to develop new and innovative ways of lighting still photography; he later adapted these same methods to the fledgling art of cinematography. Eugenio must have seemed like a magician to his young son—tall and mysterious, crafting human bodies out of shapeless materials, recreating entire vistas of nature in miniature on table tops, gifted with the ability to find the miraculous in the mundane.

Naturally, there came a time when the child determined to create something that would impress his father, as his father's creations had so often impressed him. One day, when Mario (then called Nino) was about 3 or 4 years old, presumably after many secret attempts, he drew a picture that he considered good enough to present to his father. Proudly, he signed the drawing "MARIO BAVA" in large printed letters and took it down the hall to his father's workshop.

When the child placed his creation on his father's desk, Eugenio Bava looked at the paper, frowned . . . and smacked the boy's face.

"*Papà!*" Mario cried. "Why did you do that?"

"Who do you think you are—*Michelangelo*?" his father shouted. "Only Michelangelo created art worthy of a signature! And you, who created this—who are you? You are *nobody!*"

◀ **MARIO BAVA** *consults his shooting script on the set of LA RAGAZZA CHE SAPEVA TROPPO in 1962.*

Eugenio wasn't a cruel or sadistic man; he was simply enacting a popular Italian wisdom of the time: "If you want someone to remember what you say, slap them when you say it." Nevertheless, it was a traumatic episode for Mario, never forgotten by the child and much impressed upon the man and the artist he became.

Mario's relationship with his father was always difficult, as relationships between similar people often are, and the son held onto his determination to someday impress his father with his independence. As the ironies of fate would have it, Mario discovered that his own personal path followed the arc of his father's own footsteps. Like his father, he initially aspired to become an artist, and like his father, he was ultimately seduced by the motion picture business, which had become the family business. He initially worked as his father's apprentice in the optical effects department of the Istituto Nazionale LUCE (1932-39), later becoming one of Italy's leading cinematographers (1939-60), and eventually, a film director (1960-78). All of these things and more Eugenio had also been, though he stubbornly resisted identification with his work and died virtually unknown. Mario likewise never achieved great celebrity during his lifetime, not because his work went unrecognized but because he was uncomfortable in the limelight. After all, he was nobody.

Like his father, Mario considered any form of self-promotion to be vulgar. He worked his wonders from the vantage where he was least likely to be observed: *behind the camera*. He photographed several of Italy's most popular and important films of the 1950s, helping to cultivate the screen personas of such international stars as Gina Lollobrigida, Aldo Fabrizi and Steve Reeves. When fortune rewarded his hard work and dependable talent by promoting him to the rank of director, Mario took refuge in the shadows of a genre that most filmmakers of that time did not often deign to include on their résumés, and which was distinctly unpopular in his own country: the horror film.

While Bava's choice of genre certainly contributed to his neglect by the critical mainstream, it was not wholly responsible. Bava himself was the first to belittle his endeavors. According to his son Lamberto (who served as his assistant director from 1965 to 1978), Mario often commenced the shooting of a new film by calling for everyone's attention and announcing, "Now we are going to make a movie . . . and when we finish, we'll all have much to be ashamed of!" Unlike his colleagues, who made proud claims for their movies that the unreeled evidence did not always support, Bava actively shunned the prospect of his own discovery. He dismissed his films as "bullshit," saying that they made him "feel like throwing up"; he would roll his eyes whenever anyone attempted to discuss them seriously. In his twenty-year directorial career, he made only two television appearances and granted only a half-dozen print interviews, most of which were self-deprecating to the point of self-sabotage. He responded to interviewers' questions with quizzical remarks that carried an undertone of "Haven't you anything better to do than talk to me?"

By diverting serious attention from his work, Bava was spared the embarrassment of admitting that he had been secretly expressing himself through it all along. Knowing nothing about the man he was, and given no clues as to what Bava might express about himself, his life or his beliefs if he were so inclined, neither the press nor his audience had any clues to the contrary. Consequently, Bava attained the reputation of a masterful stylist whose films were bereft of soul and substance.

But the insiders of the Italian film industry knew better. Throughout the 1960s and '70s—the fecund period in which he directed all of his movies—Mario Bava was regarded by his peers as a *Maestro*, and he was often approached by other directors in desperate need of his expertise. "[Mario] was endowed with an extraordinary technical ability, and took great pleasure in confronting and solving the most difficult technical problems," his friend and mentor Riccardo Freda recalled in his autobiography, *Divoratori di celluloide*. "I remember—when film wasn't as sensitive as it is today—that he once shot a sunset scene with the characters in close-up, going far beyond what were considered the limitations of the film stock. A master of trick photography, he could solve any problem, however difficult."

The word "legendary" may sound excessive for such a retiring and humble personality, but witness Vincente Minnelli's *Two Weeks in Another Town* (1962)—a melodrama documenting a troubled American production being filmed at Cinecittà—which features an heroically resourceful cameraman named "Mario." Of course, Mario is a common Italian name, as good as any for this peripheral character, but Minnelli's film is overflowing with inside jokes and a sophisticated knowledge of the Italian film industry. It was also made well after Bava had saved many an American director's "Hollywood on the Tiber" excursion—Robert Z. Leonard, Raoul Walsh, Jacques Tourneur, Andre de Toth, and Arthur Lubin, were only a few of the filmmakers who had reason to thank him. Bava never sought credit for such favors. After all, who was he to take credit? To sign his name?

Mario Bava never aspired to become a film director, or so he claimed. As he once said, "I've been in the film business for so long . . . I know everything and everybody, so how could I possibly take this absurd circus seriously?" He was essentially pushed into the director's chair by other directors, notably Riccardo Freda—who abandoned two horror films (*I vampiri*, 1957 and *Caltiki il mostro immortale/Caltiki the Immortal Monster*, 1959) that Bava happened to be photographing, leaving them in his capable hands to finish. It was after salvaging another abandoned picture, Jacques Tourneur's *La battaglia di Maratona/The Giant of Marathon* (1959), that executive producer Lionello "Nello" Santi rewarded Bava with an offer to direct any film of his own choosing.

A devotée of Russian literature, Bava chose Nikolai Gogol's ghost story "Viy" as his model and made *La maschera del demonio/Black Sunday* (1960), a film that actually has little in common with its credited source. It became a tremendous international success. Audiences were thrilled and terrified by this, one of the last great black-and-white horror pictures, and overnight—as a result of her dual role as the virtuous Princess Katia and her resurrected vampire ancestor, Princess Asa—Barbara Steele earned international regard as the first (and possibly still reigning) Queen of Horror.

As sometimes happens when things go too well, the overreaching success of *La maschera del demonio* cast a pall over Bava's subsequent efforts. The film's admirers were not pleased when its elegant monochromatic photography, classical storytelling, and Gothic atmosphere were followed by a chain of increasingly brutal, deliriously colorful horror films, including *I tre volti della paura/Black Sabbath* (1963), *La frusta e il corpo/The Whip and the Body* (1963), and *Sei donne per l'assassino/Blood and Black Lace* (1964). These inventive, fiercely modernist films—now recognized by many as Bava's most accomplished work—were perceived at the time as a betrayal of his gift for gothic horror. Furthermore, the frankly adult bent of these films was met with disapproval from American distributors, who retaliated by deleting footage, reshuffling the order of the remaining scenes, and rewriting their dialogue in the dubbing studio. These amendments too did nothing to advance Bava's career.

After a healthy half-decade spent largely under the beating wing of American International Pictures, Bava drifted into low-budget obscurity. His only subsequent major-budget production came in 1968, an adaptation of the popular Italian *fumetti* (comic book) *Diabolik* for producer Dino De Laurentiis; it proved a moderate success and a personal turning point. Bava learned from this production that the higher financial stakes of big-budget filmmaking took all of the fun, spontaneity and invention out of his profession. Once



FRENCH *grande affiche for CALTIKI IL MOSTRO IMMORTALE, art by Georges Allard, utilizing elements from original Italian poster artist Valcarenghi.*

his job was completed, he withdrew—despite a lucrative offer for more work from De Laurentiis—back into the subterranean strata of exploitation filmmaking, where creative picture-makers could still function more or less as they pleased without interference from the front office.

As the 1960s became the '70s, Bava's films became more personal, challenging and difficult to see. One of these, *Lisa and the Devil* (1973)—possibly his most personal and certainly his most oblique film—failed to attract any buyers at the 1973 Cannes Film Festival and remained on the shelf for two years. Bava was ultimately recruited to reconfigure his masterpiece into a common *Exorcist* rip-off. Being compelled to paint a mustache on his Mona Lisa drove Bava to the breaking point, and he rebelled against his producer, Alfredo Leone, refusing to shoot certain scenes. Leone eventually took over as director, supervising the final edit and releasing the end result as *The House of Exorcism* (1975)—whose title appears on a theater marquee in Woody Allen's *Annie Hall* (1977) as one of the signs heralding the end of civilization.

In the meantime, Bava tackled the most unusual and technically restricting film of his career—*Cani arrabbiati/Rabid Dogs* (1975)—a crime thriller shot in real time and staged almost entirely inside a moving car. Alas, his bad luck held true to form: two days shy of its completion, the film's principal investor died, and his assets—including the film's rough cut, which was being assembled as the picture was shot in sequence—were impounded. Bava's only wholly realistic film, *Cani arrabbiati* could have had a revitalizing effect on his career had it been completed as planned. But the film remained under official lock and key until fifteen years after Bava's death, at which point it was finished by unrelated hands, scored with demos of the music intended for it, and released directly to DVD. *Rabid Dogs* was hailed as one of Bava's most remarkable films—the only title in his filmography to take place wholly outside a fantastic context—but far too late for Bava himself to benefit from its recognition.

The downward spiral of Bava's professional life led to his increasing cynicism about the business of making motion pictures. He spent his last years remaining true to his nature: working anonymously on other people's projects. Bava provided uncredited trick photography to television commercials and the works of some younger filmmakers, developed feature projects that he knew might not be entrusted to him because of his advancing years, granted a couple of increasingly bitter interviews, and co-directed *La Venere d'Ille* (1978), an hour-long movie for television, with his son, Lamberto. Even this 16 mm swan song had to wait two years, until after Bava's death, for its premiere broadcast.

On April 25, 1980, less than a month after a medical check-up that found him in perfect health, Mario Bava suffered a fatal heart attack while sleeping. His obituary in the May 14, 1980 edition of the American trade newspaper *Variety* is a testament to how well he had covered his tracks throughout his lifetime. It said that he had spent twenty years before becoming a director *as a mere camera operator* rather than as one of Italy's leading cinematographers; and it credited him with a handful of film titles in English, all crude transliterations of their original Italian titles, the necrologist not bothering to research the original names of their releases in America and Great Britain. *Variety*'s careless research at least helped to spare Bava's memory the indignity of recalling that his last three completed features—all original productions—had been marketed in America as rip-offs: *Last House Part II*, *The House of Exorcism* and *Beyond the Door II*.

Bava's friends and acquaintances allow that his merry personality also had a dark side and yet—more than a quarter century after his death—they continue to speak of him with the sort of reverence more appropriate to a man of the cloth than a director of horror films. When I spoke to actor Cameron Mitchell, the star of three Bava films, he insisted on preceding our interview with this disarming tribute:

> "I did the first film of my life with John Ford, the man considered by many to be America's finest director, and it was an emotional experience I'll never forget. I was scared to death of him. It has been my pleasure to work with Orson Welles, and I also knew Fellini and Bergman quite well. It's true that I never worked with Bergman, but I met him in Stockholm (where I was making a picture) at Svensk Filmindustri, and we had quite a few lunches together. He reminded me of Elia Kazan, whom I'd worked for in *A Streetcar Named Desire* and *Man on a Tightrope*. Raoul Walsh, Sam Fuller . . . I mention the names of these men because I honestly feel that Mario Bava was perhaps the best and most underrated filmmaker of them all. I don't think any one of them could really compare with Bava."

Mitchell's obviously sincere estimation begs the question, "If Mario Bava was such a great talent, why did he never transcend the horror genre?"

It's a reasonable query, considering the number of actors and directors who have used horror as a point of entry into the business, only to deny it later like personal information of the sort that could only interest a blackmailer. The most commercial of all film genres, horror has often proved to be the smart choice for talented, albeit unproven filmmakers intent on making a low-budget, high-profit stepping stone to "bigger things"—e.g., Francis Ford Coppola's *Dementia 13* (1963), Alan Rudolph's *Barn of the Naked Dead* (1973), and Oliver Stone's *Seizure* (1975), to name a few. When the genre is used as a short cut into the business, it is somehow understandable, if never forgivable. But if the tide is reversed, and an established director turns to horror at the summit of his career, the backlash can be devastating. Look no further than the example of British director Michael Powell, who all but destroyed his seemingly unimpeachable career as one of England's most respected filmmakers by turning his attention to the dark and sordid subject matter of *Peeping Tom* (1960)—a remarkable film, incidentally, whose stock has risen considerably in the decades since.

In time, after the Powell debacle, it became possible for filmmakers like David Cronenberg (*The Fly*, 1986) and David Lynch (*Blue Velvet*, 1987) to build respectable mainstream careers on the same bizarre, thematic concerns which inspired their exploitation-level debuts. The "baby boomer" generation that grew up on horror movies, comic books and science fiction paperbacks is now Hollywood's ruling class, and most of the Top Ten grossing films in history have some connection to the horror or science fiction genre. The prejudice against these films still persists among the public and the Hollywood establishment alike, but the money they generate in clanking tumult is respected by one and all.

Mario Bava dared to specialize in horror at a time when it wasn't fashionable—indeed, when it was barely possible in his own country. Why? Because the genre was his conviction and his compulsion. In the horror film, Bava found the ideal palette for the emotions he was most driven to express.

In the first print interview Bava ever granted, "the Hitchcock of Cinecittà" was asked by Alfredo Castelli and Tito Monego of the Italian magazine *Horror* why he had selected the genre as his specialty. "I don't know why," Bava confessed, but eager to explore the possibilities, he continued: "Terror fascinates and attracts me, but for no particular reason. Perhaps it's a question of psychology . . . to make a film of this kind helps me to overcome my own fears. The lights, the technicians, and the actors help to defuse an atmosphere that, in real life, would be enough to make me die of fright."

Fear—an emotion distinct from horror, which is analogous to revulsion—was Bava's primary interest. ("Do you know what the most frightening thing in the world is?" asks Michael Powell's *Peeping Tom*. "It's



SPANISH *poster art for GLI INVASORI.*



SPANISH *poster for IL ROSSO SEGNO DELLA FOLLIA, art by Francisco Fernandez Zarza Jano.*

fear.") And what better forum for the creative purgings of a man who didn't like to be seen, than a genre that causes its audience to avert their eyes? Horror was also, very importantly, a genre in which the initial production costs were so low that Bava could expect and receive complete artistic control—a latitude almost impossible for a director to attain while working in any other film genre.

In some ways, Bava's work shows him to be a throwback to zoetropic pioneers like Etienne-Gaspard Robert (1763-1837), who, in the late 18th century, adopted the name "Robertson"—thus initiating a long history of European horror specialists hiding behind Anglo pseudonyms. Robertson delighted in projecting animated images of demons and skeletons on the walls and cobwebs of actual Parisian crypts. Like Robertson, Mario Bava was neither a traditional nor conventional storyteller, but rather a mediumistic conductor, an orchestrator of macabre atmospheres. He was a fundamentally inarticulate artist who spoke his heart by transposing text into image, circumstance into design, and emotion into color. It was his particular innovation to detail his obsessions not only with interplays of light and shadow, as the German Expressionists had done, but with shocking exclamations of hue. It was his special genius to jolt audiences with visual shocks of great chromatic and compositional beauty, confounding their impulse to look away or hide their eyes. He made Evil appear glamorous and seductive; he juxtaposed scenes of animal violence with allusions to mankind's highest spiritual conceits; he dared to eroticize the very moment of death. When Bava's camera zooms into the carnal remains of a murdered woman, his Madonna lighting always sees through the horror of violence to the Angel in the wreckage.

Bava was, at once, the last great gothic horror director and the genre's first truly modern practitioner. Films like *La frusta e il corpo* and *Operazione paura/Kill, Baby . . . Kill!* (1966, which Phil Hardy described as "one of [Bava's]—and therefore one of the genre's—best pictures" [1]) are examples of progressive, psychological dramas transposed to a Gothic *milieu* to accentuate their sense of dislocation, while *Sei donne per l'assassino* and *Ecologia del delitto/Twitch of the Death Nerve* (1971) provide precise blueprints for the "body count" subgenre that would dominate the horror genre throughout the remaining years of the 20th century, from *Friday the 13th* (1980) to *I Still Know What You Did Last Summer* (1998), and well into the next.

Bava's films reflect a preoccupation with fear, superstition and death so pervasive that it spills over even into the unlikely terrain of his science fiction, Western, and mythological films. This morbidity is occasionally offset by a mood of playfulness, wherein the darkness becomes all the more awful in its unexpected stance as a game, a friend, or the laughter of a child who happens to be dead. Unlike his British contemporary Terence Fisher, whose horror films concerned themselves with the classic broadstrokes of theological Good and Evil, Bava's brushstrokes were more interior and individual—"spiritual" rather than "religious." The specifics of his work are in fact so intimate, like those of the similarly enigmatic American director Tod Browning, they wield the arcane force of a creative catharsis.

Before Bava photographed and co-directed *I vampiri* in 1956, no horror film tradition existed in Italy. Nevertheless, something in Bava's character allowed him to see sunny Italy as a natural setting for ghost stories. Rome is, after all, an enormous ruin where every street corner harbors some antiquity more widely known among the dead than among the living. Just as David Cronenberg has suggested that his film *The Brood* (1979) could be read as "his" *Kramer vs. Kramer* (1978) for the way it explores the horrific subconscious effects of divorce, a film like Bava's *Il rosso segno della follia/Hatchet for the Honeymoon* (1970) bears a similar relationship to such mainstream Italian fare as Pietro Germi's *Divorzio all'italiana/Divorce Italian Style* (1961). Bava's ability to express previously unexpressed moods and atmospheres on film may suggest him as a poet, but his ability to express at once the dark side of himself and his country confirms him as an artist of more than cult-level significance.



The horror, fantasy, and science fiction film genres were founded to depict stories and concepts that cannot be seen or experienced in our day-to-day lives. But as the years have passed, the horror genre has moved away from its roots as an abstract and expressionistic art form. And, as the motion picture industry has evolved from a fantasy factory into the richest of all commercial businesses, the horror film has become—like all forms of cinema—increasingly realistic. By looking at the horror films produced by Universal Pictures between 1931 and 1941, a gradual movement away from expressionism, toward realism, can already be discerned. Reality was further enhanced by the first successes of Britain's Hammer Films in the mid-1950s, with the addition of color and graphic and/or clinical violence. Hammer's gifted resident cinematographer, Jack Asher, made occasional impressionistic experiments with color photography (see *The Man Who Could Cheat Death*, 1959), but never quite spilled over into the exciting, garish excesses of style flaunted by Jack Cardiff in the dark fantasies he photographed for Michael Powell and Emeric Pressburger, *Black Narcissus* (1947) and *The Red Shoes* (1948).

What Mario Bava brought to the evolution of the horror film was exactly this brand of chromatic daring, combined with an Italian eye for detail and florid exaggeration and an underlying sense of irony. It was not the ugly things in his films that frightened audiences; instead, Bava unnerved them with instances of beauty, poetry, symmetry, inverted imagery, metaphysics, mysticism, and above all, color. Color of abnormal intensity. Color that drew the eye to places it would not normally wish to linger. Color that shouted or whispered warnings. Color that did not belong—that, in a realistic setting, could not possibly be there, thus intimating the presence of the supernatural. Bava's films had the uncanny atmosphere of waking dreams, in which the imagery of the conscious could unexpectedly be eclipsed by glimpses of the subconscious or unconscious. In many ways, Bava's work was the perfect cinematic equivalent of the prose of his favorite author, H. P. Lovecraft (1890-1937), where narrative was slippery at best, buried behind a baroque, harlequin-colored wash of false literary references, invented histories, and otherworldly atmosphere.

Few genres are as dependent on narrative logic as the horror film, which carries the responsibility of making the unbelievable believable—or, at least, plausible. Because they concede to emotion—or even to aesthetic reasoning—before logic, Bava's films are sometimes described as weakly scripted. It is my argument that Bava—who was described to me by many of his colleagues as an essentially intuitive artist who found it difficult to verbally communicate his goals, needs or achievements—was working toward something new, something analogous in film to what musical contemporaries like Miles Davis and John Coltrane were simultaneously doing in the world of jazz. That is, breaking away from the traditional strictures of melody and rhythm to explore the possibilities of mood, invention and atmosphere. This is not to place Bava's work in the same category as jazz, but we will see that his working methods often relied on spontaneity and the spirit of improvisation, also essential to jazz. But, just as jazz could not exist without a traditional musical foundation from which to improvise, it would have been impossible for Bava to proceed along these experimental lines without his thorough grounding in all the laws and sciences of cinema.

However improvisational, oblique, and mood-driven Bava's films may be, they are also frequently classical and romantic in character and cadence. Martin Scorsese has described Bava, perceptively, despite his modernistic tendencies, as a 19th

1 Phil Hardy, *The Aurum Film Encyclopedia: Horror* (London, UK: Aurum Press, 1985, rev. 1993), 183.



PRINCESS KATIA *(Barbara Steele) places her trust in the valiant young doctor Andrej Gorobec (John Richardson) in this lovely Italian fotobusta from* LA MASCHERA DEL DEMONIO.

century director. Rather than jazz, a more correct musical correlative to Bava's work might be rhapsody; the pacing of his films is rhapsodic, their tenor is rhapsodic, the ripe overstatement of his visual sense is rhapsodic . . . but his rhapsodizing is always accompanied by shadings of irony, serious or comic, usually cast by the spectre of Death as it stands in eternal reproach of Bava's—or possibly Rome's—essentially romantic character.

What Bava was doing is also comparable to the changes that were simultaneously taking place in the work of his fellow countrymen Michelangelo Antonioni and Federico Fellini, as they took steps beyond their neorealistic films of the 1950s toward their less rigorously structured masterpieces of the early 1960s. Bava's "neorealistic" phase could be construed as the traditional gothic horror styles apparent in both *I vampiri* and *La maschera del demonio*. As the 1960s progressed, his work too became more interior and existential, more interested in exploring the subconscious, or the unconscious, than the conscious; it was not the actor's emotion or even narrative motivation that interested Bava most, but the correct color or *mise en scène* to bring the underlying truth of a moment to the surface—truth that could be more readily felt than explained.

To achieve this, Bava exercised strict control over his uses of color and framing. According to film director Joe Dante (who has had opportunity to examine 35 and 16 mm elements of Bava's films, first-hand), Bava favored the use of 1.85:1 hard-matting as early as his directorial debut *La maschera del demonio*, although the word "SuperPanoramico" (Italian hyperbole for the 1.85:1 widescreen format, as opposed to anamorphic scope) does not appear in connection in the theatrical advertising for Bava's films until *Terrore nello spazio* in 1965. The widest of the standard non-anamorphic gauges, 1.85:1 was analogous in shape to a painter's canvas and, of all the available screen ratios, a 1.85 hard-matte was the least vulnerable to mishandling by projectionists, as it was impossible to overmatte or undermatte. It is true that Bava's films were habitually cropped, or pan-and-scanned, when 16 mm prints were prepared for television. As Dante explains, "It's rare that hard-matted films were released that way in 16 mm, as most TV stations hated the 'black lines' on top and bottom. And there are, indeed, cropped 16 mm prints of *Blood and Black Lace* that were intended for TV use, but all were in Eastman Color. The letterbox 16s are all IB-Technicolor and were made earlier for non-theatrical situations like the Army, Navy and rental markets."[2] Bava's precise attention to framing is further underscored by his reputation as the first member of the Italian filmmaking community to employ storyboarding as part of his process; he began doing this early in his career as a cameraman.

Color, on the other hand, was much trickier to control. Forced to work economically, Bava typically shot his color films on affordable Eastmancolor stock, but aware of its tendency to fade over time, he insisted on striking his prints in Technicolor from the time Technicolor Roma began accepting outside film stocks for development in the mid-1950s. He was able to keep an eye on this process in Italy, but once his films were sold to other countries, the matters of print duplication and color process were left in the hands of his foreign distributors. Only since Bava's original Technicolor work has become available on DVD has his audience been able to realize how much of their meaning and impact was formerly lost due to cheap, maladroit processing. For example, when Bava's films were released in the United States by American International Pictures, the prints were struck in Pathé Color, which bled them of the potency given them by Technicolor's various three-strip and dye processing, turning his richly confectionery images to a flat paste. With this mishandling factored in, it's no wonder that critics looked to the storylines for satisfaction and found them clichéd or otherwise wanting.

We must remember that Bava was bringing this level of care and attention to a body of work that was conceived and executed for perhaps two weeks of theatrical play at best, without any awareness of a future shelf life beyond that of late night television, where the movies would be butchered and subjected to commercial interruption.

Bava's directorial debut, *La maschera del demonio,* was released in 1960, before anything resembling a serious critical appreciation of the horror cinema had come into being. Audiences, young and young adult, delighted in its inventive fusion of the classic Universal and recent Hammer brands of terror, the way it blended graphic horror with expressionism and chiaroscuro, but there was no literature at the time capable of articulating exactly what it had accomplished. The premiere issue of the intelligent French journal *Midi-Minuit Fantastique* was still two years away, and the American alternative, *Famous Monsters of Filmland,* was so focused on American product that *Black Sunday* somehow failed to receive timely coverage in its pages, at a time when every other new AIP release was guaranteed at least a three-page spread. What critical attention the film did receive tended to be naïve, jocular and ultimately dismissive. For example, while acknowledging the film's visual sophistication (and sweeping it under the rug before the first comma in the first paragraph), "Tube."'s review in the American industry journal *Variety* likened *Black Sunday* to "a grade school imitation of Poe," and flaunted the writer's ignorance by remarking that Steele "bears a strong resemblance to Jackie Kennedy and manages to be attractive in both parts [of her dual role], which may not have been the original intention."[3]

Bava's films received some of their earliest, appreciative attention in *Midi-Minuit Fantastique* (founded May – June 1962), in reviews written by Michel Caen and Jérome Caulandre, and in Great Britain's *Monthly Film Bulletin*, where initially callous and condescending notices by anonymous reviewers were succeeded by attentive and appreciative notices by Tom Milne and Raymond Durgnat. Bava's critical reception in English-speaking countries (including Britain) was complicated by the fact that the films were almost always altered for foreign markets, without the director's consent or approval. Therefore, while French critics wrote enthusiastically about *La ragazza che sapeva troppo/The Girl Who Knew Too Much* (1963) or *La frusta e il corpo*, American and English reviews greeted their haphazard recuts with lofty derision. They might have felt the same way whether the films had been recut or not because, after the great success of *La maschera del demonio*, Bava's films became more resolutely visual and personal, less driven by narrative. The results were considered exhilarating in the homeland of the *nouvelle roman* and the *nouvelle vague*, but in America, where horror films were traditionally juvenile entertainment, Bava's phantasmagorical and resolutely adult horror films were an uncategorical anomaly.

In the first major book-length survey of the horror genre, *An Illustrated History of the Horror Film* (published 1967), author Carlos Clarens cited Bava as proof that "if bad directors usually end up as photographers, the reverse of this axiom is just as valid and true."[4] Clarens' viewpoint stood as the accepted wisdom for some time, but in the decades since those words were written, there has been a welcome, widespread reappraisal of Bava's abilities as an artist and entertainer.

Today, audiences are bombarded daily, hourly, with bravura displays of visual style in everything from features to television commercials to music videos. Stylish visuals have become so commonplace that they often cease to have any impact on viewers at all; we have been conditioned to respond only to what is absolutely new, and we become jaded to those nascent thrills as early as the second pass. Consequently, it is

2 Joe Dante, email to the author, July 30, 2005.

3 Tube., "Black Sunday" review, *Variety*, February 9, 1960.

4 Carlos Clarens, *An Illustrated History of the Horror Film* (New York NY: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1967), 158.

hard to explain to anyone who didn't live through the 1950s and '60s what it was like to discover Bava's work in its own time, the way it stood out from the pack of its contemporaries.

Film historian Paul M. Jensen explains, "Back in the 1960s, when mainstream films were visually limited and emphasized dialogue, there was always a wonderful sense of discovery to find something as thoroughly visual (in its photography and also in its emphasis on visual storytelling) as a Bava film. And it was so much more gratifying that these discoveries were *mine*; that I could go to the drive-in and never know what work of imagination and quality I might discover *unheralded*. The critical establishment paid no attention to these films, and seemed quite blind to their visual virtues. I feel sorry for the present younger viewers who have no such chance to discover visuals on their own. In this era when visual style (or, at least, visual imagination and flamboyance) is all over the place—is inescapable and taken for granted—the only room for discovery now is the occasional film with a reserved, even static approach. It's almost a *relief* to find a new film that does not use visual style extensively." [5]

As Jensen indicates, Bava's work was considered outstanding—by the early few who recognized it—because it was informed by an aesthetic that nourished the eye as well as the imagination. It's one thing to think back to a horror movie scene that scared you, once upon a time; it is far more disconcerting to reflect on an instance of beauty, especially a moment of *inexplicable* beauty, over too soon to be analyzed and properly filed away, and encountered in a context where such intimacies and epiphanies were not expected. Moments like these become part of us.

Director Tim Burton agrees: "The films I like—and Bava is probably Number 1 this way—tell a story through images and give [the viewer] a feeling . . . a mixture of eroticism, of sex, of horror and starkness of image, which, to me, is more real than what most people would consider 'realistic' films. Somehow it all bypasses your mind and goes right inside of you . . . There's something about things that can't be simply and quickly identified, that are powerful, [maybe] the most meaningful things of all . . . Bava had a design sense that went beyond design and into your soul. I've seen *Black Sunday* I don't know how many times, but if you asked me what the story was [about], I couldn't tell you. That's what I love about Bava: *I can't remember one single story*!" [6]

They are, however, there. As this book will show, Bava's stories were often rooted in the best of classic and pulp literature, and his films, however insistently visual, reflect a degree of narrative sophistication that was more progressive and unusual than most horror devotées were equipped to appreciate at the time. Nevertheless, Bava's name quickly evolved into a brand-name among the *cognoscenti*, one that could always be trusted to deliver a certain number of indelible images. A significant promise, this, in an era when most filmmakers withheld their disappointing monsters for no more than a brief glimpse in the final reel.

Bava's fuller recognition by American critics did not begin to occur until his young admirers grew up and began to form the critical "anti-establishment" as members of the underground press in the late 1960s and early 1970s. In the pages of the irregular American film journal *Castle of Frankenstein*, Joe Dante (later an imaginative film director in his own right) not only championed Bava's work in a series of capsule reviews, but adopted Bava's name as adjectival shorthand to describe horror movies that took a particularly colorful, poetical or surrealistic approach to raising gooseflesh. (1968's *The Name of the Game Is Kill*, he noted, had moments of "Bava-like brilliance.") In a moment of particularly memorable critical audacity, Dante also took the bold step of exclaiming that *Twitch of the Death Nerve* had "maybe the greatest [ending] since *Citizen Kane*!" [7]

"Before people knew what cult movies were, [Bava's films] were cult movies," Dante relates. "It was never organized enough to really be called a cult, but in the '60s, there was a dedicated following of college students, high school students . . . that followed this particular kind of film. Drive-ins were the only place to see these pictures if you lived in the Midwest, because they never played the hard-tops except in the main cities. It was very tough to find them, and when one of them played, you had to be there, because your weren't going to see it again, *maybe ever!* I made it my business to track down every obscure European horror film that I could, so that I could write it up, so there would be some record of it, because there wasn't much record in those days." [8]

In May 1971, the French magazine *L'Ecran Fantastique* published a mimeographed booklet entitled *Mario Bava*, which was the first attempt to compile a list of Bava's myriad credits as a director and director of photography. In 1973, also in France, the first truly significant essay about Bava's work as a director appeared in Jean-Marie Sabatier's book *Les Classiques du Cinema Fantastique*. "With its extreme complexity," wrote Sabatier, "the works of Bava confound analysis. It would be a mistake to consider him, as a director, on the same level as [Terence] Fisher or even [Tod] Browning. Though he has worked in every film genre, the cinema of Bava has also transcended every genre. He is also unique in that he is completely dedicated to horror cinema. If Bava isn't the greatest [director of horror films], he is unquestionably the most personal—and perhaps the only genius." [9] This perceptive essay, which also was the first account of Bava's career to argue that *La maschera del demonio* was not as significant as his works in color, has not to date appeared in English.

Two years later, America picked up the gauntlet with "Mario Bava: The Illusion of Reality," a critical essay by Alain J. Silver and James Ursini, which first appeared in Mark Frank's fan publication *Photon*. Though unaware of Bava's dual career in special effects and trick photography, Silver and Ursini offered an impressive exploration of Bava's recurring themes of perception. When I first read the Silver/Ursini article in 1975, I was in the earliest stages of my own research for this book, which at the time was intended to be nothing more than a feature article for the magazine *Cinefantastique*.

Those of us who were familiar with Bava's work knew that, in his own quiet way, he was becoming one of the most original, influential, and widely-imitated of horror directors. This phenomenon was immediate and can be traced to other Italian films released well before *La maschera del demonio*'s exportation, as early as *L'amante del vampiro*/*The Playgirls and the Vampire* (1960) and as late as Luigi Batzella's *Nuda per Satana*/*Nude for Satan* (1974). These films, like *La maschera . . .* (and indeed *I vampiri* before it), depicted modern day characters falling in love with alluring faces encountered amid the brushstrokes of ancient paintings, or age-old vampires falling in love with the modern day reincarnations of loves lost to the mists of time. In the pre-credits sequence of Renato Polselli's *Il boia scarlatto*/*Bloody Pit of Horror* (1965), the evil Crimson Executioner is punished for his crimes by being buried alive in a blade-lined coffin, complete with a glass window over his face, which—as in the Bava film—is later shattered during a bat attack.

There are countless other examples, which will be discussed in due course, but by far the most significant is the Devil in Federico Fellini's short film *Toby Dammit*, included in the omnibus Edgar Allan Poe film *Histoires Extraordinaires*/*Spirits of the Dead* (1967), who was plainly modelled on the spectral Melissa Graps character from Bava's *Operazione paura*. Fellini himself

5 Paul M. Jensen, email to the author, September 2000.

6 Tim Burton, *Mario Bava Maestro of the Macabre*, 2000.

7 Joe Dante, (unsigned review), *Castle of Frankenstein* 20, 46.

8 Joe Dante, *Mario Bava Maestro of the Macabre* interview transcript, 2000.

9 Jean-Marie Sabatier, *Les Classiques du Cinéma Fantastique* (Paris, France: Balland, 1973), 59.



GERMAN *A1 poster for I VAMPIRI. The uncredited art combines photographic elements as well as original Italian poster art by Arnaldo Putzu.*

had suggested to his producers that Bava direct his segment, and his screenwriter, Bernardino Zapponi, was a personal friend of Bava's as well as an admirer, so the short's primary authors were fully conscious of their debt. When Italian horror again became fashionable, it was due to the success of the *giallo* thrillers of Dario Argento, whose debut *L'uccello dalle piume di cristallo/The Bird With the Crystal Plumage* (1970) re-energized a dormant genre which Bava had first crystallized with *La ragazza che sapeva troppo* and *Sei donne per l'assassino*. As a young film critic for the leftist newspaper *Paese Sera*, Argento had been galvanized by his early exposure to these films.

Another Italian director who freely admitted his debt to Bava's *oeuvre* was Aristide Massaccesi (1936-99), better known as "Joe D'Amato," who cut his teeth in the film business working as a camera assistant to both Eugenio and Mario Bava. When the former cameraman directed his first film, a slice of Italian gothic called *La morte sorride all'assassino/Death Smiles on the Murderer* (1973), he was fully conscious of working in a cinematic *milieu* which Bava had introduced.

"I wanted *La morte sorride* . . . to appear drenched in the atmosphere of the Victorian era," Massaccesi told interviewer Peter Blumenstock. "Romanticism was the main subject I wanted to create, not just because it suited the genre perfectly, but also because I felt a lot like that back then . . . It was the only one of my films which I have signed with my real name, mainly because it is my most personal work and the one that means the most to me in my entire career. Mario Bava's work inspired me a great deal on this project."

Bava's influence quickly expanded beyond the local to become international. His work had a distinct impact on horror cinema produced in various Latin countries, including Mexico (Rafael Baledón's *La Maldición de la Llorona/The Curse of the Crying Woman*, 1961), Brazil (José Mojica Marins' *A Meia-Noite Leverei Sua Alma/At Midnight I'll Take Your Soul*, 1964) and Spain (where images from Bava's films are frequently quoted in the films of actor/director Paul Naschy, who admits in his autobiography *Memoirs of a Wolfman* that he took his young bride to see *La maschera del demonio* on their honeymoon).

In America, Bava scored a major admirer in his fellow American International director, Roger Corman. "Mario Bava, to me, was one of the greatest practitioners of Gothic horror films," Corman told an interviewer for the SKY TV documentary *Mario Bava Operazione Paura* in 2004. "He made many kinds of films, but I think his finest work was in the Gothic tradition. I never met him but our thinking was along the same path. We both tried to do good work on low budgets; we both succeeded, I hope, in different ways. I think I learned from him much to do with camera work—for example, with picking angles to make a small and confining set look bigger. I was particularly impressed, and probably influenced, by his work in chiaroscuro, his use of deep focus, hard light, and hard dark. He also had a unique personal style and I learned a great deal from that. If he was influenced by me, as some have suggested, it was possibly more conceptually than technically, because technically he was brilliant. I think Bava was a brilliant artist—a *true* artist—and his work was universal; it reflected a European sensibility, but also resonated with the American audience."

Corman was so impressed by *Black Sunday* that he cast Barbara Steele in his next Poe picture, *Pit and the Pendulum* (1961), and Bava's garish color experiments were studiously recreated in the opening montage of *The Raven* (1963). Likewise, the mob execution which opens *The Haunted Palace* (1963), and the ensuing plot of the reincarnation of the evil Joseph Kerwin (Vincent Price) masquerading as his own descendant, mirror aspects of *Black Sunday*. Another episode from the film was remade in Corman's *The Masque of the Red Death* (1964), as Jane Asher looks upon the dormant form of Vincent Price reposing in a coffin as though asleep . . . briefly looks away . . . and then looks again to see his eyes wide open, devilishly mocking her entrapment. As Bava's horror films grew more metaphysical in the mid-1960s, Corman's work became more psychedelic, and both directors gravitated to flirtations with pop culture and other genres in the late '60s and early '70s.

By the mid 1970s, *Castle of Frankenstein* magazine was defunct. Joe Dante relocated from the East coast to Los Angeles, where he got a job in the trailer department of Corman's fledgling distribution company, New World Pictures. It was there that Dante and fellow editor Allan Arkush talked Corman into allowing them to direct a joint first feature, *Hollywood Boulevard* (1975), a picture that would cost so little to make, they reasoned, it couldn't fail to make money. Though ostensibly a satire of the New World film factory, the picture's final act contains a surprising (indeed, jarring) number of Bavian visual touches: saturated gel lighting, fog, a menacing assassin, vicious murders.

"It was a comedy, but I figured it might be my last chance to make a movie at all, so I inserted this long *hommage* to Mario Bava," Dante confesses in the documentary *Mario Bava Maestro of the Macabre*. "I couldn't let anything from me go without some acknowledgment of the fact that Mario Bava was one of my favorite filmmakers." Thus, Bava's once-unique approach to the horror genre began to be emulated by a second generation of filmmakers.

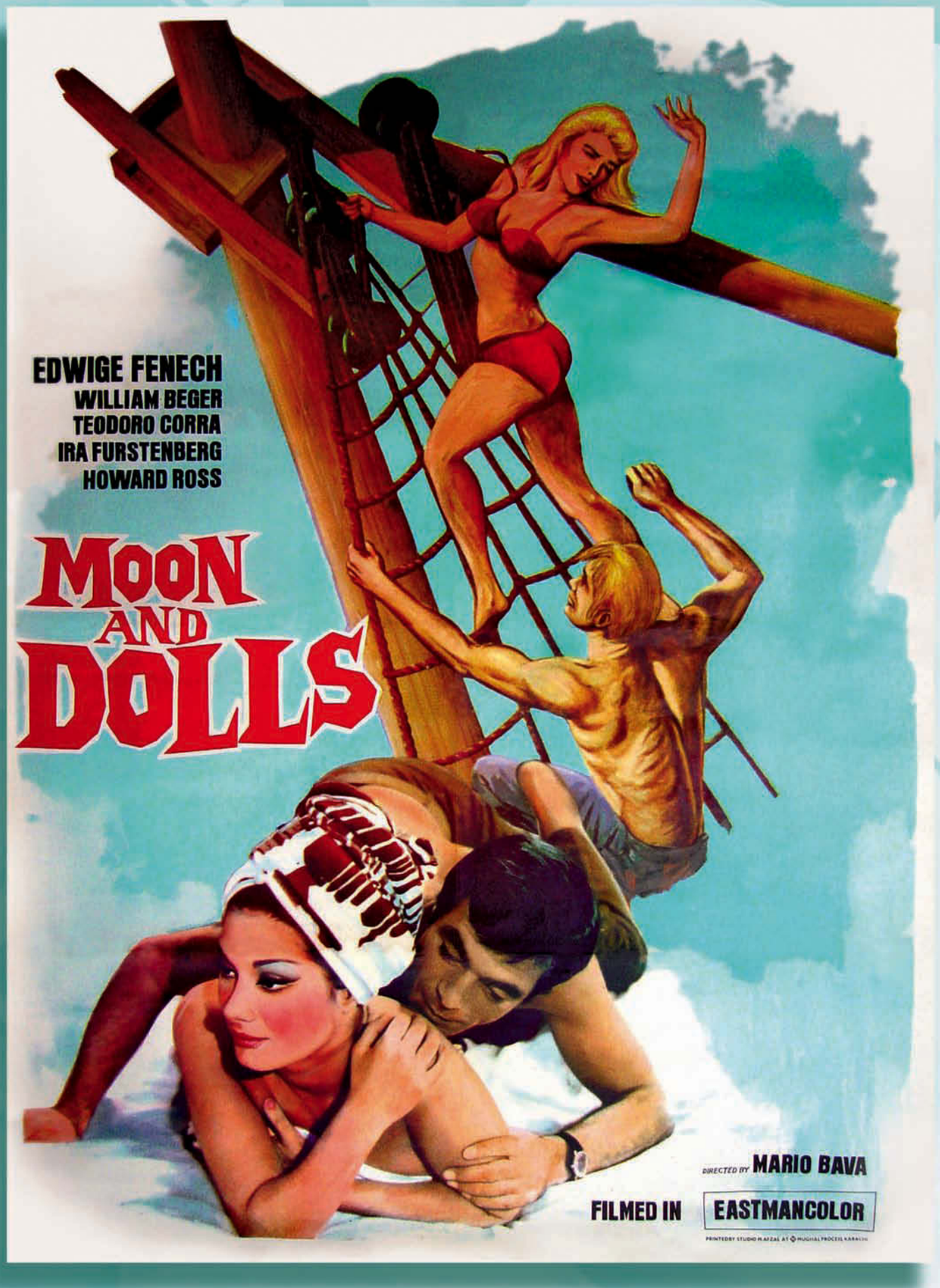
In July 1976, London's National Film Theatre presented a lengthy retrospective devoted to "12 Masters of the Italian Cinema." Of the directors saluted by this exhibition, Federico Fellini, Michelangelo Antonioni, Luchino Visconti, Roberto Rosellini, Vittorio De Sica, Pier Paolo Pasolini, and Bernardo Bertolucci had already been the subjects of books or monographs written in English; others, like Pietro Germi and Elio Petri, had been solidly represented by scholarly exegeses in film journals. Of the NFT's dozen *maestri*, only Mario Bava was unfamiliar to the majority of attendants, but it was yet another sign that recognition was in the cards for Bava, whether he wished it or not.

Back in Italy, the popular thrillers of Dario Argento began to move away from lucidly cruel and photogenic *gialli* toward matters of magic, which Argento and his cameramen summoned forth by emulating Bava's past experiments with saturated gel lighting in the supernatural films *Suspiria* (1977) and *Inferno* (1980, on which Bava himself worked as an uncredited special effects designer and second unit director). During this period, French director Jean Rollin paid his own *hommage* to the film released in Paris as *La Masque du Démon* by photographing Brigitte Lahaie flanked by a pair of menacing dogs in *Les Raisins de la Mort/The Grapes of Death* (1978).

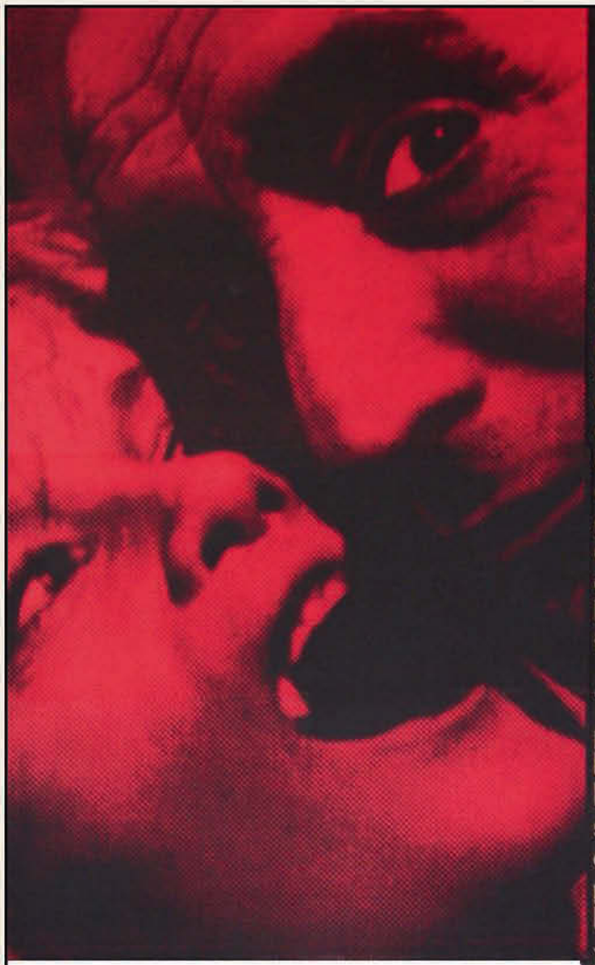
It was not until 1980—the year of Bava's death—that he exerted his greatest and most lasting influence, when the "body count" subgenre that Bava had founded with *Sei donne per l'assassino* and *Ecologia del delitto* was revisited in Sean Cunningham's *Friday the 13th* (1980). Independently produced for only $500,000 (in itself, more than Bava had ever spent on a picture, even those with name stars attached), Cunningham sold the picture to Paramount for an advance of $1,500,000; the distributor then lavished $3,000,000 on publicity and advertising and raked in total gross receipts of an estimated $35–40,000,000. *Friday the 13th* had none of Bava's visual technique, but it was essentially a witless, Americanized, carbon-copy of the movie released in America as *Twitch of the Death Nerve*. As Cunningham himself now readily admits, "Certainly anybody who was making horror films in the '80s owed an awful lot to Mario Bava." [10] *Friday the 13th* became a prime franchise title for Paramount Pictures, continuing through nine sequels and a spin-off television series to date.

In the early 1980s, videocassette players and recorders became luxuries that most anyone could afford. Those of us who had been fans of Bava's films since the 1960s, not knowing when (if ever) we might see our favorites again, could finally record them from local television broadcasts, edit out the commercials,

10 Sean Cunningham, *Mario Bava Maestro of the Macabre* interview transcript, 2000.



TURKISH *poster art for 5 BAMBOLE PER LA LUNA D'AGOSTO.*



THE HAUNTED WORLD OF MARIO BAVA

October 8-10 1993

Hosted by
Joe Dante

A child's frozen hand appears at the window ... an unconscious woman is violated next to a rotting skeleton ... a sadist returns from the grave to torture his doomed lover ... To enter the world of Italian horror and suspense master Mario Bava is to step silently through a mausoleum filled with beautiful corpses. Bava is often praised as one of the cinema's great stylists -- and his talent for exquisite cinematography and production design allowed him to commit some of the most atrocious acts of violence ever filmed. But beyond his stylistic gifts, Bava (who died in 1980) achieved a chilling poetry all his own, a lyricism that links him to Cocteau, Buñuel and the other great poets of the surreal and bizarre.

Born in San Remo in 1914, Bava "grew up in the midst of film, among picture frames, miniature models, and heaps of hyposulphite"; his father Eugenio was cinematographer on the silent classic QUO VADIS. By the early '40s, the younger Bava was photographing films for Pabst and Rossellini. Bava was nearly 50 years old before he directed his first full feature, BLACK SUNDAY, a worldwide success that quickly established him as the premiere horror director of the 1960s.

Sadly, the mutilation depicted in Bava's films was often less than the mutilation of the films themselves: poorly dubbed, re-edited with or without the director's consent, and released with obscure or misleading titles. This series features many rare prints unavailable in the U.S. for decades, including the L.A. premiere of the full-length LISA AND THE DEVIL. Director Joe Dante (GREMLINS, THE HOWLING) will host the weekend in-person, discussing Bava's influence on his own work and talking with Bava's colleagues and co-stars. Program compiled by Dennis Bartok, Joe Dante and Alan Upchurch.

ONE OF A KIND *lobby display advertising the first Mario Bava retrospective held in Los Angeles, sponsored by the American Cinematheque and held at the Director's Guild of America Theater in 1993.*

and watch them to our heart's content. I can remember some fans voicing concern at the time, that Bava's mysterious works might not stand up to closer scrutiny, that they couldn't possibly live up to our memory of the moment when they first took us by surprise . . . but Bava's films turned out to be even better than we remembered them. The sudden access which his growing number of admirers were granted to these once-elusive documents made their further study irresistible. Inevitably, the first book devoted to Bava's films appeared a short time later, when Pascal Martinet's *Mario Bava* was published in France in January 1984.

The VCR brought about other cultural changes which could not have been anticipated by the movie mainstream. By the 1990s, most film buffs had managed to collect copies—on Beta, VHS or LaserDisc—of nearly every movie classic they might ever want to see. As a result, there was a conspicuous drop in attendance at theatrical retrospectives devoted to such revered filmmakers as John Ford, Orson Welles and Alfred Hitchcock. Alternative masters were suddenly desperately needed. Thanks to a collection of 35 mm and 16 mm prints independently assembled by Alan Upchurch, Carlos Sylva, and Joe Dante, Mario Bava suddenly became a major draw on the retrospective circuit, attracting the very fans who had discovered his work on video and never had the experience of seeing it on the big screen.

Made possible largely through the efforts of Upchurch and Sylva, three Mario Bava retrospectives were presented in the United States in 1993—in San Francisco, New York and Los Angeles. The San Francisco program, held at the Roxie Cinema, was well-attended, as was an exhaustive and ambitious series unreeled at Manhattan's Film Forum over a two-week period. The American Cinematheque's three-day retrospective in Los Angeles—hosted by Joe Dante, myself, and several stars of Bava's films—sold-out well in advance, and sizeable throngs hoping to buy tickets at the door were turned away from most screenings, prompting a second retrospective in August 1996. In 1998, the British Film Institute organized a near-definitive, month-long Bava retrospective, showing nearly all of the films he directed.

In 1994, the second book devoted to Bava's work appeared in France: a collection of scholarly essays by various contributors, published by the Cinématheque Française Musée du Cinéma under the editorship of Jean-Louis Leutrat. The following year, the first Italian book on the subject was published in Milan, written by Alberto Pezzotta. Both books, like Pascal Martinet's of a decade earlier, were simply titled *Mario Bava*.

In October 1998, a German company called Lucertola Media obtained the rights to a rough assembly of Bava's unfinished 1975 crime picture *Cani arrabbiati*, entitled *Rabid Dogs*, and released it on a new compact video disc format called DVD. Limited to two modest pressings, it was the first movie to be released exclusively in the DVD format. Then, in December 2000, Image Entertainment (in collaboration with producer Alfredo Leone) launched "The Mario Bava Collection" on VHS and DVD, with each release in the latter format extensively annotated and with an audio commentary for *Black Sunday* by this author. The series sold so well, and scored so well with reviewers, that other companies followed suit—notably VCI Home Entertainment with their lavish DVD editions of *The Whip and the Body* and *Blood and Black Lace,* which also featured my commentaries.

In May 2002, the American Cinematheque hosted a second Bava retrospective that included the world premiere of *Kidnapped,* a controversial recut of Bava's unfinished *Cani arrabbiati*, produced by Alfredo Leone and completed by Lamberto Bava. In the subsequent year, a package of thirteen Bava films owned by Leone's company International Media became available for 35 mm bookings across the country, and major 2003 Bava retrospectives were held in Boston, Chicago, Cleveland and New York. In July 2006, Korea joined the now-long list of countries hosting Bava retrospectives.



As exhaustive as these Bava festivals may seem, even the month-long BFI program told less than half of the truth about Mario Bava. He was much more than "the supreme visual poet of the Italian Gothic cinema," as David Bell once eloquently described him.[11] Indeed, if it could be said of any individual, Bava *was* the postwar Italian cinema—at least for a period spanning three decades (1945-75). Just as assuredly as Hitchcock defined the thriller, Chaplin the silent comedy, Ford the American Western, the record shows that Bava was present at the defining moment of not one, but *each* of Italy's native postwar genres: the neorealist and opera films of the 1940s, the *pepla*[12] ("sword and sandal") and baroque horror films of the 1950s and, in the '60s, the Spaghetti Western, the comic Western and, most definitively, the *giallo*—that violent, decorous, and peculiarly Italian breed of murder mystery. If any man can be described as a seminal filmmaker, that man is Mario Bava.

Furthermore, no appreciation of Bava published to date has adequately come to terms with the fact of his twenty-year reign as one of Italy's leading cameramen, or pondered how the first half of his career may have influenced the second half. (Bava disliked the terms "cinematographer" and "director of photography," which he considered pretentious, so this book will observe his preference.) In fact, Bava's work as a cameraman included as many, if not more, popular successes than did his later years as a director. Nevertheless, in most reference books, Mario Bava's life and career begin with *La maschera del demonio.* This book corrects that error, telling the complete story of Bava's career for the first time.

As I discovered in the midst of my research—and subsequently made known through various articles, DVD liner notes, and audio commentaries—Bava not only directed and photographed his films; he also created their special visual effects. He never took credit for this work; not because he didn't like to draw attention to himself, but because he believed that explaining how special effects were done (or that they were even present) was antithetical to their purpose. He often served as his own matte painter and maquette builder, and he was capable of staging the most miraculous scenes using common ingredients that could be found in any kitchen. On a couple of his films, he was given so little in the way of sets that he was forced to rely on his mastery of atmosphere and trick photography to camouflage what had not been placed at his disposal. This furthers Bava's range of responsibility into the realm of art direction. Interviews and stills also support the fact that Bava took a direct hand in decorating his sets before filming them—by adding cobwebs to crypts, rotting meat to skeletons, whatever was needed.

Thus, at a time when cinema technology was exploding—introducing light-sensitive film stocks, faster lenses, expensive cranes, and so forth—Bava worked as a modern day antiquarian, making films largely by hand, incorporating into them his talents for painting, sculpture, and trick photography, as well as the naïve techniques of silent filmmaking he had learned as a young observer in his father's home studio. It was not uncommon for Bava to close down production for a few days, in order to work at home on a glass matte painting that would transform a plain hillside into an ivy-laced temple in ancient Rome.

Adding to my frustrations and exhilarations as the author of this book was my discovery that Bava's filmography does not end with the movies he directed and photographed. Whenever he wasn't otherwise engaged, Bava was ready and willing to add pick-up shots, lend technical advice, or amplify the production values of a friend's impoverished production with his trick photography—all of

11 David Bell, "Mario Bava" entry, *The Penguin Encyclopedia of Horror and the Supernatural* (New York NY: Viking, 1986), 24.

12 "*Pepla*" is the plural form of *peplum*, a term coined for the genre by French critics, in reference to the short pleated garments worn by the heroes of these films.

which he did in the name of friendship, and for the opportunity to solve new problems, which allowed him to learn more about his craft. This work is almost always uncredited, but to an eye trained to recognize his brushstrokes, it is often as good as a signature. Many are the times I've caught a glimpse of Bava's handiwork flaring unexpectedly from the margins of some otherwise excruciating pictures, signed by hacks who had the good fortune to eat alongside him in the Cinecittà commissary.

Director, lighting cameraman, special effects genius, editor, miniature set designer, compiler of library music, his wardrobe person's wardrobe designer, his art director's adviser on matters of décor, guilty of making impish cameo appearances onscreen, Mario Bava was the last of a dying breed: *a complete filmmaker*.

The story of Bava's life, which must begin with the story of his father Eugenio (one of the most important and least-known pioneers of Italian cinema), covers the entire history of motion pictures from their earliest days as a parlor trick, through their evolution from entertainment into an art form, and their eventual proliferation into the biggest of big businesses. When B cinema became A cinema, the special circumstances that allowed a talent such as Bava to exist faded away. Bava's own mortality coincided with this sea change in the world of movies, but not before he passed the baton to the next generation. His son Lamberto screened his directorial debut, *Macabro* (1980), for his father only a short time before his death. Lamberto has since gone on to become one of the most commercially successful Italian directors of his generation, with the popular *Demoni* and *Fantaghirò* series to his credit. Today, Lamberto's son Fabrizio (or Roy, as he prefers to be called) is one of Italy's most in-demand assistant directors, having recently followed in his father's footsteps as the assistant to Dario Argento on *Il cartaio/The Card Player* (2004). Mario Bava's story is thus only part of a larger story of the Italian cinema, now entering its fourth generation and second century.

The writing of this book—a family chronicle as much as a biography—has been a nearly lifelong dream and occupation; I don't know what it's like to be an adult and not be working on it. At the time I began, there was almost nothing available in English in the way of hard facts, other than reviews and a very incomplete filmography published in *Film Dope*. Like any work of biography, this book is a synthesis of verifiable truth, subjective truths shared with me by the participants in Bava's life and work, and my own intimations of the truth, which I assembled as best I could by tracing and tying together the threads that sometimes invisibly connect seemingly unrelated relationships and moments in history. I have labelled these throughout the following text to the best of my ability.

If I had to point to any single moment or image in Bava's work that motivated me to undertake this project, it would be the first time—late at night—when I saw the words "Directed by Mario Bava" on a television screen. With Bava, I had the same experience as when I first encountered the films of F. W. Murnau, Jean Cocteau, Georges Franju and Max Ophüls. Their unusual names immediately struck my young, provincial mind as being incantatory, pregnant with magic and mystery. I didn't have to see their work to know, intuitively, that each of them was destined to become an important acquaintance. In time, as I discovered the work associated with those fabulous names, it never disappointed my expectations.

My fascination with Bava was cemented by the scene in *Operazione paura* where Giacomo Rossi-Stuart pursues a strange figure through a series of rooms that repeats over and over, each time a little faster, finally apprehends him, and finds himself face-to-face with . . . himself. In many ways, this Borgesian image was prophetic of my experience in writing this book, because as I learned more and more about the man who devised that chilling scene—which broke all the rules of the horror genre, not to mention those of time and space—the more I found myself apprehending an elusive phantom who turned out to be a man very much like the one I became: middle-class, apolitical, ironic; a worrier and a skeptic; a homebody uncomfortable with travel; a compulsive sketcher and reader with a particular fondness for Russian literature and pulp fiction, whose bookish life was nevertheless overridden by his love/hate affair with the cinema. Bava worked in Cinecittà; I work in Cincinnati—which, like Rome, is a river town built on seven hills. While working on this book, I discovered that my late father's Christian name, though everyone called him Frank, was actually Marion—the English form of Mario. My wife's grandparents were named Frank and Emma; Mario's parents were named Francesco and Emma. While I find this wealth of eerie correlations curious, I don't take them too seriously, except as a means of identifying with my subject, which has brought me closer to an understanding of him.

Mario Bava knew my name and was aware of my intentions toward him. I wrote to him twice in the late 1970s, mostly to thank him for his films, but also to inform him of my plan to write a book about them. I received no reply but, some years later when I addressed my condolences to his family upon hearing of his death, a hand-written reply came to me from the man who was his son, assistant and best friend.

"I know why he did not write back to you," Lamberto Bava explained. "He did not like to talk about his professional activities. Looking through my father's drawers, I found your letters, which he kept with the important papers he preserved."

I replied to Lamberto that this was the finest personal memory he could have given me of his father, who once told an interviewer "I throw out all the letters I receive."

Despite this *oltre tomba* endorsement, the writing and preparation of this book has been a long and arduous task that I often despaired of ever finishing. I began writing this book by hand, then graduated to typewriting, and then essentially started all over again when I stepped up to a Wang word processor in 1985, and later to a series of personal computers. All the while this work was in progress, I began my careers as a magazine editor and novelist, work that helped to keep food on the table while the Bava book continued its slow and fitful gestation. The obstacles were never-ending: the unavailability of many films, my own inability to speak Italian (had I known how long this project would take me, I would have learned), Bava's reluctance to speak about his work, the devastating setback of his early death, a unanimous lack of interest among New York publishers, a lack of deadline, mental exhaustion—all of these elements and more (not least of all the demanding monthly schedule of my magazine, *Video Watchdog*) were stacked against its completion. Also, a great deal of the material contained in this book is rooted in primary research; I dug it out of the rock myself, so to speak.

However, as the years passed, this book and I seemed to be moving with great certainty toward a point in time that was suddenly available and receptive to it. Many of the conveniences we take for granted today did not exist at the time of this book's conception. I saw several of Bava's films for the first time on commercial television stations, looking away from the hideously cropped picture half the time to scribble down notes, names, or plot details. A surprise broadcast of *Evil Eye* on a Dayton station one Saturday afternoon back in 1976 led me to prevail upon a friend to drive me to and from his apartment, some 20 minutes south of Dayton, so that I could see it—a round trip of about 60 miles. (As Joe Dante mentioned earlier, we didn't know if there would ever be another chance.) The electronic innovations over the years have been blessing after blessing to this project, from the VCR to the multi-standard VCR (which made it possible for me to screen dozens of films and variants unavailable to the average consumer), from LaserDisc to DVD, and most importantly, the home computer and the accessories that make desktop publishing and video frame-grabbing a reality.



ITALIAN *due-foglia poster for FOUR TIMES THAT NIGHT, art by Nano.*



JAPANESE *photo-collage poster for* OPERAZIONE PAURA.

I didn't intend for the writing of this book to take so long, but it appears to have taken exactly as long as it needed to take. Seeing all of Bava's films took long enough, but in order to write this book, I also had to research subjects of direct or peripheral relevance to Bava's story: the silent cinema of Italy and France, World Wars I and II, the Italian cinema in general, Russian literature and contemporary science fiction, opera, painting, the sciences of cinematography and trick photography, and the Italian language itself. Certain things which also had to occur before this book could exist are now in the past, further setting the stage for its publication: the retrospectives, the home video releases of the key films, the restoration and availability of *Rabid Dogs*, the teasers provided by the liner notes I wrote and the audio commentaries I recorded for the DVD releases of Image Entertainment, VCI Home Entertainment, Anchor Bay Entertainment and Dark Sky Films. These preliminaries have made people more aware of Bava's work, and ready to absorb the information contained in this book. Had I completed this book as recently as five years ago, what I have learned in the meantime would cause me to disown that work today.

In the least fruitful period of this book's long gestation, a time when I despaired that this project might never be completed, I had a dream—one of my life's most vivid. I had followed a series of clues until I found my way onto a set where Mario Bava was directing a new film. I couldn't see him, because he was giving his directions from the shadows. I waited on the sidelines for him to emerge, but he wouldn't come out; it was as though he knew I was there, taking notes for my book. Finally, exasperated, I worked up the courage to cross the studio floor and enter into those shadows myself, to ask some of the questions that were driving me crazy at that particular time.

"*M-Maestro*," I stammered, "forgive this intrusion, but there is something I must ask you . . . How did you feel when you learned that Fellini had used the little girl from *Operazione paura* in his film *Toby Dammit*?"

The presence in the darkness stopped adjusting his camera and looked at me under an arched eyebrow. Then Bava spoke to me:

"Why should I discuss with you what I would not discuss with Fellini?"

The sheer force of that question woke me up instantly.

At a later date, I shared this anecdote with Lamberto Bava, who exploded with laughter and told me that I must have made genuine contact with Mario. It is apparently very close to what Mario would have said. "Maybe a little *nicer*," he supposed.

To have felt myself in unconscious or subconscious contact with my subject was probably no more than a delusion on my part, necessary to getting through this process. But, thanks to the testimonies and confidences shared with me over the years—the decades!—by Bava's family members, friends and colleagues, I was sometimes able to intuit—in the places where their comments coincided—a three-dimensional presence whom I could address as Mario. I don't claim that his spirit inhabits this book, but . . . On occasion, as I'm sure has happened with other biographers, I have been nudged by a small voice, a nasal murmur emanating from somewhere between my conscience and intuition, which has pointed me in unsuspected directions where I was able to locate the answers to daunting questions, or helped me to connect the dots of a mystery into a constellation of common sense.

The time has come to share this distillation of what I have learned through my communion with my subject over the last thirty years. Though this book may appear formidable in size and scope (not to mention weight!), I don't intend it to be "the final word" on Mario Bava and his films. Its success cannot be measured by how many doors it closes, only by how many doors it opens.

Now let us run through those doors together and apprehend this elusive artisan who shunned the limelight, preferring to work unobserved amid all the colors of the dark.

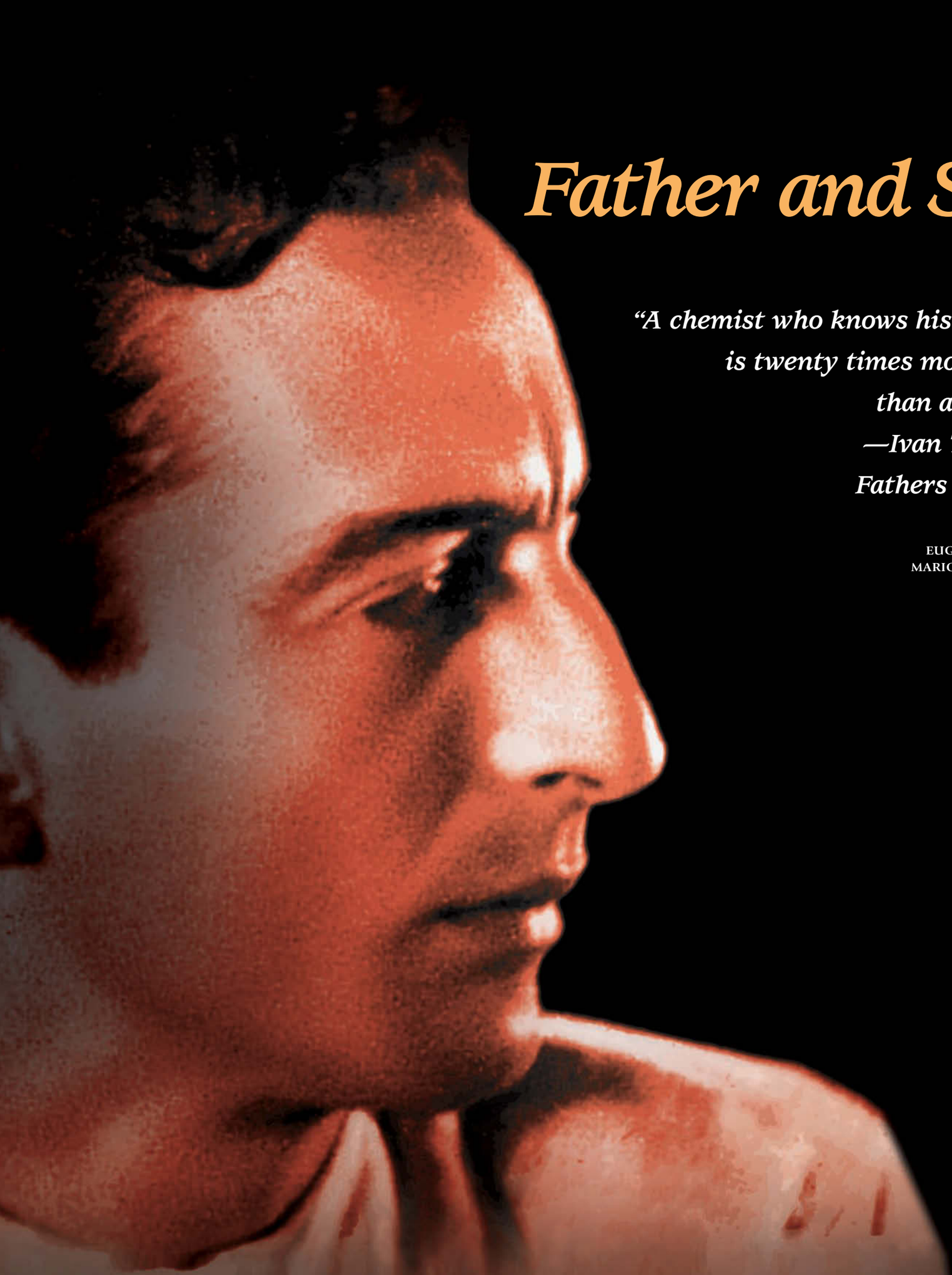
Notes on the Text

Film Titles: The complex histories of Mario Bava's films have worked against the simplicity of this text. In books written in English for English-speaking readers, the use of English language film titles is the logical standard. However, in the case of Bava's filmography, the English versions of his films are often bastardized works that do not represent these works as they were seen in Italy. Therefore, I have opted to use the original Italian titles when discussing Bava's original versions, and to use the English titles only when specifically referring to those alternate versions—which play their own part in this epic story. Films undertaken as American productions—*Esther and the King, Four Times That Night, Baron Blood, Lisa and the Devil* and *The House of Exorcism*—are the only exceptions to this rule. Because the Italian titles may be unfamiliar to many of my readers, I have opted to combine the Italian and English titles of Bava's films, separated by a slash (e.g., *La maschera del demonio/Black Sunday*), in all the mentions preceding the chapter devoted to that film; in the subsequent chapters, the references will be made only to the Italian or English title, depending on whichever version is under discussion, because the dual presentation seems overcompensatory in the wake of an in-depth discussion. Non-Bava titles are presented in the dual title format throughout, or until the point when both titles have been presented so often as to no longer be necessary.

Credits: Full credits sidebars are provided only for those films which Mario Bava directed or co-directed. I have made every effort to include as many international release titles, distributors, release dates, and running times as possible, but these should not be taken as complete or definitive accounts of where each film was distributed. As far as running times are concerned, some of these reflect my own timings of material, rounded off to the nearest minute, while others are based on published listings. When I have found references to running times of films as released in, say, West Germany that are as much as 10 minutes longer than their original Italian lengths, I have presumed these are erroneous and have either adjusted or omitted them as seemed appropriate. In the case of British releases, I have included available running times in minutes and seconds, as this extra measure of information seems necessary in light of censorship cuts inflicted on Bava's work at the time of their initial release in Great Britain.

Currency: This book contains numerous references to motion picture budgets and boxoffice earnings in *lire* (plural form of *lira*), the Italian currency during Mario Bava's lifetime. Italy followed suit with the European continent's conversion to the standard currency of the Euro on February 28, 2002. To ensure the better understanding of these figures among my non-Italian readers, I have presented sums of *lira*, wherever pertinent, in tandem with their equivalent in US dollars. These equivalents, necessarily based on the closing rate of exchange, do not take inflation or other fluctuations of the exchange rate into account. Therefore, while these monetary translations do not accurately reflect the value of these sums *at the time*, they can offer a rough idea of how much money is being discussed.





Father and Son

"A chemist who knows his business is twenty times more useful than any poet."
—Ivan Turgenev, Fathers and Sons

EUGENIO BAVA, *1908*
MARIO BAVA, *circa 1934*



EUGENIO BAVA, *1908.*

Eugenio Bava

The Invisible Man of Italian Cinema

TODAY, SANREMO is the Atlantic City of Italy, a popular beach and gambling resort in the northwestern province of Imperia, nestled between the Maritime Alps and the Riviera di Ponente, the sandy coastal fringe where the boot of Italy is kissed by the Ligurian Sea.

The Sanremo in which Mario Bava's story begins (not "San Remo," as it is listed in most English sources) was quite a different place. In the late 19th century, Imperia was known as Liguria, and the Italian Riviera did not yet exist as such. It was not until the year that Bava's father was born—1886—that Sanremo enjoyed its first surge of popularity, thanks to a prolonged visit by King Friedrich II of Germany. At the time, Sanremo was a small, picturesque hamlet marked by tightly clustered 13th century houses and steep, narrow, labyrinthine streets of dirt and cobblestone. In daylight, one could appreciate the rich fecundity of the land, whose mountainous shelter from the winter winds ensured the early flourishing of flowers and vegetables; but at night, one could see something in its huddled architecture that evoked the more interior worlds of folklore and superstition. Sometimes at night, a mist would sweep in from the sea and roll low in the streets till morning. Photographs from the period very much recall the village of Karmingen in Bava's *Operazione paura/Kill, Baby . . . Kill!* (1966).

Mario's father was born Francesco Eugenio Bava in Sanremo on March 31, 1886, to Giovanni "Nino" Bava and his wife Caterina. He was the couple's third child and first son, following two elder sisters, Mariuccia and Manin. As a child, he was called either Eugenio or "Chechin," an affectionate nickname for Francesco; his Christian name was so seldom used that it was given again to the last of the couple's three remaining children, who was preceded by Luigi (called "Gigin," who grew up to become the director of the Sanremo Telegraph Office) [1] and Luisa. The family lived with Caterina's widowed mother, who shared her same name, and was called by everyone "*Nonna* [Granny] Caterina."

Mario's grandfather Nino was a sculptor and a sculptor's son. The family hailed from a village near Genoa, between Piedmonte and Liguria, and its sculptors had been responsible for carving all of the church altars in the vicinity. Nino was regarded as a very righteous man, the heart of his family. A family portrait shows him seated with patriarchal centrality, his arms warmly encircling his two sons; he looks young and handsome, with curly dark hair, a mustache and a diamond-shaped stud of beard beneath his lower lip. Tragically, he died of pneumonia—still incurable at the time—only ten years after this photo was taken, circa 1900–01.

When he lost his father, Chechin (that is, Eugenio) was only 15 years old, and his grief was so intense that family friends speculated that he might soon follow his father to the grave, if he didn't learn to marshal his emotions. Gradually, time eased the acuity of his pain, and he and his family got on with their lives. The early loss of their father may have made the Bava family wary of a God who giveth and taketh away, because except for *Nonna* Caterina, they were not particularly religious, unusual for a working-class Italian family of this era. Eugenio, in particular, learned to place his faith in the transcendence of art and the practicality of science.

Eugenio "was a Basque like Raphael and dressed in the *avant garde* fashion of his era," according to his son Mario. "He was an '*artiste*,'



PATERNAL *family photograph, circa 1900. Left to right: Mario Bava's aunt Maruccia, grandmother Caterina, father Francesco Eugenio, grandfather Giovanni ("Nino"), uncle Luigi ("Gigin"), great grandmother ("Nonna") Caterina, and aunt Manin.*

the prototype of the Bohemian artist. He was an artist, sculptor, chemist, electrician, and inventor. He spent years studying perpetual motion." [2] In another of his interviews, Mario went so far as to include "medium" on his father's résumé of abilities. Lamberto Bava laughs at the idea and suggests that, when his father said this, he may have been recalling a curious episode from Eugenio's early days in Sanremo: "A cousin of my grandfather, a slightly crazy member of the wealthy family Parodis, committed suicide in Sanremo. She threw herself off a cliff into the sea. Her body was never recovered, and for this reason, my grandfather attended a seance. The psychic—a woman unknown to my grandfather—told the gathering that the body would be found in Tolone, France—quite a distance from Sanremo, where she had killed herself. Everyone laughed, saying, 'Right! She's a sailboat!' But, about one month later, that is exactly where she was found! This was the only example in our family history (my grandfather, my father and me) in which our search for the supernatural turned up anything positive or verifiable."

Eugenio Bava matured into a dark, thin man with a hawklike brow and piercing eyes, which he complemented with a mustache much like the one worn by his late father. He not only barbered himself like his father; he also followed his absent footsteps into the family business, becoming a sculptor in his own right. He took over the operation of his father's shop, which was run out of the home he continued to share with his family, including *Nonna* Caterina (who apparently survived her daughter). Eugenio's sculptures and pottery attracted local attention, and one of his regular customers suggested that he might profit by compiling a catalog of his wares. To illustrate the catalog, Eugenio bought a camera and quickly became obsessed with the untapped potentials of photography. This was during the age of flash-powder, which had the unfortunate result of flattening the ornate surface detail that distinguished Eugenio's efforts. As a result, Eugenio devoted himself to the study of artificial lighting—with open oven doors, candles, mirrors, and screens—to offset the details of his handiwork to the most complimentary effect.

Eugenio held the conviction—uncommon today, to say the least—that artistic talent was a blessing from God and should be used only in the service of God, or in the service of one's fellow man, and never for personal glorification—hence, his abomination of signed works. To place one's own name before, or on an equal footing with, the work itself, he considered a form of sacrilege.

One night—in a year variously pinpointed by his son as 1904, 1906 and 1908, and by his grandson as 1905—Sanremo's proximity to the Cote d'Azur resulted in an episode that would forever alter the course of the Bava family's history. It was midnight when Eugenio was roused from his slumber by a frantic knocking on the door of his workshop. The desperate visitor was a representative of the French film company, Pathé Frères—founded in 1896, and at that time the world's largest producer of motion pictures—who was in desperate need of a sculptor for an emergency job. Eugenio's local reputation had literally brought the movies to his doorstep.

Mario Bava told the story thusly: "One night, [my father] was rudely awakened—'Who is it?' 'Le Pathé Cinema!' I don't think filmmaking was any better organized then than it is today; it has always been chaotic. In the middle of the night, Pathé realized that the tomb in which they were planning to shoot the following morning lacked a door. That's right, it all started in a tomb! Anyway, my father—on the move—carved them a door, and from that day forward, he was preoccupied with the cinema." [3]

Some detail may be lost in the translation, but Lamberto Bava insists that—according to the story as it has been passed down from generation to generation within his family—Eugenio was actually summoned to carve the stone frame of a fireplace, not the entrance to a tomb. It may seem a moot point, but knowing the truth is the only means we have of speculating which Pathé Frères short might have heralded the moment when *la famiglia Bava* entered the cinema. The name of the short was never recorded, but we can safely narrow down the identity of the director in charge to two, because the Pathé shorts produced during this period were usually the work of only two directors: Ferdinand Zecca and Segundo de Chomón.

Ferdinand Zecca (1864–1947) directed most of Pathé Frères' output between 1901–10, during which time he pioneered the crime melodrama with *Histoire d'un Crime* ("Story of a Crime," 1901), and directed the first celluloid adaptations of *Quo Vadis?* ("Where Are You Going?" 1901) and *L'Homme Invisible* ("The Invisible Man," 1909). While later generations have criticized Zecca for plagiarizing the trick photographic techniques and ideas innovated by the French cinemagician Georges Méliès (1861–1938), he tended to relegate such spectacle to the backgrounds of his scenarios, reserving it for comic effect; Zecca was not, in the strictest sense, a fantasist. While Méliès faded into unjust obscurity, Zecca's commercial applications of his genius turned a magic act into a world-class business, making Pathé Frères the first true empire of the cinema. In 1910, Zecca's business acumen was rewarded when Charles Pathé appointed him general manager of the company.

But it is doubtful that Zecca required Eugenio's services because it is unlikely that Eugenio opened his workshop while still in his teens; the true date of this occasion was probably closer to 1906–08. In this event, it is much more likely that Eugenio found himself in the employ of Segundo de Chomón—and this would indeed have been the kind of encounter to make sparks fly in his imagination.

Born in Tereul, Spain, on October 18, 1871, de Chomón—a descendant of a noble French family (de Chaumont)—first came to Zecca's attention with his animated live action short *El Hotel Electrico* ("The Electric Hotel," 1905), a fantasy about a fully mechanized hotel of the future, which had been produced for Hispanofilm, a Pathé-owned Spanish company. At Zecca's invitation, de Chomón had relocated to Paris in 1907, whereupon he directed numerous imaginative shorts for Pathé Frères, including *La Maison Hanteé* ("The Haunted House," 1907), *Voyage à la Planete Jupiter* ("Voyage to the Planet Jupiter," 1907), and *La Cuisine Magnétique* ("The Magnetic Meal," 1908).

It makes better sense that Segundo de Chomón presided over Eugenio's first encounter with the cinema for several reasons. First of all, the odds are in his favor: de Chomón directed more Pathé shorts during this period than Zecca, who was becoming increasingly involved with the business end of the fledgling film industry. Secondly, as a direct result of his experiences that night, Eugenio became obsessed with trick photography, and "the Spanish Méliès" was exactly the kind of filmmaker who could have instilled a life-long love of special effects in a young man of artistic temperament. Finally, this meeting makes sense because it would establish a working relationship between Bava and de Chomón, who, as we will see, would work together again on even more significant projects. This meeting would give them a basis for those future collaborations.

As a solitary workman with an interest in photography, Eugenio must have found very seductive the sense of camaraderie as a group of artists and technicians assembled at the location at daybreak and set to work with a common sense of purpose. Knowing his ideas about art without ego, he may have also been favorably impressed by the spectacle of a group of anonymous craftsmen working as a unit, the individual replaced by the crew. It's easy to understand what would have endeared the magic of movies to Eugenio, but what did he do to endear himself to them? Did he

THE FICINI-CARPITA FAMILY, *circa 1904. Back row: Anita, Ida, Pierre, Gino, Adele, Emma (the future mother of Mario Bava). Center: mother Pellegrina, father Tonino. Front: Alfredo, Carlo.*



1 Elena Bava, Mario's older sister, remembers her Uncle Gigin's office: "He was the director of the Telegraph Office in Sanremo, and it was a very busy office! Not only because of the vacationers, but also because there were many celebrities who came to spend their declining years in Sanremo. One of these was the last Shah of Persia! Then there were the English, who came in groups, sent there for cures by their physicians: 'Only Sanremo can cure you!' We little kids, recognizing the English from their language and their clothes, cried, 'Run! The English are coming!' Then times changed, and the English didn't come any more. When the Shah of Persia died, one of his servants (who spoke Italian pretty well) came to us and said, 'Don't worry if you see one of his windows open and lit by a lamp; that's the Shah's bedroom. This way, his soul might find its way back to his room.'"

2 Giuseppe Lippi and Lorenzo Codelli, *Fant'italia* (Trieste, Italy: XIV Festival Internazionale del Film di Fantascienza, 1976), 152–54.

3 Ornella Volta, "Conversation avec Mario Bava," *Positif* 138, May 1972, 44–48.

simply fulfill the task he was called upon to do? Did he offer the cameraman some useful lighting suggestions, based on his own past experimentation with still photography? Whatever transpired that night between midnight and sunrise, one thing is certain: Eugenio's life was forever changed.

"My father rapidly developed into a most formidable cameraman," Mario Bava summarized. "We are indebted to him for some of the loveliest images of the Italian silent cinema."[4]

Indeed. In the course of his extraordinary career, Eugenio Bava would produce the first animated films made in Italy; he would become the first Italian specialist in trick photography; he would photograph the first feature film to receive a significant international release; he would supervise all the work produced by the leading Italian special effects house over a period of thirty years; and he would invent several basic cinematographic devices. Yet, despite these impressive (and, in some cases, fundamental) accomplishments, Eugenio remains one of the most obscure figures of the Italian cinema, owing to his fiercely held conviction that art was meant to enrich the world, not the reputation of the artist. As Lamberto Bava says, "It's not easy to identify his contribution, but you can *feel* it."

Eugenio did not abandon his work as a sculptor, but his professional life was abruptly divided by his newfound passion for the art and science of cinematography. He obtained a motion picture camera and began to experiment. His first results were a farce, with the image accelerating and slowing down unexpectedly, as a result of irregular hand-cranking. Over time, he found that by quietly humming certain pieces of music, it helped to regulate his hand-cranking of the camera and produce more even results. The song "*Giovinezza!*" (a Fascist anthem prior to the second World War) he found ideal for cranking 35 mm, while Verdi's "*La marcia reale*" from *Aida* was perfect for 16 mm.

In 1908, at the responsible age of 21, Eugenio married Emma Ficini-Carpita, the daughter of Tonino and Pellegrina Ficini-Carpita. A surviving family photo indicates that Emma was perhaps the middle-born



EUGENIO BAVA *proudly poses with his fellow founders of San Remo Film, 1908.*

of eight children, a brood including three sisters and four brothers. Her parents must have had a happy marriage, as their children varied greatly in age; in this photo, there are two adult daughters, two toddlers and the full range between. Emma looked very much like her mother—a placid, moon-faced girl—and, unlike her nonchurchgoing husband, was a very devout Catholic.

"She had a really sweet, down-to-earth character," Lamberto Bava recalls. "Her manners were simple yet elegant. Everyone called her a saint for putting up with her husband's strange attitudes. She had a great sense of humor and she loved putting on funny clothes to amuse her grandchildren. She was very similar in character to my father." Lamberto's sister (Mario's daughter) Elena also has fond memories of visiting her grandmother as a child, because she was always dressing up in costumes and putting on impromptu plays to entertain her.

Within the first year of his marriage to Emma, Eugenio Bava made a proud announcement—though not the sort of announcement commonly expected of newlyweds. Though no record of this work exists, Eugenio must have continued to work on assorted Pathé Frères shorts, because he had befriended several local artists and technicians who, like him, worked periodically for Pathé Frères—men whose talents went to waste when the company had nothing local in production. Indeed, product was so scarce that most of the theaters in and around Sanremo were closed more often than they were open. Seeing that this need for product was a proverbial window of opportunity, Eugenio and his friends founded a new production company—San Remo Film—to provide their city's empty screens with homegrown miracles. As Lamberto Bava notes, "This was the period of *La Belle Epoque*, when you could



EMMA FICINI-CARPITA, *circa 1908, showing a remarkable likeness to her mother.*

make a movie about a nice landscape in a picture frame."

Eugenio and his partners posed together for a commemorative photograph, presumably to announce or celebrate the completion of a project entitled *Maggio—mese dei fiori* ("May—Month of Flowers"), which sounds very much like a landscape picture. Considering the entrepreneurial pride on display in the photograph, it may well have been their first production.

By all published accounts, San Remo Film's outstanding production was a special effects extravaganza entitled *Terremoto fatale* ("Fatal Earthquake"), made in the wake of a devastating earthquake in Messina, Sicily, in 1908 that claimed 70,000 lives. The first disaster movie, and arguably the first Italian horror movie, *Terremoto fatale* dared to visualize the unthinkable: What if the Messina quake had occurred in Rome? The film showcased a variety of special effects techniques that Eugenio may have learned by observing Segundo de Chomón at work—augmented with his own gifts for sculpture, scale modelling, and photography. Since the film was not shot in Rome, we may assume that even the location of the film was an illusion—an example that his son Mario would follow fifty years later in *I vampiri* (1957), where scenes shot in an ordinary Roman courtyard appeared to unfold on the streets of Montmartre. At a time when audiences could still be frightened and disoriented by images of trains rolling into close-up and guns being fired at the camera, Eugenio Bava served up a veritable apocalypse—staged with scale models and detailed tabletop miniatures.

Eugenio personally travelled with the San Remo shorts, exhibiting them up and down the coastal area. Unfortunately, nothing produced by San Remo Film has survived—thanks to the volatility of nitrate stock, the combined ravages of two World Wars, and Eugenio's own disregard for memorabilia. But from what is known about them, we can assume that the San Remo shorts reflected Eugenio's unique abilities as an artist, sculptor and photographer, and served as a showcase for all that he had learned about the principles of cinematic illusion.

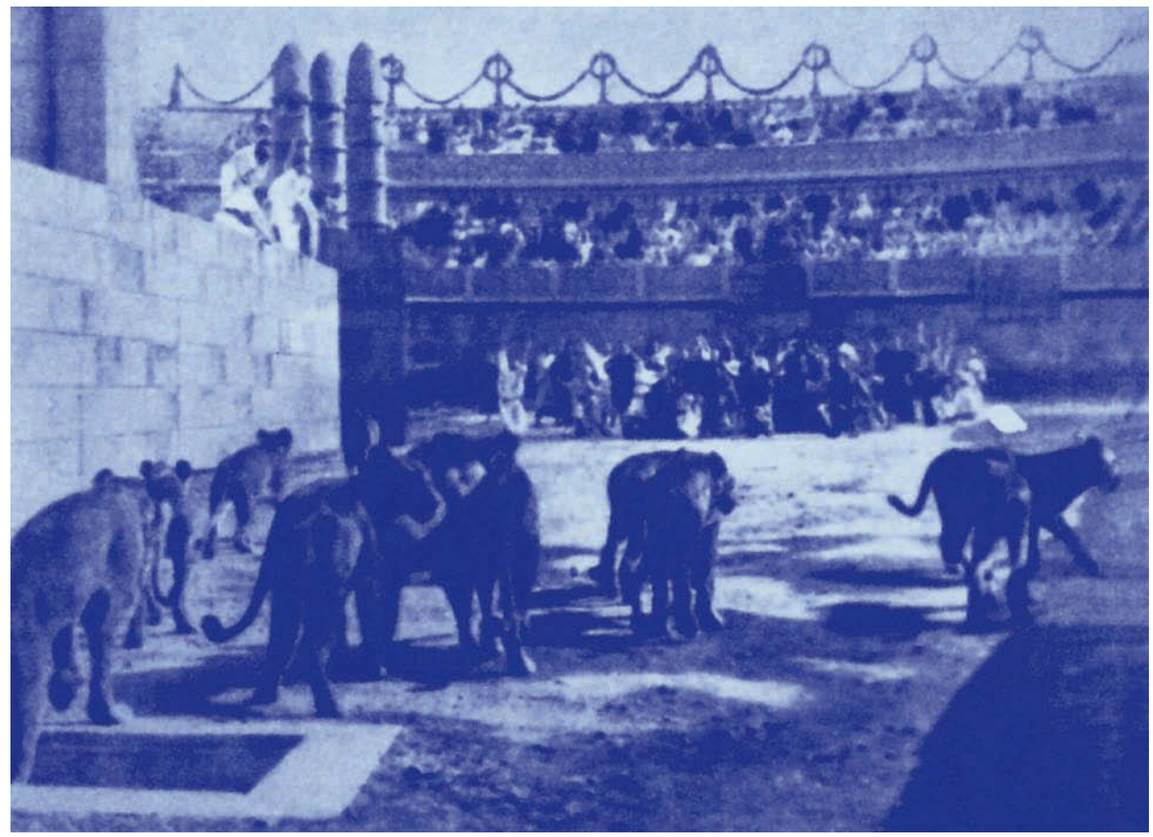
On October 9, 1911, Eugenio and Emma Bava had their first child: a daughter named Elena. Her arrival coincided with the end of an era, and the beginning of a new one, as San Remo Film was eclipsed by greater adventures in the cinema.

It isn't known how successful San Remo Film ultimately became. However, by 1912, the works of this small company must have become very well-known and respected by the Italian film community at large. We know this because, in 1912, Francesco Eugenio Bava (he went by his full name at this time) was entrusted with the job of photographing one of the earliest feature films made anywhere in the world, and certainly the most ambitious filmic statement Italy had attempted to date.

The film was Enrico Guazzoni's *Quo vadis?*, based on the 1895 novel by Henryk Sienkiewicz and released in 1913. Sienkiewicz' worldwide best-seller had already been filmed thrice (twice in 1901, once in 1908), but these earlier efforts were essentially short films capturing various highlights of the novel on film. Guazzoni had previously made *La Gerusalemme liberata/The Crusaders* (1911), which was considered ambitious at the time for running 1,000 meters (approximately 43 minutes), and is considered by some references to be the first feature film. *Quo vadis?*, on the other hand, was produced for the then-astronomical figure of 48 million *lire* (about $30,000 in today's currency), and it was the first Italian film that dared to be truly epic in scope, opulence, and literal length, running 2,250 meters (approximately 97 minutes).

To fill the screen with unparalleled bounty, horses were borrowed from the Army, gladiators were recruited from the proletariat, and trained lions were rented from a Roman circus. What areas of the screen could not be filled literally, were filled suggestively by the 26-year-old Bava's mastery of trick photography.

Though severely limited by the primitive state of cinematographic technology, Eugenio's photography in *Quo vadis?* is immediately remarkable for its mobility. His pioneering uses of composition in depth help to create illusions of sets and distances where there are none, and his fondness for implying scope of spectacle with lateral camera movements is particularly fascinating when compared to his son's innovative widescreen compositions within the epic genre forty years later. The film's unimaginably costly appearance is almost entirely due to Eugenio's familiarity with tricks of perspective; the seemingly mile-long grandstands on view during the film's arena scenes were actually miniatures,



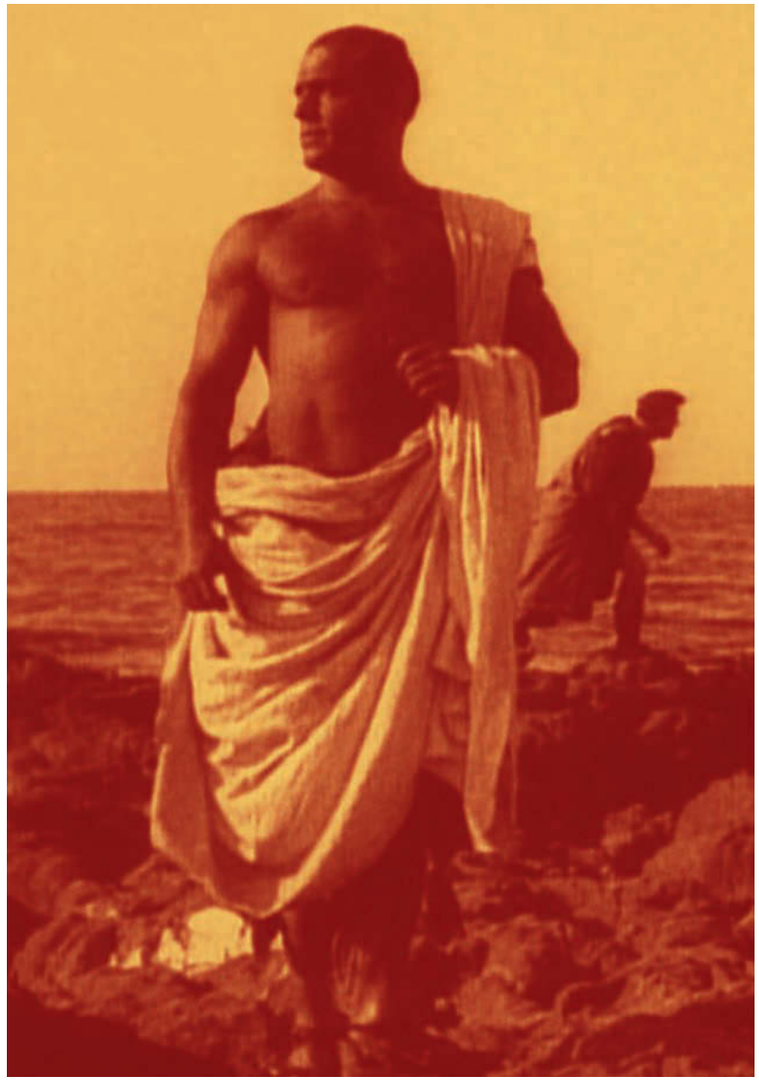
LIONS *multiplied on the set of QUO VADIS? by the camera wizardry of Eugenio Bava, 1912.*

4 Ibid.

and the burning of Rome was conjured with smoke pots and scale models of columned structures carved by hand. *Quo vadis?* may appear static by today's standards—how could it not?—but Eugenio's favorite accolade came when the film was praised by the renowned sculptor Pierre-Auguste Rodin as a masterpiece.

The famous sequence of Christians being fed to the lions for Nero's pleasure is of particular importance, as it illustrates the means by which Eugenio most likely rose so quickly to the top of his profession. The scene showcases the earliest known use of one of Eugenio's own inventions, the *camera truca*, which made it possible to create "in-the-camera" matte shots decades before the invention of the optical printer. The crude camera attachment worked by partially obscuring sections of the exposed frame with pre-cut cards; after the shot was completed, the film was automatically rewound to its starting point, at which point the frame was protected by a complementary set of cut-outs. In this manner, Eugenio was able to create the illusion of hungry lions pacing within inches of cowering Christian extras. In fact, the production had rented only one lion from a local circus; by using the same method, Eugenio was able to photographically clone this single animal into a den of twenty. With typical selflessness, Eugenio regarded this invention as his gift to the profession, and willingly built *camera truca* for other cameramen in need without thinking to patent the device.

Quo vadis? was a tremendous, world-wide success. Its vast scope, pageantry and technical daring placed Italy in the vanguard of motion picture entertainment—which is perhaps hard to imagine today, considering that most Italian films are still made without direct-sound recording. It became the first international phenomenon of the cinema. In Great Britain, it was the subject of a command performance for King George V. It premiered in America at Broadway's Astor Theater, a special occasion for which ticket prices jumped from 15 cents to a staggering $1.50.



CABIRIA: *Bartolomeo Pagano as Maciste.*

The resounding commercial victory of Guazzoni's film caused a thunder of approval that was soon after stolen by a film of stark technical superiority, Giovanni Pastrone's *Cabiria* (1914), produced by Italia Film of Turin. Directed by Pastrone under the pseudonym "Piero Fosco"—ample proof that the Anglo-Saxon market had yet to prove itself on the silver screen—*Cabiria* set standards for Italy's cinematic identity which in some ways remain to be transcended ninety years later.

It was here that the *peplum* or "sword and sandal" epic was truly born, a genre whose rebirth would be engineered in great part by Mario Bava in the 1950s; a decorative melodrama, as intrinsically Italian in nature as the Western later became to America, built upon the romantic Roman concept of a muscular Everyman shouldering the burden of a falling empire. It was in this archetypal role that Pastrone cast barrel-chested Bartolomeo Pagano (1878–1947), a former dock worker from Genoa. Pagano had been discovered some years earlier by Vincenzo Leone—an actor–director who signed his films "Roberto Roberti," best remembered today as the father of filmmaker Sergio Leone—and he was subsequently cast in Ambrosio Film's *Gli ultimi giorni di Pompeii* ("The Last Days of Pompeii," 1908). Pagano's screen debut in this 21-minute "selected scenes" featurette had done nothing for his career, but painted black for the epic *Cabiria*, he found overnight stardom, becoming synonymous with his character, the Nubian slave Maciste.

Maciste's career appended a grand total of twenty-four sequels to *Cabiria* until 1926, when the post-war decrease in Italian film production had no choice but to claim stars of even his magnitude. However, even as late as the 1960s, the name of Maciste remained so legendary that it was revived for more than twenty other *pepla*, which engaged the (now Caucasian) hero in battles with everyone from Genghis Khan to Zorro to the Man in the Moon. The Maciste name had no boxoffice identification abroad, however, and was subsequently changed in the dubbing process to any number of generic strongman names like "Samson" or "Goliath." Without the example of Maciste, the Italian Cinema renaissance in the 1950s—spearheaded by Pietro Francisci's *Le fatiche di Ercole/Hercules* (1958), photographed by Mario Bava—might never have happened.

The credited cameraman of *Cabiria*—acclaimed for introducing the screen's first tracking shot, laying the earliest dolly tracks, and riding the first of all camera cranes—was none other than Segundo de Chomón, formerly of Pathé Frères. After a series of ambitious Jules Verne adaptations established him as one of the company's outstanding talents, de Chomón left in 1910 to form his own production company in Spain. The venture proved unsuccessful, however, and in 1912, de Chomón was lured to work as a cameraman in Italy.

Perhaps because they had befriended each other in the course of working together for Pathé Frères, but certainly due to the credentials he had acquired from the illusions he had created for *Terremoto fatale*, Eugenio Bava was invited to work with de Chomón in the preparation of *Cabiria*'s special effects. These

CABIRIA *(clockwise): the eruption of Mt. Etna, the angelic procession finale, two nightmare images, and the flaming armada.* ▶



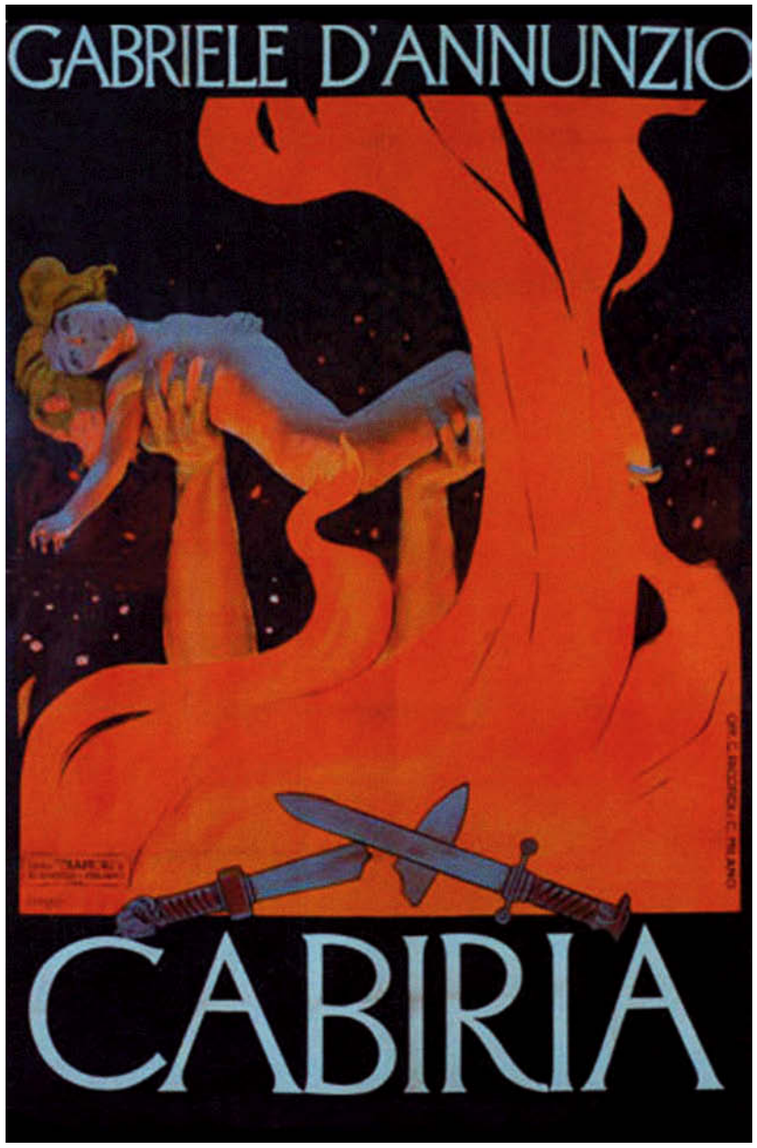












VARIOUS POSTERS *dating from the film's original release.*

included the film's early, extraordinary sequence of the eruption of Mt. Etna—a sequence that looks remarkably like certain effects shots in Mario Bava's *Terrore nello spazio/ Planet of the Vampires* (1965, on which Eugenio also worked)—and the burning of a Roman armada at Syracuse. Film scholar David A. Cook describes these sequences as "the best special effects to appear on the screen for the next twenty years,"[5] and they remain remarkable, especially in some of their less obvious applications. For instance, some shots of collapsing sets during the Mt. Etna sequence were rendered more frightening by double exposing the footage with shots of licking flames and rising smoke, filmed against black backdrops. For the shots of the raging volcano itself, Eugenio built a scale model on the set, to allow the flames and smoke it belched forth to retain a semblance of their proper size and detail onscreen; however, what really sold the shot was the optical insertion of numerous live extras (including a herd of sheep!) into the effect, shown fleeing the eruption by running down a sloping road winding around the volcano to its base.

There are several ways this effect could have been achieved, any one of which would have been extraordinarily innovative in 1913. The first (and most obvious) is double exposure; that is, by filming the miniature with the lower right corner of the frame unexposed, and then rewinding the film, protectively covering the exposed portion with a black mask, exposing the unexposed area, and filming through that aperture the live action at a distance appropriate to scale—in other words, the *camera truca*. But the evidence of the effect itself makes this explanation impossible, because smoke pots placed on the side of the slope with the actors send smoke up into the air, where it passes over the face of the volcano—an impossibility with the hard edges of matte effects. The other obvious explanation would be that the miniature was reflected on a sheet of mirrored glass, placed at a 45° angle in front of the camera, with the silvering on the lower right corner scraped away to provide an area of see-through glass, through which the live portion could be filmed at the same time on-set. Again, the hard edges of the scraped mirror would cut off the rising smoke once it reached a certain height, making this also an unacceptable explanation—besides, this method was still roughly fifteen years away from being coined, when Eugen Schüfftan, the Polish-born cinematographer of

Fritz Lang's *Metropolis* (1926), intuited how to insert live actors into miniature sets by studying the effects shots in *Cabiria*. (Thus, the scraped mirror approach came to be known as "the Schüfftan process.") Frame-by-frame study of the sequence indicates that the volcano (which one would assume to be the reflected component, as it was the miniature) was shot head-on, through a sheet of angled glass in front of the camera, with a deliberately darkened area at the lower right side, where the live component of fleeing actors and animals (staged off-camera to the left) was reflected with the help of bright lighting. This would seem to be the only means by which the smoke could pass from the live area over the face of the miniature without matte-line interference. The illusion is further "sold" by the foregrounding of a sculpted miniature stone wall that masks the ramp on which the extras and livestock were actually walking.

Naturally, Eugenio Bava's name did not appear on prints of *Cabiria*—neither did Segundo de Chomón's—and over the years, when the film's special effects were mentioned, they were assumed to be solely the work of de Chomón, whose name was synonymous with screen trickery. But de Chomón's special effects were usually rooted in the principles of stop-motion animation: he relished making inanimate objects move of their own accord, appear and disappear; he was not a sculptor, a mathematician, or a chemist, as Bava was. There is also a noticeable division of lighting styles between the main scenes of the picture and its special effects sequences, the latter being much moodier and atmospheric, lending force to the theory that Eugenio Bava staged and photographed these inserts himself as a separate unit.

It was not in Eugenio's character to demand credit or attention for his inventions, but given the angled glass explanation of the shot, one could argue that the so-called "Schüfftan process" might never have come about without Eugenio's trail-blazing example—which actually offers a simpler, more elegant solution to the problem of inserting live actors into miniature sets. Schüfftan's claiming of this approach as his own seems to have grated on Mario Bava, who offers it oblique comment in *Operazione paura*, in which an orphaned woman named Monika Schüfftan (Erika Blanc) returns to her childhood home, where she discovers that she is not a child of the Schüfftans after all, but in fact the abandoned daughter of the Baroness in whose villa they once worked as servants.

The more experience he gained as a motion picture cameraman, the more Eugenio was bothered by the guesswork that was necessarily involved in the framing process. Thus, according to Lamberto Bava, he invented what is popularly known today as the Reflex camera system. As always, Eugenio paid no heed to patenting this wonderful new invention—which, for the first time, allowed cameramen to view, through an internal system of small spinning mirrors, the exact image being captured on their film stock (thereby taking all of the guesswork out of the framing process, and making deliberate camera compositions possible)—and was happy to build replicas for other cameramen. As Eugenio's descendants bemoan to this day, someone else eventually did patent a very similar invention—*two decades later*—and today it is part and parcel of every motion picture camera built. Had Eugenio been more inclined to sign his name to his own inventions, he could have become independently wealthy from this single patent.

Cabiria was released in Rome on April 18, 1914. When it premiered at the Knickerbocker Theater in New York City, it was seen by D. W. Griffith, who was then preparing a film called *The Mother and the Law*. Pastrone's film so affected Griffith that he reconceived his project as a single thread of a more elaborate motion picture epic spanning four different periods of history, which would attain international glory when it was released in 1916 as *Intolerance*.



5 David A. Cook, *A History of Narrative Film* (New York NY: W. W. Norton & Company, 1981), 56–57.



YOUNG MARIO *"Nino" Bava and family pet, photographed by Eugenio Bava circa 1920.*

Figlio d'arte

ON JUNE 28, 1914, Europe was shaken when Archduke Francis Ferdinand of Austria and his wife were assassinated in Sarajevo by a Bosnian nationalist, in retaliation for his participation in military maneuvers in Bosnia-Hercegovina. The ensuing tumult rapidly escalated into the first global conflict, beginning with Germany's declaration of war against France and Russia on July 30, 1914. It was on that very day—which marked the beginning of the conflict that would escalate into World War I—that Emma Bava gave birth to her second child, a son named Mario. [1]

Mario's older sister Elena, then only 3 years old, remembers the day vividly: "The delivery was expected to be very difficult. The physician, Dr. Cotta, asked for an oxygen tank—but we lived in the beautiful region of San Martino, not in downtown Sanremo! So my father jumped on his bicycle and took a shortcut, pedaling through the sea front—a non-thoroughfare area! It was a real scene *à la Chiapucci* [referring to a famous Italian cyclist]—and my father was the winner! He managed to outdistance the policeman who was furiously pursuing him . . .

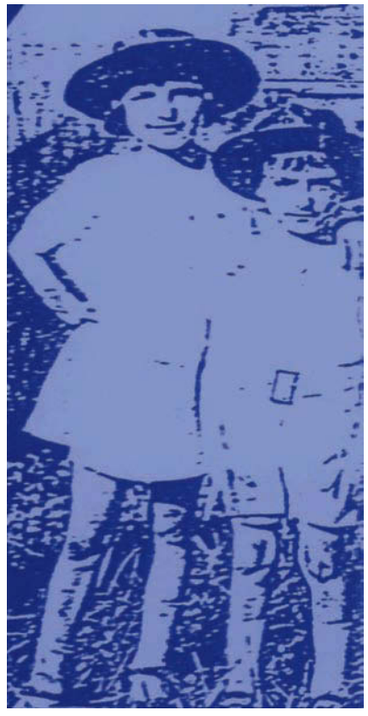
"In the meantime, around my mother's bed, we were all very worried. The only person who was peaceful and serene was—right!—her, the sick one! That day was the feast of the Madonna di Pompei, and *Mamma* told us afterwards (very secretively) that in the moment of her greatest pain, she saw the Madonna standing at the foot of her bed and she became serene. The Madonna smiled at her and, nodding her head gently, told her that everything would be all right very soon . . .

"To divert me, my younger aunt took me out for a stroll. We were walking up and down Sanremo and we arrived at St. Stefano's Church, and went inside. We found the church in absolute silence; it was the moment of the supplication of the Madonna. My aunt whispered to me, 'Why don't you ask the Madonna for *Mamma*'s recovery?' Thus, with all the force in my little lungs, in the absolute silence of the church, I cried out, '*Madonna, fai guarire Mammina!*' [Madonna, please let my little mother be well!] After a moment of silence, I answered myself even louder, with a long *'Si!'* [Yes!] All the people in the church turned their heads, smiling and very moved. And *Mammina was* healed!"

The newborn was named Mario in honor of the Virgin Mother whose presence seemed so closely linked to the circumstances of his birth. Yes: the future cinematographer was named after a vision. Like his sister before him, Mario was baptized as an infant at the parish of Santa Maria degli Angeli in Sanremo. For the first twenty years of his life, Mario was called Nino—the affectionate form of Giovanni—after his late paternal grandfather, whom his father Eugenio continued to mourn. Giovanni was considered to be Mario's second name, but it was not entered on his birth certificate.

Now with two small children to feed, and a beautiful home in the San Martino district to keep up, Eugenio needed to maintain steady employment. Evidently, while Eugenio was working on *Cabiria* in Turin, his work came to the attention of Arturo Ambrosio, the mogul behind Ambrosio Film, also of Turin. Established in 1906, Ambrosio Film was known as a place that encouraged—indeed, which had been founded upon—technical ingenuity. A former optics dealer, Ambrosio had produced the first newsreel footage filmed in Italy, and he had also built the world's first glass-roofed studio, allowing his productions to utilize natural lighting, and also to dodge Turin's undependable climate, which was subject to fogs, rain and heavy mists. Ambrosio Film was also the first major studio to introduce artificial lighting, thanks to cameraman Carlo Montuori's exasperated decision to move the street lamps indoors.





ELENA *and her little brother Nino—the best of friends.*

Some months after he had gone back to Sanremo, Eugenio received a communication from Ambrosio, inviting him to relocate to Turin and work exclusively for his company. His daughter Elena recalls that he accepted the offer "with great satisfaction," and that the family celebrated by taking some days of holiday in Ceva, Piedmonte (Northern Italy), before packing their motorcar for a new life in a new city. According to Lamberto Bava, Mario often remarked that his earliest memory was of seeing the snow capping the long walls along the roads as his family drove to Turin.

The Bavas rented an apartment on Via Ormea, which they made their home for the next four years. Across the street from their apartment was an elementary school run by nuns, which Elena attended, as did Mario once he came of age. Also nearby was the Parco del Valentino, where the two siblings often played—always dressed alike, like twins, in sun hats and white, short-legged apparel. One summer, the Bava children went with their mother on holiday to Ormea while their father stayed in Turin to work. A postcard, which Eugenio sent to his children, survives. Inscribed in Eugenio's crabbed handwriting, it reads "*Bacioni da Papà. Saluti a tutti.*" ("Kisses from Papa. Greetings to all.") Next to his message, he drew a charming portrait of his children at play in the Parco del Valentino, sharing a swing in their matching outfits, as the family dog romps in the background. "We were very happy to get it," Elena remembers.

One of Eugenio's first projects for Ambrosio was *Cenere/Ashes* (1916), co-directed by Febo Mari and Arturo Ambrosio Jr., which has retained a special place in the history of cinema for preserving the only filmed performance by the legendary stage actress, Eleonora Duse (1858–1924). He was chosen to photograph *Cenere* by a personal friend, the poet Gabriele D'Annunzio, who was also Duse's lover and the author of *Cabiria*'s purplish intertitles. He performed the same chore for *Cenere*.

Based on a novel by Grazia Deledda, *Cenere* is the melodramatic story of Rosalita, a young Sardinian woman who gives birth to a son out of wedlock, is financially unable to care for him, and turns him over to his mill-working father to raise. When the son reaches prosperous manhood, he seeks out his mother and finds her a pitiful outcast. Shattered by the revelation of his illegitimacy, he rejects his mother, and then reconsiders . . .

but she dies of melancholy before the sign of his acceptance arrives.

Although she was cast as a haggard peasant woman, considerable steps had to be taken to depict La Duse—who was making her screen debut at age 60—as flatteringly as possible. According to her biographer Bertita Harding, Duse's wardrobe had been "stripped to the barest essentials [by the war years] so that . . . she was forced to borrow the required finery for her [screen] test. Almost 60, her tired body and timeworn face did not photograph well, but it was thought that heavy makeup might cover the ravages of age."[2] In fact, Duse played the early scenes of her character's youth dodgily, by wearing dolorous veils and averting her face from the direct scrutiny of the camera.

After seeing the finished film, Duse criticized her performance in an equally melodramatic letter to producer Arturo Ambrosio: "My mistake, and that of many others, lay in employing 'theatrical' techniques, despite every effort to avoid them. Here is something quite, quite fresh, a penetrating form of visual poetry, an untried exponent of the human soul. Alas, I am too *old* for it!" Her letter concluded with a plea to Ambrosio, that he destroy all existing prints of the film—a vain and selfish request with which he wisely refused to comply.

Cenere was recently restored to a length of 60 minutes in a joint preservation between Cineteca del Friuli and George Eastman House, but the version in general circulation is less than half that length. Despite its brevity, the sophistication of Eugenio's cinematography remains impressive; it appears to have been filmed magically, without any of the technical obstacles that typically beset silent films. In an age when movies were still being filmed in flat, natural light, Eugenio devised a virtual blueprint for chiaroscuro photography, making extensive use of sculptured lighting and dramatic shadowplay.

The film's most remarkable shot occurs after Rosalita has delivered her son to the mill: as the mill turns, the stationary camera suddenly moves apace with the grinding wheel, dollying to the right and continuing past meticulously composed workers until it reaches a rectangle of light, streaming in through an off-camera door. The silhouette of the child moves into the light, hands held high as he proclaims, "I am the son of Rosalita!" In another striking image, the child is shown poised in a window, below which the shadows of his mother's reaching arms lower out of sight as she abandons him, receding from view.

Eugenio continued to work for Ambrosio Film through 1920, but Italian film production records have not preserved the titles of the films on which he worked between 1916–18. What is known about this period is that Eugenio remained industrious and inventive, as witnessed by his son's earliest memories of him.

"My memory of my father is that he was a character like Gyro Gearloose, the friend of Donald Duck," Mario reminisced during his 1974 appearance on the television program *L'ospite dalle due*. "You opened a drawer [in his studio] and lying inside you found a body sculpted in

LEGENDARY *stage actress Eleonora Duse in an 1898 lithograph, and as Rosalita in CENERE.*









1 This is according to the birthdate inscribed on Bava's own burial site. His birthdate has been incorrectly reported as July 31 in every article or book written about him, an error accepted as fact and perpetuated from the germinal statistics first presented in Henri Guieysse, et al., "Mario Bava," *L'Ecran Fantastique Fiche C.E.R.C.* 34, May 1971, 3–12. and "101 Mario Bava," *Film Dope* 3, August 1973, 11–13.

2 Bertita Harding, *Age Cannot Wither: The Story of Duse and D'Annunzio* (Philadelphia PA: Lippincott, 1947), 220–21.



wax . . . in a cupboard, there was a lathe . . . in another place, a ball. He was always inventing—filmic relief, color tinting, explosions—it was normal in my house to find cyanide in the drawers. He used it for tinting, things like that. Being there, seeing those things, I learned—and this disease [of cinema] slowly got in my blood. It's a real disease, actually . . . For example," he elaborated, pointing to the boom microphone hovering above him, "I see light shining on a microphone like this, and automatically, I begin to think, 'This could be a cinematic trick shot—it could be a skyscraper, if shot in a certain way . . .' The brain is always thinking of something new."

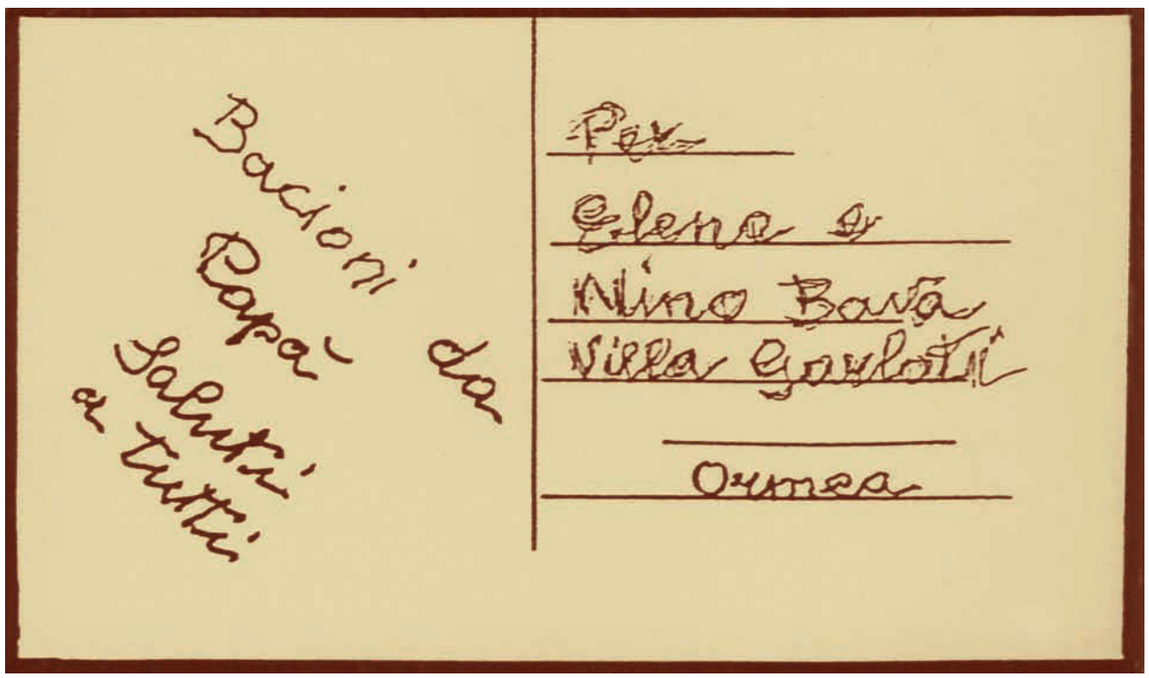
As Mario elaborated in his *Fant'italia* interview: "I grew up among picture frames, miniature models and piles of hyposulfate. I grew up in the midst of film. When I was 3 years old, I used to play with pieces of potassium cyanide, which I loved for its rubescent color. I used to alternate long lines of it with white grains of hyposulfate. It never occurred to my father that I might have poisoned myself. I knew it was poisonous, that I should refrain from licking my fingers while handling it. Cyanide and hyposulfate were mixed to make a chemical fondue. I kept my eye on the film while my father drenched a piece of cotton-wool in cyanide and rubbed the emulsion in the kitchen sink, taking care not to get any drops in his salad. The roots of my love/hate relationship with special effects goes back to that time and those experiences."

Mario's mention of a "love/hate" relationship to special effects may also tacitly acknowledge his conflicted feelings toward his father. As is obvious from his early memories of his father's "Aladdin's cave," he felt a great and early attraction—a *simpatico*—to his father's tools and trade, but Eugenio was also away from home for much of the time, working, associating with famous people, building a career for himself in order to support his family. There is a family legend that Eugenio once went out, ostensibly to get some tobacco, and did not return for three weeks. While he was away, he sent drawings and affectionate notes to his children, which they gratefully received, but when he returned, Eugenio was often more remote than his correspondence. He sequestered himself in his workshop, was very self-absorbed in his experiments, and easily annoyed by household distractions. In short, little Nino's presence in the workshop was tolerated, and sometimes necessary when Emma was not available to mind him, but it was not encouraged.

Asked to characterize their father–son relationship, Lamberto Bava candidly attests: "It was a strict relationship, and since Eugenio worked in the cinema, there was not much time for family. He was never at home, and it was not until later—when they worked together—that they established a relationship. It was a different time, a time when fathers paid almost no attention to their children until they grew up and could communicate with them on an adult level."

Mario's desire to please his father never waned. When he became a director in 1960, the year in which Eugenio retired, Mario kept his father busy with sculpting and effects consultation jobs on his movies. The best years of their relationship were the years of shared goals and professional equality.

FRONT AND BACK *of a hand-drawn postcard sent by Eugenio Bava to his children during his travels.*



In 1919, Eugenio is known to have photographed and provided special effects for two melodramas signed by Ambrosio director Achille Consalvi: *Champagne caprige* and the two-part *L'amante della luna* (literally "The Moon Lover," referring to a hero fond of taking nightly walks in the moonlight). Night photography was seldom attempted at the time, and it would be fascinating to see *L'amante della luna*, if only to discover how Eugenio Bava coped with this technical problem.

Mario Bava could remember his father laboring on "a small model with a forest and a lake . . . I recall that he poured the water for the river himself, and that, one day, a maid spilled some and he made a big stink about it." [3]

Mario's sister Elena has vivid memories of the premiere screening: "It was the first film shot by my father [that I remember seeing]; it was not only shot by him, but also sewn, basted, etc. I was 7 years old, more or less, and I remember that I was seated in the front row of the first screening, proud to say, 'This film was made by my *Papà*!' I remember particularly the beginning: pitch-black, a long row of cypresses fully lit by a wonderful, shining moon! At a certain point appeared on the screen the sleek shape of an old, bearded man, elegantly dressed. His head was raised toward the moon, and his gait was solemn—he was the Moon Lover! After a long, silent walk, the old man abruptly stopped. In a nearby villa, strange noises could be heard! The scene changed, and we were transported to a dimly lit room. The window was open, and there was a young woman—Lidia Quaranta, the protagonist—sleeping. After a short while, two male silhouettes appeared at the window and, after a brief hesitation, they rushed inside, lifted the girl, and covering her mouth with a hand, they dragged her away!

"Sound didn't exist yet, but we, the audience, took care of that! Everybody stood up, shocked by the tragic scene! They shouted, "Leave her alone! Leave her be, you ruffians!" (Those were innocent days—it was the infancy of the cinema!) The audience stayed riveted throughout the third act, in which the criminals were arrested and the heroine was rescued. When the movie was over, there were honors for *Papà*, for the actress, and for those who had collaborated with him."

Of the family's years in Turin, Elena Bava has particularly fond memories of the holidays when Eugenio would take his children sight-seeing. "We especially liked the Museo Eglizio [Egyptian Museum], which is now regarded as one of the best and richest museums of its kind in Europe. We saw the beautiful churches, the historical sites, always under the guidance of our father, who was trying to enrich us culturally. Sometimes at night, during the week, we went to the Maffei, a *café-chantant*—a very beautiful theater. I remember that my brother was very interested in everything, except for the dancers, who came on stage dancing in unison. Mario would turn around backwards on his chair, with his back to the stage, and say, 'When those idiots go away, call me!' He had no way of knowing how many more like this he would have to endure in his long career—and without a chair to turn around in!"

One suspects that little Nino may have turned his back to the dancing girls not because they bored him, but because he did not wish anyone to observe how shaken he was by their beauty. Throughout his life, Mario adored women—this much is obvious from the way he photographed them, which did more than capture them: it *exalted* them. Nino was a sensitive child and, much as his father had to do following the death of his own father, part of his growing up was learning to marshal his violent emotions.

His sister Elena tells two stories that illustrate what a considerate and loving child he was, which also shed light on some of the other interpersonal dynamics within the family. "Mario was extremely tender-hearted and sensitive," she considers. "He suffered because my aunts weren't affectionate toward my mother. My aunts once threw a party and invited all of their relatives, including Mario—but not our mother! When this party in the country ended, Mario put a pastry in his pocket to bring home as a gift to our mother, but on the way, he realized that the pastry, which was filled with cream, had been squashed in his pocket. He started to cry, when our Uncle Mimmo happened by and saw him. He gave Mario the money to buy *two* pastries—one for *Mammina* and another for himself!

"On another occasion," she continues, "I was preparing for my Holy Communion and Mario wanted to make me a present. He saw a nice little Madonna in a shop and the price was 20 *lire* [about a penny]. He asked our miserly Aunt Mariuccia, 'Could you lend me the money?' She told him that he would have to earn it first, by taking a candle and catching some snails. 'For every twenty snails, I will give you one *lira*,' she said. He had to do this at night, when the snails came out. He finally caught enough and went to buy the little Madonna. Running back home, he fell down and the Madonna broke! Poor thing! Luckily, at that very moment, our Uncle Carlo happened to pass by, and he gave his little nephew the money to buy another one. That was my brother—much better than me!"

In 1920, Eugenio photographed F. G. Viancini and Arturo Ambrosio Jr.'s *La farfalla della morte* ("The Butterfly of Death"), though surviving production records credit him as "Fernando Bava." This intriguingly titled film marked his last work for Ambrosio.

In the latter months of that year, Do-Re-Mi Film offered Eugenio a monthly wage of 20,000 *lire* [$12.50] to supervise a series of films about Galaor—a muscular hero, played by Alfredo Boccolini, conceived as competition for the Maciste of Bartolomeo Pagano. Eugenio would photograph the films, design special effects for them, write their scenarios, and—according to his family—also direct them. But first, he had to uproot his brood once again and relocate . . . to Rome.

The titles of the first Galaor films have not been preserved, but *L'ultima avventura di Galaor* ("The Last Adventure of Galaor"), written and photographed by Eugenio Bava, was released in 1921. The direction, however, was credited not to Eugenio, but to Mario Restivo. The film was also known in some territories as *L'ultima impresa di Galaor* ("The Final Deed of Galaor"), and it was reissued in 1923 as *Galaor tra i leoni* ("Galaor Among the Lions"). Naturally, it wasn't Galaor's final adventure . . . but considering the failing fortunes of the Italian cinema in the postwar years, there was every reason why some might harbor such an expectation.

"After we were in Rome for six months, the big crisis of our cinema came, which was to last nine years, until 1930," Mario Bava remembered. [4] During this period, the Italian cinema was eclipsed as the leading producer of feature films by America and Germany, which were exporting the first important films of such directors as D. W. Griffith (now considered "the father of the epic," in the wake of *Intolerance* and *The Birth of a Nation*), Thomas Ince, Robert Wiene and Fritz Lang. By 1922, a mere 6% of all films being shown on Italian screens were Italian productions. A number of independent production companies sought to consolidate their strengths by forming the UCI (Unione Cinematografica Italiana), but the plan failed. Italy's Prime Minister, Benito Mussolini (b. 1883), responded by enforcing a strict quota on Italian theaters, requiring them to play one Italian film for every ten features brought in from other countries. But it wasn't strict enough: Italian production companies folded, and some of Italy's most talented filmmakers had to leave their homeland to seek employment in the various hot spots of motion picture production around the world.

In 1924, Italy was responsible for the production of only ten feature films. One of these films, *Galaor contro Galaor* ("Galaor vs. Galaor"), produced by Fert Film, was again written, photographed and featured special effects by Eugenio Bava, under the direction of Eugenio Perego (not a pseudonym, but a real Milanese director who lived from 1876–1944). Unfortunately, the national film crisis required him to make the film in Turin, while his family remained behind in Rome. Eugenio was paid 20,000 *lire* per month to do all three jobs, but he was beginning to question the value of a profession that so often separated him from a family that was becoming harder to support.

3 Alberto Abruzzese, et al., *La città del cinema—produzione e lavoro nel cinema italiano 1930–70* (Rome, Italy: Napoleone, 1979), 83–89.

4 Ibid.

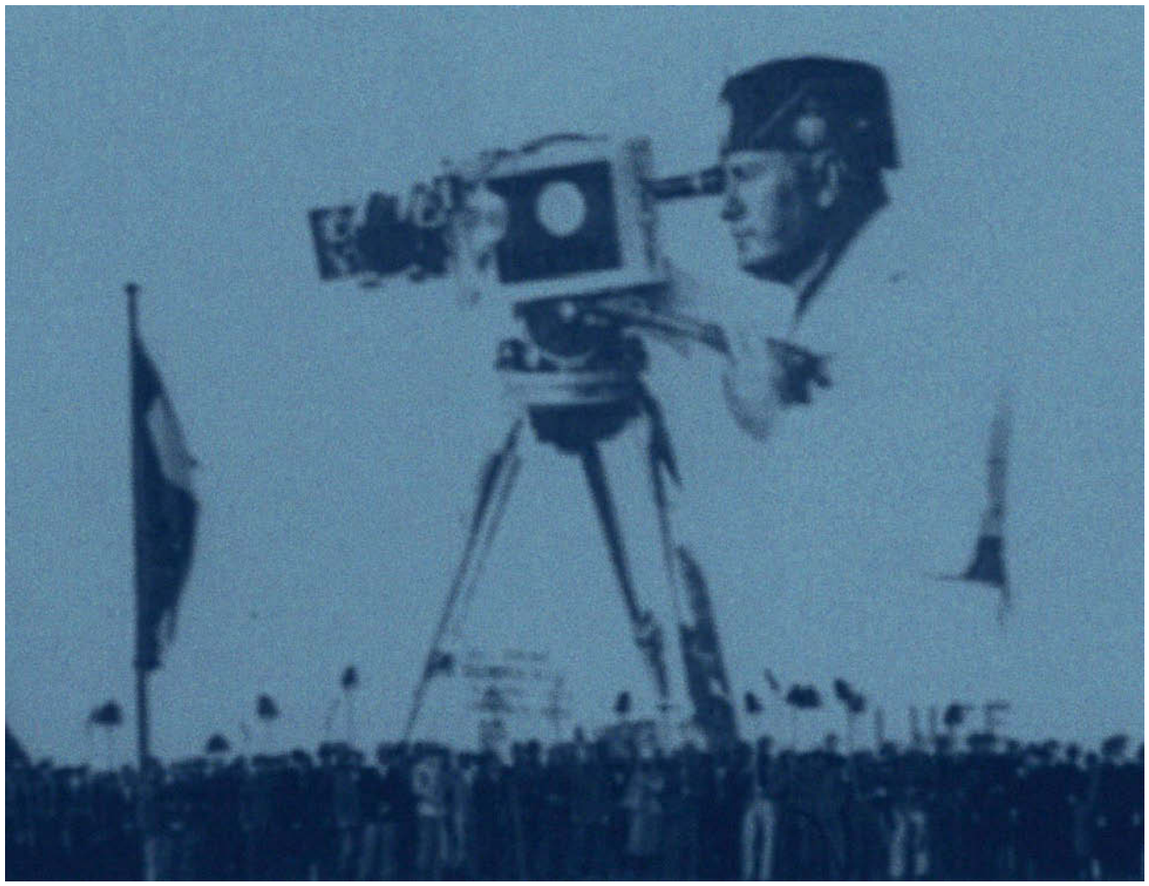
Mussolini & the Istituto LUCE

In 1924, the Italian epic—the foundation of the Italian cinema's worldwide success—stood on the brink of extinction. That year, German director Georg Jacoby, together with Gabriele D'Annunzio, collaborated on a colossal remake of the film that started it all, *Quo vadis* (the question mark now dropped)—an Italian/German co-production starring Emil Jannings as Nero. This version was photographed by Curt Courant, Giovanni Vitrotti and Alfredo Donelli. Made at enormous cost by a depressed film industry in a desperate move, this *Quo vadis* proved a commercial disaster both at home and as it made its tragic circuit around the world.

The final nail in the coffin of the Italian epic was driven deep in 1925, when Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer sailed a film crew to Rome to film the Biblical epic *Ben-Hur: A Tale of the Christ*, based on the 1880 novel by Gen. Lew Wallace. The first-ever collaboration between American and Italian film crews, the production was troubled from the start by union conflicts, personality flare-ups, and endless delays. Things did not get better when the first director was replaced by Fred Niblo, who had directed Douglas Fairbanks in *The Mark of Zorro* and Rudolph Valentino in *Blood and Sand.* Under Niblo's aegis, the sea battle—filmed in Lucarno—resulted in several near-drownings, and the climactic chariot race sequence (later deemed unusable due to camera shadows) ended in the death of one Italian stuntman and several horses. When the property warehouse caught fire (arson was suspected), Niblo's unit was recalled to Hollywood, where the arena sequences were reshot from scratch in early two-color Technicolor. The eventual cost of the film is reputed to be $3,900,000, making it by far the most expensive motion picture produced of its era. Despite its heavy financial and human cost, *Ben-Hur* was greeted by *Variety* as "the epic of motion picturemaking up to this time" and widely hailed as a masterpiece.

Ben-Hur left a very bad taste in the mouths of the Italian film community, who felt used and abused by the visiting Americans, and this may be part of the explanation why the proverbial buck stopped there. Furthermore, the film became a global triumph, and the Italians understood—especially after the lack of support shown to the latest *Quo vadis*—that there was simply no point in trying to duplicate *Ben-Hur*'s mammoth success on a lesser scale. It is one of the more baffling aspects of the years of Prime Minister Benito Mussolini's dictatorship—given his developing interest in the cinema as a propaganda tool, and his determination to project a strong, resilient Roman image to the outside world—that he never spearheaded a resurgence of epic filmmaking in Italy in the 1930s and '40s. After all, poor as Italy was, the genre required little more than bare chests and the arenas, props and ancient scenery freely at its disposal. In the years following *Ben-Hur*, Italian escapist fare was scaled down to more intimate, comic dimensions with the arrival of the *telefono bianca*, or "white telephone" movies—which told romantic situation comedy stories in glamorous, antiseptic settings that were essentially pageants of Fascist illusion, distinctly at odds with the worsening economic conditions throughout Italy. (The closest American counterparts to this genre are the Astaire/Rogers musicals of the 1930s.) The epic genre would now remain dormant for another twenty years, until it was revived in the 1950s—in large part by Mario Bava.

Perhaps the Italian tradition of epic cinema disappeared because Mussolini wanted to transpose this brand of drama to the arena of the world stage, real life, and to reserve all demonstrations of national heroism for himself. Several historians have noted that Mussolini's image underwent a stark change over the years of his public career, morphing from an early, spectacled, intellectual look into a proud, bald-pated, boisterously physical one inspired by the *Duce*'s favorite film star, Maciste.



In 1926, Mussolini founded the Istituto Nazionale LUCE—the acronym stands for L'Unione Cinematografica Educativa, in other words "The National Institute for the Union of Cinema and Education" ("Union" in its original meaning, not in the sense of a worker's union)—to produce educational and scientific documentaries, in an effort to create films with a stronger national identity to bolster the public morale. Eugenio Bava was recruited by Mussolini to supervise the Istituto's first major work, a documentary about the *Giovani Fascisti* ("Young Fascists"), which took him on an extended cruise to the Far East in the company of Mussolini's sons, Vittorio and Bruno, and many other young idealists. [5]

ITALIAN PRIME MINISTER *Benito Mussolini, founder of the Istituto Nazionale LUCE.*

For Eugenio, this working cruise meant another extended separation from his family, and the documentary realism of the job afforded him no outlet for his fascination with trick photography, which he found most fulfilling. In short, it was not a welcome trip, and a surviving photograph, showing Eugenio on deck with Bruno and Vittorio Mussolini, presents a man trying, without success, to disguise his unhappiness. When Eugenio finally returned home, he resolved to never again be placed in such a situation by his profession. He announced his retirement as a cinematographer, effective immediately.

"He got fed up with the business and shut himself away in a musty little room, a real alchemist's closet," Mario summarized. "It was there that I learned everything I know today about special effects and trick photography."[6]

That "musty little room" was at the Istituto Nazionale LUCE. After his extended voyage with Mussolini's sons, at the age of 40, Eugenio Bava was appointed by Mussolini as the Istituto's first production executive. From his modest workshop on Via Cernaia, Eugenio would oversee the production of newsreels, animated cartoons, scientific documentaries, title sequences, "*Fine Primo Tempo/ Secondo Tempo*" intermission cards, even studio logos.

One of Eugenio's assistants in the preparation of title sequences was Aristide Massaccesi, who later became a successful cinematographer in his own right, and also produced and directed numerous films under numerous pseudonyms, "Joe D'Amato" being the most famous. "I worked with the grandfather of Lamberto Bava when I was only a little boy," Massaccesi told interviewer Peter Blumenstock in 1994. "It wasn't really a job in a professional sense; I didn't see even one penny for doing it. I did it to learn, to experience the atmosphere and magic of movie making. At that time, Eugenio Bava did the opening and closing titles for countless movies. That was a tough job; we had to cut out all the letters of the credits, using stencils and so on. Nowadays, it's easy to do titles because computers do everything for you. But, at that time, every single letter, every comma, had to be cut by hand."



EUGENIO BAVA *poses with il Duce's sons, Bruno and Vittorio Mussolini during an extended sea voyage.*

Another of Eugenio's tasks in this regard was the filming of the trademark for Aquila Film, the logo heralding all of the Istituto's in-house productions.

"Mussolini liked very much the idea of putting a live eagle on the logo, as a trademark for the films of the Istituto," recalls Elena Bava, who assisted her father for a time. "He ordered the most beautiful eagle in the zoo to be brought over, and it so happened that this eagle gave us some scares. First of all, she got loose—Heaven knows who untied her! She flew very high toward the exit door, which happened to be wide open at that moment. Had she flown out, we never would have recovered her! The men from the zoo came to fetch her down . . . but this was nothing compared to the filming of the logo! The big lights scared her and she slipped down, hanging upside down with one of her claws caught. Poor creature—and poor us! But with a great deal of patience, on her part and on ours, we got a good result."

Every Wednesday evening, a projectionist took the newest films produced by the Istituto for a private screening at Mussolini's home, Villa Torlonia, where *il Duce* watched everything with aquiline vigilance. "The projectionist told us that *il Duce,* tired at the end of his day, was also sometimes visibly worried," Elena remembers. "He wasn't always calm, but he followed the screenings very attentively, and when the atmosphere wasn't good, his relatives understood to attend in silence. In moments like those, his son Bruno was the only one who stretched out on his seat and threw his arms around his father's neck. Mussolini didn't even have to look; he knew already who it was, and he let him have his way. Bruno was his favorite. In a film we made about Sardinia, we had an aerial view of Sardinia, but forgot to include Corsica. And *il Duce* saw this and said, 'What about Corsica? Put it in!' Another time, we went to Sicily and filmed some young people in a big living room, wrapping oranges in tissue paper. On one side of the room, one of these girls took a sheet of tissue paper by licking her finger. And *il Duce* said immediately, 'Cut that out—she licked her finger!' And then we made a film about hygiene . . ."

For this next project, Eugenio made a number of historical inquiries, which resulted in some astonishing discoveries about the standards of personal maintenance held by such famous personages as Queen Marie Antoinette (born 1755, beheaded 1793). "They sent us from Paris the small basin used by Marie Antoinette, no bigger than a dish—maybe a bit closer to a soup plate," Elena recalls. "They wrote us that Marie Antoinette didn't like to obey her doctor's orders—he had requested that the Queen bathe at least once a year! If that was the Queen, can you imagine her subjects?"

One of Eugenio's most important collaborators during his Istituto LUCE years was Roberto Omegna. Born in Turin on May 28, 1876, Omegna came to the Istituto with two decades of remarkable experience in cinema under his belt. He had been a cameraman and director of documentary short subjects for Ambrosio Film since 1906; he appeared onscreen to assist a Dr. Negro in a demonstration of the correct way to assist someone suffering an epileptic fit, and also showed himself to be something of an Indiana Jones adventurer by marching into a jungle, armed only with a small

5 Vittorio would later become the editor of *Cinema* magazine and producer of the Fascist-era epic film *Scipione l'Africano*, 1937, while the younger Bruno would become a pilot and die during a war flight in 1941.

6 Ornella Volta, "Conversation avec Mario Bava," *Positif* 138, May 1972, 44–48.

pistol, and bagging a leopard single-handed. A noted still photographer, he illustrated chapterbooks of the latest Ambrosio films and also unflinchingly documented many of the horrors of the 1908 earthquake in Messina, cranking his camera while panning down from a collapsed building to a pile of dead men, women and children. That same year, he applied his skilled hand to the writing of screenplays, beginning with Ambrosio's *Gli ultimi giorni di Pompeii* ("The Last Days of Pompeii"), directed by Luigi Maggi. (Some sources claim that he also photographed it.) It was later at Ambrosio that Omegna innovated the scientific short subject with *La vita delle farfalle* ("The Lives of Butterflies," 1911), remarkable for its pioneering use of microphotography.

The paths of Roberto Omegna and Eugenio Bava may have first crossed during the production of *Champagne caprige* (1919), one of Eugenio's first camera assignments at Ambrosio Film. The feature was scripted by Omegna, who would have taken an interest in the way his words were being filmed; it also included a scene of the heroine, Edith, tipsy on champagne and fantasizing a dozen or more tiny spirits dancing on a tabletop beside her, which gave Eugenio the opportunity to indulge his penchant for trick photography. When the two men reunited at LUCE years later, Eugenio encouraged Omegna to return to his true obsession—the world of science, particularly the worlds of smaller creatures and insects.



PROF. ROBERTO OMEGNA, *whose fascination with insects inspired characters in Mario Bava's later films.*

Between the years 1926 and 1948, Omegna directed more than 150 shorts for the Istituto on the themes of science, medicine and world travel. Several of these are available for internet viewing on the Archivio Luce website (www.archivioluce.com). Among these are *Abitanti del mare* ("Inhabitants of the Sea"), *Dall'uovo alla gallina* ("In the Egg of a Chicken"), *La vita dei topolini bianchi* ("The Lives of White Mice"), *Insetti nocivi* ("Harmful Insects") and *Forme plantoniche* ("Planktonic Forms"). Eugenio would often serve as Omegna's cameraman, and *Forme plantoniche*, a silent film dating from the 1920s, is particularly impressive as a pioneering yet fully achieved work of cinemicrography.

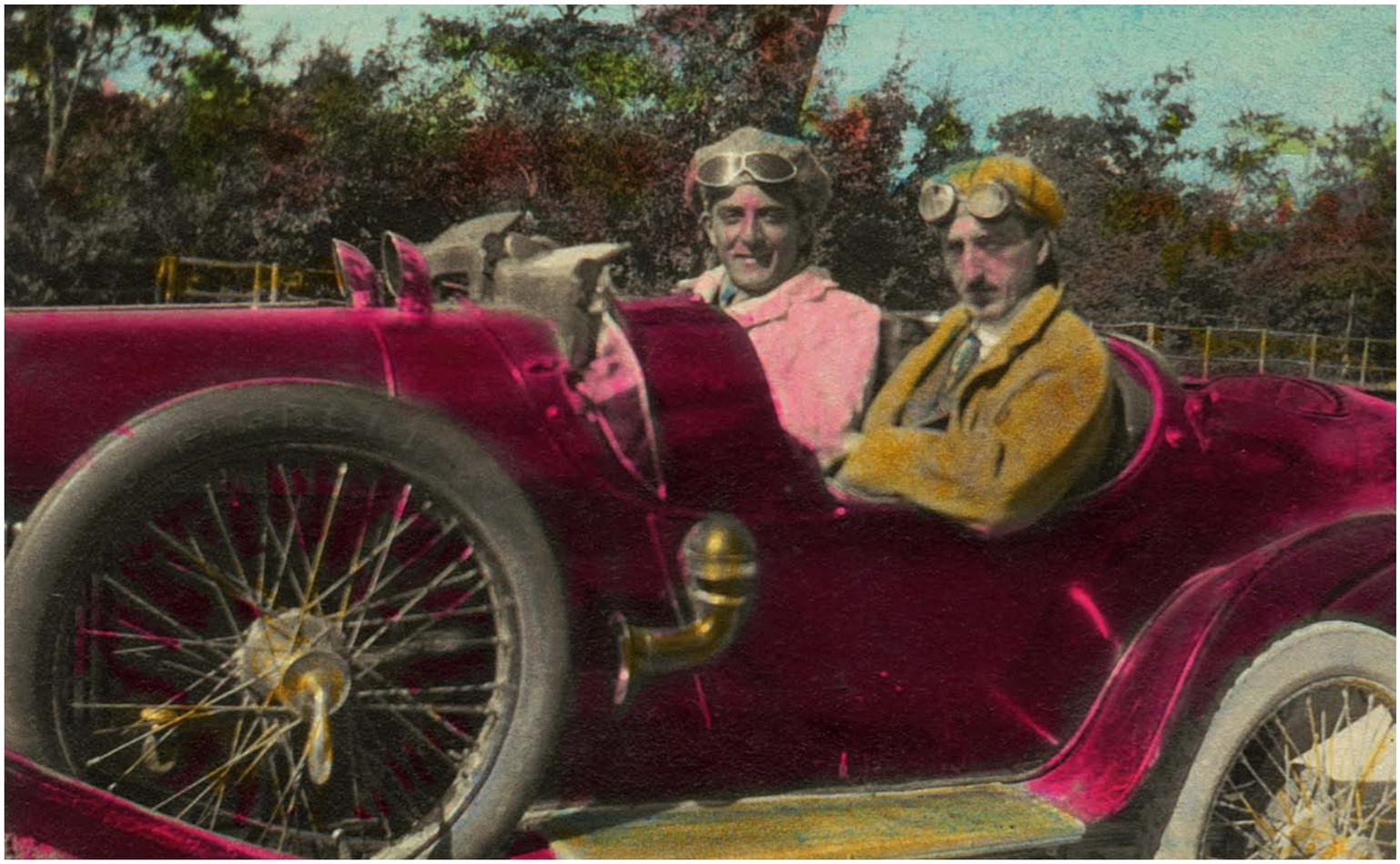
In later years, after the arrival of sound, Omegna and Bava branched out into shorts about botanical subjects, such as *L'intelligenza dei fiori* ("The Intelligence of Flowers," 1933), while yet other shorts about biological and general scientific subjects were co-directed by Omegna and Bava. Among these were the delightful *Bolle di sapone* ("Soap Bubbles," 1932-37), which demonstrates all the interesting ways soap and water can be magically manipulated by knowing hands, and *L'occhio* ("The Eye"). The latter, undated but produced in the mid-1930s, is an engrossing study of the components and functions of the human eye; it is of particular interest for its opening shot, in which the darting, hawkish eye of young Mario Bava —in his first known screen appearance—dissolves to the analogous lens of a still camera. (The father obviously knew his son all too well.) The collaborations of Omegna and Bava notably differ from Omegna's solo endeavors by virtue of their humor; in *L'occhio*, for example, we see a man admiring a woman standing on a balcony . . . popping in his monocle for a better look . . . and discovering that his Juliet is in fact a grumpy-looking man!

Elena Bava remembers Prof. Omegna in appropriately colorful terms: "He was a real magician who knew everything about the mysterious lives of insects, butterflies, ants . . . He would come in, saying in his Piedmontese accent, 'How are you? How is your work coming along?' He was interested in *everything*. Then he added, 'Tonight I will stay awake! The ants are hatching!' He was a dignified person with a small black beard and from the watchfob chain on his vest hung the claw of a jungle cat. He had crossed many deserts, and from these travels, he kept hundreds of photographic plates. He travelled alone, declining even the company of a native guide. 'They might get sick,' he reasoned—he didn't believe he could get sick himself! The last time he visited, he was about to leave for Turin. He told my father, 'Get ready—when I return, we will make *The Life Cycle of Mice*!' And then he suddenly died!"

Prof. Omegna apparently made an equally lasting impression on Mario, as well. One can readily see his influence on the short nature-based films he would soon make with Roberto Rossellini, and Mario's directorial debut with the short film *L'orrecchio* ("The Ear," 1946) is nothing if not a continuation of the work his father and Omegna had done on *L'occhio*. One can also see the imprint of Roberto Omegna in certain characters within Mario Bava's feature filmography, notably Paolo Fosatti, the entomologist played by Leopoldo Trieste in *Ecologia del delitto/Twitch of the Death Nerve* (1971).

Omegna died on November 19, 1948, in Turin. His contribution to cinema was promptly recognized with a fascinating 44-minute featurette, *Un pioniere del cinema scientifico Roberto Omegna 1876–1948*, directed by Virgilio Tosi. The first half of this film only is available for viewing on the Archivio Luce website, but it includes much invaluable footage, including a selection of scenes from *Champagne caprige*.

Omegna was just one of the many larger-than-life figures befriended by Eugenio Bava. Though often invisible on the dotted line, Eugenio himself was a man of formidable presence, talent and personality. He counted many of the best-known



EUGENIO BAVA *sporting around with world racing champion Tazio Nuvolari.*

Italian figures of his day among his closest friends. In addition to Pierre-Auguste Rodin, Gabriele D'Annunzio and Eleonora Duse, Benito Mussolini and Emperor Hirohito of Japan, one preserved family photo shows a goggled Eugenio out for a drive with Italian racing champion Tazio Nuvolari.

He also exacted a powerful influence on both his children, who inherited their father's skill for drawing, painting, sculpture and design. Elena Bava was particularly affected by her father's talent for sculpture, which after 1930 he used primarily to sculpt life-sized likenesses of the Saints. These unsigned works became his lifelong hobby, his own personal religion, his artistic refuge from bureaucracy. When these pieces were finished, he presented them as gifts to local churches, which brought his extraordinary talent to the attention of houses of worship the world over, who began to submit requests of their own. One of Eugenio's many surviving sculptures is the likeness of Sant'Andrea della Valle, which is housed in a glass coffin at St. Peter's Cathedral. It is said to be indistinguishable from an actual body lying in state.

Occasionally, Eugenio would return to the cinema in the role of sculptor and for these rare assignments, he deigned to accept screen credit under his own name. In 1948, he was credited with "special effects" in Roberto Rossellini's film *La macchina ammazzacattivi* ("The Machine That Killed Bad People"), a moral fable about a man (Gennaro Pisano) who—with the help of a supposed angel (Giovanni Amato)—invents a camera that petrifies evil people. The photographer sets about purifying his hometown of Amalfi, but soon realizes that Man is a complex creature in which elements of Good and Evil are entwined; this brings about the realization that the angel is in fact a demonic imp following his own agenda. Eugenio provided sculptures to match the live actors photographed in Rossellini's story, as well as additional in-camera trick shots. His own hands are seen manipulating the figures during the film's main titles sequence, which he prepared himself at the Istituto. Similar, later assignments were Giacomo Gentilomo's *Sigfrido/The Dragon's Blood* (1957), a color remake of Fritz Lang's *Siegfried* for which he supervised the screen debut of mechanical effects genius Carlo Rambaldi, and Alberto De Martino's *Perseo l'invincibile/Medusa Against the Son of Hercules* (1963), for which Eugenio provided a number of plaster victims for Rambaldi's rampaging, tree-like Medusa.

As the saintly sculptures stood in various stages of completion in his workshop and the corridors of Eugenio's home, they were visited by worshipful neighbors and regarded warily by his imaginative offspring. These figures had a special impact on the imagination of young Mario, who remembered once opening a drawer in his father's workshop and being shocked to discover what he believed to be a dead body. Like Eugenio's workshop, Mario's future films are inhabited by mannequins, dolls, wax heads, dead bodies—and the fear that they might somehow spring to life. (Freud once wrote that the presence of statues in dreams represents a feeling of being unloved, but in the films of



EARLY WORK AT ISTITUTO LUCE: *Mario Bava (in white shirt and tie) assists the filming of a glass matte shot.*

Mario Bava, statues can more fairly be said to represent statues.) The cumulative effect of his early exposure to special effects and the common exposure to the Saints can be seen in the details of a prank that Mario played on his mother when he was in his early teens. One morning, he summoned his mother to his room with cries of agony. She rushed to his side in concern.

"Nino! What's wrong?"

"*Mamma*, it's my leg! I can't feel it! What's wrong with me?"

Emma felt under the blanket and found her son's leg to be hard and cold as stone. She recoiled, terrified. Feigning horror, Mario slowly pulled down his blanket to reveal his thigh, which slowly turned whiter and whiter, until his white leg culminated in a marble foot. It was a homemade illusion—his first—made from a bit of flour from the kitchen and a marble limb found in his father's workshop. Laughing, he pulled away the blanket and showed his mother how convincingly he had joined the false limb to his own at the knee. The family anecdote doesn't reveal whether the poor woman simply rolled her eyes at her son's mischief, or gave him the beating of his life.

"This story tells you a lot about his character," observes Roy Bava, Mario's grandson. "He was always trying to make a joke out of fear."[7]

On the other hand, Elena Bava doesn't credit her father's religious sculptures with prompting her decision to become a nun. Despite her father's devotion to his sculptures, and the meticulous research he conducted into the lives of each Saint before undertaking their likeness, Elena was already a grown woman by the time Eugenio fully consecrated his free time to this project. She insists that she did not have a religious upbringing; her only exposure to religion, as a child, was through the example of the two most important women in her life—her mother and great grandmother. She describes her *Nonna* Caterina (who died at the age of 82, after falling out of a tree!) as "an angel . . . very religious," and as a woman who "sacrificed everything to our Lord," but by the time Elena entered her life, she had grown too old and infirm to attend church regularly. "Only *Mamma* was a real churchgoer," Elena says. "She went to church, never missed the Mass on Sunday, and sometimes demanded that we follow her example, but without any result! Some years later, she told me how much she had prayed for us, seeing how adverse we were to her faith—and my eventual response was to consecrate myself to the religious life."

Today, Elena Bava is Mother Superior to the *Ancelle del Sacro Cuore* (Order of the Sacred Heart) in Rome.

"Mario's sister Elena is the best to reconstruct the family tree," her grandnephew Roy Bava told me in March 1993, "because she's not the kind of old woman who doesn't remember things; she remembers everything in great detail. She is very active, too; she's the kind of woman who will go from the center of Rome out into the suburbs on foot! She's 80 years old and still has black hair! She's amazing."

A decade later, she is still alive, but her memory is succumbing to age. "I recently visited her," Lamberto Bava told me in October 2002, "and she looked at me and asked, 'Why are you not dead?' So it is good that you asked for her memories when you did."

7 Roy Bava, *Mario Bava Maestro of the Macabre* interview transcript, 2000.

Art, Marriage, & Fatherhood

It would have been the easiest thing in the world for Nino Bava to follow in his father's footsteps at the Istituto LUCE. But like most young people, he embarked on a season of rebellion and vowed not to do this; he would be his own man. It was during this period that he announced his intention of becoming a painter. As we have seen, Nino was a very visually-oriented child; the earliest memory to stick with him was visual—the rising and falling levels of snow on the stone wall lining the road to Turin—and, as a young child, he was attracted to the bright colors of the chemical powders in his father's laboratory and delighted in arranging them, imposing an aesthetic order on them. Nino spent much of his childhood seeking his father's approval, but he also never forgot that resonating trauma of his childhood—when Eugenio slapped his face for signing an early drawing. Perhaps his choice of vocation was rooted in an instinct of rebellion, as all painters sign their work. It isn't difficult to imagine Eugenio's reaction to Nino's announcement.

Nino's best friend during his teenage years was Maceo Casadei, a painter born in Forli in 1899. Casadei was fifteen years older than Nino, but they found common ground in their love of art, and Casadei—who by 1920 had known the satisfaction of having his work widely exhibited—recognized and encouraged Nino's developing talent as a painter. The two friends often ventured out together to different locations with their easels and painted side by side. Under his friend's wing, Nino became adept at landscape painting and portraiture. But he was also too meticulous with his art, taking a week or more to put the finishing touches on his canvases, while Maceo was able to turn out three or four paintings per week. At the rate he produced decent work, Nino had to admit that painting would never earn him a decent living.

Maceo, on the other hand, would spend his entire life in art. His work was widely seen, and when he hit his stride with a series of works depicting Italian soldiers on different fronts during World War II—always rendered with tremendous pathos and feeling—his work began to be seriously exhibited, award-winning, and bought. Today, the work of Maceo Casadei hangs in the War Museum in Poland and the State Museum of Warsaw, and it is the subject of a permanent exhibition at the Palazzo Comunale, Piazza Garibaldi 1, in Cervia (Ravenna).

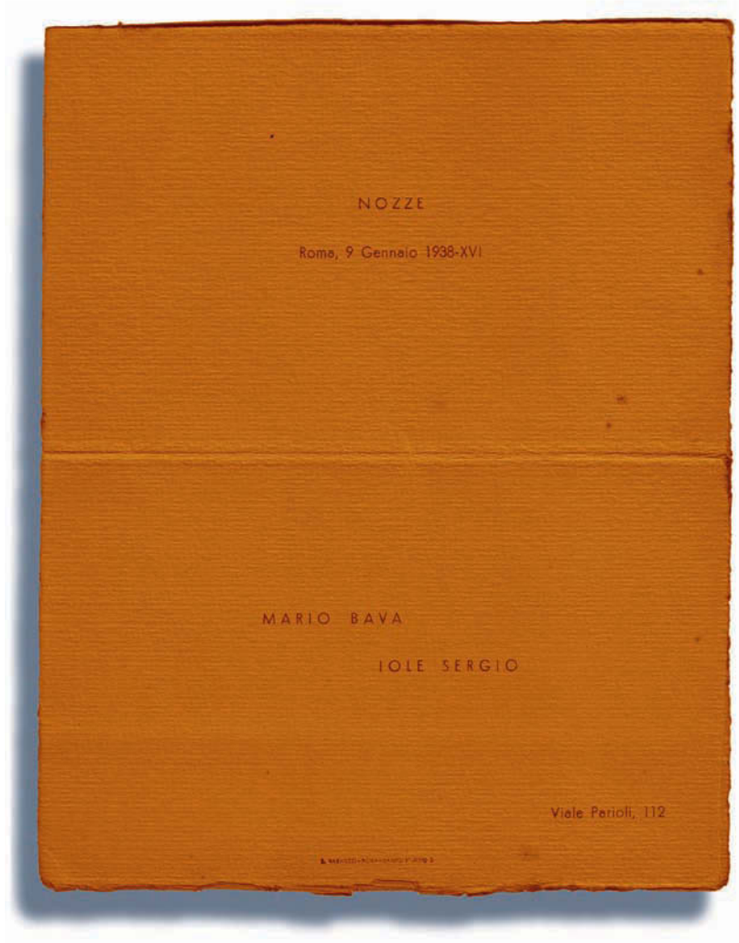
"Maceo was a very good painter, but he never had a great success," explains Mario's granddaughter Georgia Bava, who works as an art historian for a leading Roman auction house. "Today, he is well-known in Emilia-Romagna (his place of origin), but just as a local painter." Casadei died—in Forli, where he was born—in 1992.



IOLE SERGIO—*the future wife of Mario Bava—seated in the foreground at a family gathering, circa 1930.*

Having made his break with painting, Nino then (according to his sister Elena) "decided with great passion to devote himself to sculpture. He had his first big opportunity in France: to design the altar for a church in Paris. It was a serious and engaging challenge. There were many people competing for the assignment, and the job lasted nearly an entire year. My brother's work was one of the most appreciated, and it looked like he was going to do it. We were all happy to see his approaching success, because after all, it really was his first professional experience! But, after a long silence, one of the judges said, 'But this is not the one we choose!' Maybe if my brother had reacted, argued . . . but he was still too young to do that, and Lady Luck didn't help him! It was really a crushing defeat for my brother, who almost lost his health over it.

"Then bad luck struck again," Elena continues, "as *Mamma* told me some years later . . . In Sanremo, there was a big place completely enclosed by glass. My brother wanted it badly for his workshop, and he knew from the owners that no one else had lived there for thirty years. So my brother, who was in Florence by then, with his meager means, spent all of his money on some beautiful statues, to attract people to his shop. When he met with the owners, they apologized profusely and told him that the place had been sold. This was a terrible shock for my brother, who found himself unable to pay his debts for the foreseeable future. After a while, with the help of a photographer friend, Mario devoted himself completely to the art of cinematography." [8]



MARIO AND IOLE's *wedding invitation.*

The setbacks experienced by the young Mario Bava were also being felt on a national level. Once the reigning world capitol of cinema, Italy had lost considerably more than luster in the years since *Cabiria*. The universal language of cinema had died in 1928, when the "talkies" were introduced in America and Great Britain. Italian "talkies" spoke a more ancient, more mellifluous, but more regionally limited language; consequently, the cinema whose epic imagery had fired the imaginations of D. W. Griffith and Cecil B. DeMille was dealt a near-fatal setback. In 1930, Italy released barely a dozen films in the entire year. Never again would Italy lead the industry it had promoted from a parlor game into a world-class art.

So it was hardly a promising industry which Nino Bava entered in 1932, at the age of 18, when he joined the Istituto LUCE to assist his father in the production of animated shorts and special effects. (Unfortunately, no information could be found pertaining to Eugenio or Mario's adventures in the world of cartoon animation.) But the move had less to do with earning a living than with learning how to become a responsible adult with a viable trade.

It was required that everyone applying to work for the State had to become a card-carrying member of the Fascist Party, but knowing that his son was essentially apolitical and uncomfortable with this, Eugenio intervened. Thus, Mario managed to work at the Istituto without being issued the card that was disparagingly known among those who carried it as "the meal ticket."

"In those days," Mario later recollected, "in order to work in special effects, you had to specialize in that field; most people had to go to school for it. Today in America, they spend millions on machines to do these things, but in those days, if you spent even two cents on an effect, everyone would go crazy. I was crazy, too; I thought of myself as the last, romantic artisan of the cinema, for whom money was always the least important factor. I never got paid, but I took satisfaction in my work and all the innovations that were being made.

"I helped my father at the Istituto and, whenever he was sick, I took over the direction of his work. Of the fifty designers in his department, I chased many of them away, because they didn't know the first thing about design. I threw their work out." [9]

In 1936, at the Istituto LUCE, Nino Bava first set his eyes (they were brown, with a hint of yellow) on an attractive young woman who worked in the editorial department. Iole Sergio—who would become Mario Bava's wife and lifelong companion—was born in Rome on August 10, 1915. The circumstances of their meeting were remarkably similar to that of Alfred Hitchcock and his wife Alma Reville, who was working as a film editor for Gainsborough Productions when the young Hitchcock found employment there as an assistant director. As Hitchcock's daughter Patricia Hitchcock O'Connell has said, her father bade his time before speaking to Alma because they were not considered to be professional equals; it was only after he was promoted to screenwriter and art director that he felt it proper to address her in conversation. Nino himself was shy by nature, the kind of young man who needed a lot of encouragement from a woman just to make conversation, but his reticence was eroded by routine, and by the authority he assumed at the Istituto when his father was absent. With her light brown hair, moon face and dusky skin, Iole had an unusual beauty—almost plain, yet statuesque in its neutrality—that became much more apparent when she turned her bright blue eyes on Nino. In time, they began dating and eventually, they became engaged.

Iole preferred to call her fiance by his given name of Mario, and upon their engagement, he reclaimed it as his professional name. To be called professionally by a name other than that of his grandfather, a dead man he never met—to be called by a name other than that which his father called him—helped Mario to establish a sense of greater independence. With marital responsibilities looming ahead, Mario arranged to be transferred from the animation/effects department to the titles department, where he set to work designing main titles sequences and intermission cards.

"I went into titles because it was then a very lucrative business," he later reasoned. "All the American companies gave us the titles in English and expected us to come up with the Italian translation. When everything went according to plan, they paid you like a bank; after fifteen days, the check would arrive. Sometimes I earned as much as 10,000 *lire* a month, which is like 60,000 *lire* [$37.50] today . . . I used my father's Mitchell camera, which he had used to create special effects. It was patented in 1919, but is essentially the same one used today. My father could handcrank it, which allowed him to wind the film in reverse and make calculations without error." [10]

In addition to creating titles for films imported to the Italian market, Bava also did the reverse: creating title sequences of Italian films for export. One of the films known to carry titles designed by Mario Bava is the Carmine Gallone epic *Scipione l'Africano/Scipio Africanus* (1937), produced by *il Duce*'s young son, Vittorio Mussolini. Bava admitted that his work in other languages was less than perfect: "I think Minerva Film got burned by the mistakes I made on their behalf," he said. "I did *Scipione l'Africano* in all the different languages they wanted, but they didn't pay me the 22,000 *lire* they owed me. It spoiled my honeymoon." [11]

Mario and Iole were married in a private civil ceremony at Rome's Viale Parioli on January 9, 1938. Unlike Alfred and Alma Hitchcock, whose marriage complemented an ongoing relationship in cinema (she contributed to all fifty-three of his films as either a screenwriter, editor, or trusted advisor), Mario and Iole's marriage almost immediately changed the relationship upon which it was founded.

"As soon as they got married, my grandmother stopped working at the Istituto and lost all interest in the cinema," Georgia Bava says. "Her real interests were family and cooking, things like this. She didn't care how special effects were achieved, for example. She didn't like to go out and meet people, to go to dinner parties or the theater. Once they began their family, she stayed at home."

The change would have come about anyway, because Mussolini was on the point of enacting a new law that banished all women from the workplace, and back to their "rightful" place as mothers and homemakers. The Italian workforce, in the *Duce*'s view, had to be a male workforce: uniformed, buttoned-up, necktied, diligent. Mario dutifully supported his wife with his Istituto profits for the first year of their marriage, but for a young man bursting to express himself artistically, designing titles was unfulfilling, menial labor. Then—in late winter or early spring of 1938—Mario Bava learned that he was about to become a father.

Mario was earning enough to support a wife, but not quite enough to feed and clothe a family. He needed to find some other means—and quickly—of supplementing his income. Fortunately, new opportunities arose with the founding of Michele Scalera's new production company, Scalera Film.

"Word began to spread throughout Rome that all the great cameramen of that period—Massimo Terzano, Ubaldo Arata, Anchise Brizzi, and Mortuori—were now earning 14,000 *lire* [about $8.75] a month," Bava said. "So instead doing as my mother wanted, and continuing with my steady job at the Istituto LUCE, I did as my wife advised and became an assistant to Terzano. It was a step down for me to become an assistant, of course, because"—he added, with self-mocking irony—"I had been a cameraman all my life, but I reminded myself that my father also had to start at the bottom when he began." [12]

Mario didn't reveal his father's opinion of the matter, but it seems probable that Emma was speaking on her husband's behalf when she urged her son to remain at the Istituto; it offered more regimented, dependable work and higher pay. It is also interesting that Mario's new wife was already outspoken enough to oppose the wishes of his parents. Obviously, Mario felt torn, but his hand was ultimately forced by his need to prove himself apart from his father's shadow. Regardless of his expertise, he must have dealt with some level of resentment from his coworkers because he had joined the Istituto as the son of the department head. Considering that all of *Scipione l'Africano*'s foreign releases took place in 1938 or later, Bava must have attempted to obey both of the women in his life for a while by juggling two jobs, or perhaps Eugenio kept the Istituto's back door open, so to speak, allowing his son to return to his old title design duties whenever he wasn't actively assisting his new mentor, Massimo Terzano.

Mario was more than qualified to work as Terzano's assistant. The position of camera assistant requires workers of exacting, responsible and reliable character; their duties entail loading and unloading the camera, a knowledge of lenses so they can equip the camera with what is required by specific shots, maintaining a shot list, and keeping a record of those takes which are to be printed. Mario had proved himself responsible at the Istituto, assigning and rejecting work as his father's proxy. Observant as he



IOLE AND DAUGHTER ELENA, *photographed by Mario Bava in 1939.*

8 I recorded Elena Bava's memories of these particular events in good faith, but upon reading her comments, members of the Bava family have suggested that she may have confused stories told to her about her father's early life as a struggling sculptor with memories of her brother's early years as a struggling artist. Mario Bava himself never spoke of wanting to be a sculptor—painting was always his *metier*—and, in interviews, he always noted a direct move to cinematography after abandoning his plans to become a painter. Still, these stories of Elena's are of great value to the family chronicle . . . and rather than correct her, or put words into her mouth, I have presented them as she shared them with me. But the reader should be aware that what she says here more likely pertains to Eugenio than to Mario.

9 Roy Bava.

10 Alberto Abruzzese.

11 Ibid.

12 Ibid.



MACISTE IN HELL: *This US lobby card depicts a surprisingly exploitative panorama of women suffering punishments at the hands of demons. Eugenio Bava likely contributed to the film's hallucinatory imagery.*

was around his father, and based on his own experience, he surely also knew how to take a camera apart and reassemble it. Cinematography was his second nature.

Working for Massimo Terzano could in no way be mistaken for "starting at the bottom," as Terzano was commonly regarded as one of the top cameramen working in Italian cinema. His fellow cameraman Carlo Nebiolo called Terzano "the most meticulous creator of images in the Italian cinema" and "the cinematographer for directors who favored stylistic cinema."[13] Both descriptions offer substantial testimony as to the character of what the young Mario Bava learned by working at his side.

Born April 23, 1892, in Turin, Massimo Terzano photographed his first film in 1915 and rose to prominence with a series of films whose visual style show an obvious influence on Mario Bava's own later work. Terzano had staked his claim on a series of opulently baroque opera films, and rose to prominence with a trio of epic fantasies starring *Cabiria*'s own Maciste (Bartolomeo Pagano), including *Maciste imperatore* ("Emperor Maciste," 1924), *Maciste all'inferno*/*Maciste in Hell* (1925) and *Maciste nella gabbia dei leoni* ("Maciste in the Lions' Cage," 1926). *Maciste in Hell*—which achieved an American release in 1931 with a synchronized music and sound effects track, and glimpses of female nudity intact—featured extensive special effects credited to Segundo de Chomón, which suggests the uncredited involvement of Eugenio Bava.[14] Terzano actually co-photographed this classic—and much of his subsequent work for the next ten years—with Ubaldo Arata, for whom the cameraman named his first-born son. (Ubaldo Terzano would grow up to become a gifted cameraman in his own right, photographing all of Mario Bava's best-looking films.) Terzano and Arata were stylistic opposites; in later years, Arata would become the cinematographer most often associated with neorealism, particularly for his work on Luchino Visconti's *Ossessione*. The silent Italian cinema's



CINECITTÀ, *circa 1940.*

top avatars of stylization and realism, they were cinematographically opposed, but apparently the best of friends.

It is not precisely known when Mario Bava became Terzano's assistant, but it was probably in the spring or summer of 1938, when Mario and Iole were expecting their first child—a daughter named Elena (in honor of Mario's sister), born in Rome on October 11, 1938. Among the films photographed by Terzano in 1938 were *Il dottor Antonio*, *La principessa Tarakanova*, *Giuseppe Verdi*, *Inventiamo l'amore*, and *Solo per te*. Mario certainly assisted Terzano on some, if not all, of these.

Mario Bava's debut as a camera assistant was also coincidental with perhaps the most significant single event in Italian film history. To bolster Italian film production, Mussolini's fascist government had initiated a number of new policies in the mid- to late-1930s, including the building of a new chain of theaters, the appointment of Luigi Freddi as Italy's first director–general of the cinema, and the planning of a vast, world-class production complex: Cinecittà (literally, a "city of the cinema"). The plan was forced to become a reality sooner than expected when, in September 1935, a calamitous fire destroyed two of Italy's major studios, Cines-Pittaluga and Via Vejo, making its completion more urgent.

Cinecittà opened for business on April 21, 1937—approximately fifteen months after the first stone was laid. Located on Via Tuscolana, near the center of Rome, the sixteen sound stages comprising Cinecittà conveniently adjoined the Istituto LUCE and Rome's famous national film school, the Centro Sperimentale di Cinematografica. It was an ideal arrangement: the Istituto now became the hub of all Italian feature post-production, and the students attending the Centro Sperimentale had the convenience of observing films in production right next door. The school was never at a loss for lecturing professionals, and graduate students never found it difficult to find work. A thriving success, by 1940 Cinecittà boasted approximately 1,600 employees. Part of this success, however, was the result of the 1938 Alfieri Law, which transcended Mussolini's earlier strict 10:1 ratio enforcement of Italian film bookings by banning the importation of American films altogether, and thus facilitating the resurrection of Italian cinema.

Under these circumstances, it appeared that Mario Bava might have a future in the film business, after all.

13 Alessandro Gatti, ed., *I Cineoperatori: La storia della cinematografia italiana dal 1941 al 2000 Vol 2* (Rome, Italy: AIC, 2000), 81.

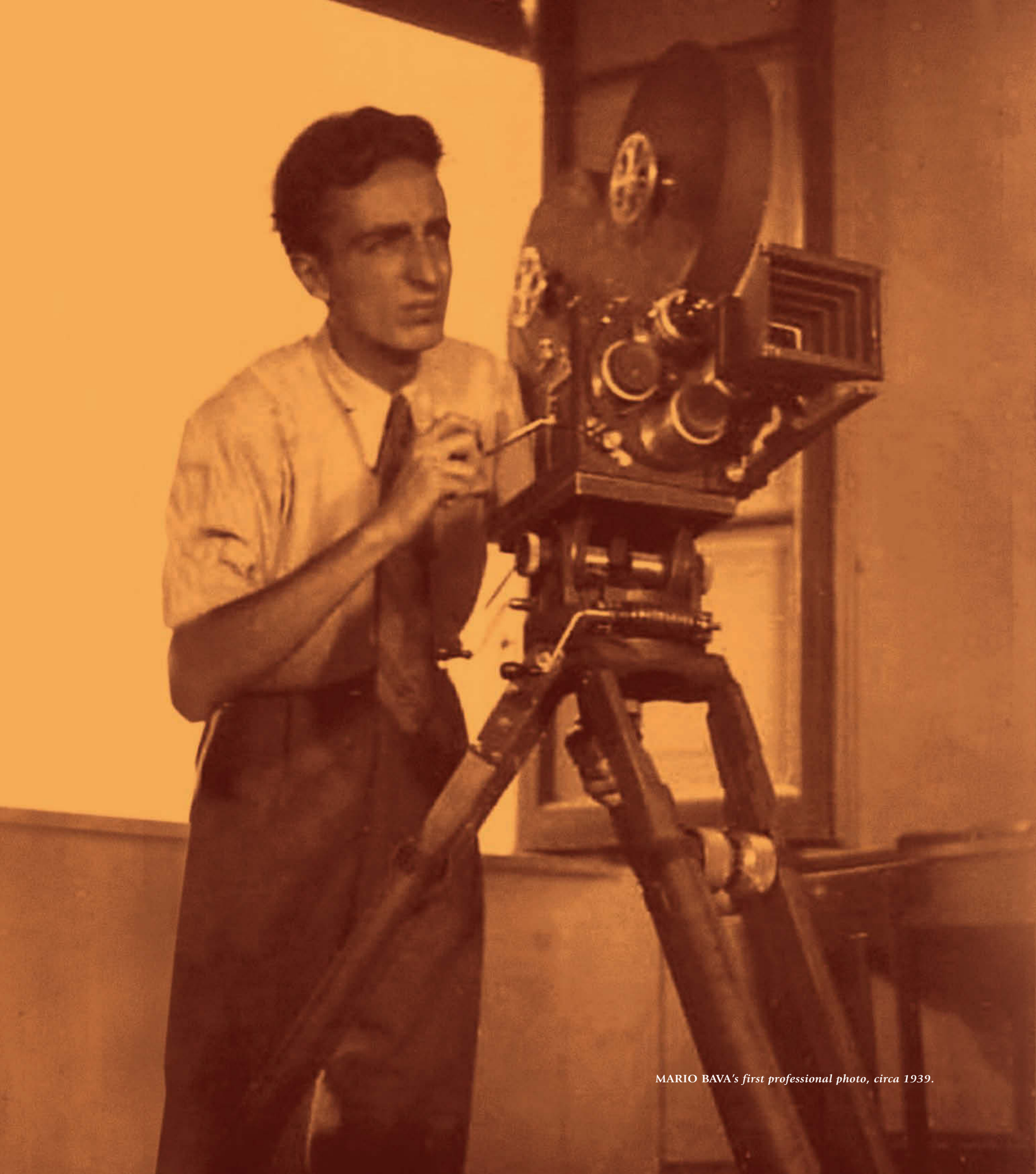
14 After *Maciste all'inferno*, de Chomón was among the cameramen who photographed Abel Gance's *Napoléon* (1926). His death on May 2, 1929, at age 58, brought a premature end to a stellar and influential career.





Cameraman

"Uncurtaining the night, I'd let dark glass
Hang all the furniture above the grass . . ."
—Vladimir Nabokov, Pale Fire



MARIO BAVA*'s first professional photo, circa 1939.*

Proverbs and Propaganda

MARIO BAVA WORKED as a cameraman from 1939–1960, making the first half of his career in films actually longer (and more productive) than his second, better-known career as a director. One reason that Bava's directorial debut, *La maschera del demonio/Black Sunday*, is so impressive is that it feels like the work of a fully-grown artist, as indeed it was.

There can be no real understanding of Bava's development as a filmmaker without a knowledge of the years he spent as a director of photography; it is during this period that we witness his evolution as an artist and the emergence of a highly individual cinematographic style—a signature touch developed in the shadow of war and in response to the demands of a wide variety of film genres, at first in emulation of his heroes, and finally as self-expression. It is here—working under the auspices of such important directors as Francesco De Robertis, Mario Costa, G. W. Pabst, Steno, Mario Monicelli, Robert Z. Leonard, Pietro Francisci, Riccardo Freda and Raoul Walsh, among many others—that Bava (in his own words) "learned what a director must do, and more importantly, what he must *not* do." [1]

Readers primarily interested in Bava's work in the horror genre will find this portion of his story more instructive and relevant than they might expect, as some key moments from that later body of work were in fact restagings, secondary drafts, or ironic comments on scenes and effects that he had filmed earlier in his career.

Working With Rossellini

In the late 1930s, while earning his primary living as Massimo Terzano's camera assistant, Mario Bava began to see that he had traded one shadow for another. He had the utmost respect for Terzano, but he discovered that there was little room for advancement or creative expression in the new job; also, knowing what he had learned from his father after a lifetime of observation, working at the side of an accomplished cinematographer was really nothing new or as educational as it might have been for someone greener. Therefore, it was not long before Mario began to scout around for opportunities to work as a cameraman in his own right. The opportunity came when he made the acquaintance of a fledgling director, Roberto Rossellini.

Born in Rome on May 8, 1906, Rossellini was eight years Bava's senior, but cut from similar cloth. The son of a prosperous architect, Rossellini had enjoyed a comfortable upbringing in a household often visited by the artists who were his father's friends. Not only was Roberto's young imagination stimulated by such company, but he had leisure enough to encourage his daydreaming. He spent much of his youth obsessed by the films that played in a Roman theater built by his father, and his inbred familiarity with the workings of mechanical devices led him to become an inventor at an early age. (In later years, Rossellini would personally develop a number of different camera lenses and lighting devices.) He broke into films—inauspiciously—as an uncredited writer and assistant director to Carlo Ludovico Bragaglia on *La fossa degli angeli* ("The Pit of Angels," 1937) and, more importantly, contributed to the screenplay of *Luciano Serra pilota* (1938), produced by Vittorio Mussolini and the first film to go into production at Cinecittà.[2] Of course, any one of these biographical details would have provided common ground with Mario Bava, but their mutual interests were discovered through some short films that Rossellini had made in a makeshift studio in his family villa.



CANDID *shot of Mario on the set of an unidentified production, late 1930s.*

The first of these was the unfinished *Prelude à l'apres-midi d'un faune* ("Prelude to the Afternoon of a Faun," 1937), in which a mermaid rose from the sea, danced with a faun, and left a veil with the dazzled creature as a sentimental souvenir. The completed portions of this short turned out so badly that Rossellini abandoned it and concocted a story claiming that it had been banned on grounds of indecency by the Italian censors. More successful was *Fantasia sottomarina* ("Underwater Fantasy," 1938)—a 10-minute "tale of two fish in love, threatened by an octopus and saved by an eel"[3]—which was likely the foundation of his meeting with Bava, as it was released by the Istituto LUCE in April 1940. With his background in special effects and predisposition to fantasy, Bava would have been charmed by this short, which Rossellini and his cameraman Rodolfo Lombardi filmed in a series of aquariums with real (mostly dead) fish, which were animated by various ingenious means. *Fantasia sottomarina* proved so popular with moviegoing audiences that producer Michele Scalera contracted Rossellini to deliver sixteen more "animal" shorts just like it.

Based on the creative partnership that followed, we can assume that

Bava saw the short, probably before its general release considering his associations at Istituto LUCE, and hearing about the Scalera contract, recognized the opportunity he had awaited. He met with Rossellini, introduced himself as the assistant to the great Terzano and the son of Eugenio Bava, and offered his services as a cameraman, which included a thorough working knowledge of trick photography.

Rossellini's next short, his first collaboration with Bava, went into production under the title *La perfida Albione* ("The Perfidious Albion"), but was ultimately distributed by Scalera Film under the title *Il tacchino prepotente* ("The Arrogant Turkey," 1939). The film, which runs about 7 minutes, opens with the title and three screen credits, all spelled out in what appear to be beans, swept *onto* the screen with a broom. The sequence was, naturally, filmed in reverse, as they were swept *off-screen*—a technique that is taken for granted as a gimmick when seen today, but which at this time had only been explored in experimental cinema by surrealist filmmakers like Jean Cocteau. The first of the three credits is *"Fotografia di Mario Bava,"* followed by a music credit for Maria Strino and Rossellini's own directorial credit; the script is uncredited, which is unusual for a film with narration. This is a barnyard parable, in which the titular fowl, a large proud turkey (representing England) struts around the henhouse, interfering with the hens (a metaphor for the nations of Europe), until its tyrannical ways are challenged and literally plucked down to size by a defiant, righteous rooster (symbolizing Italy).

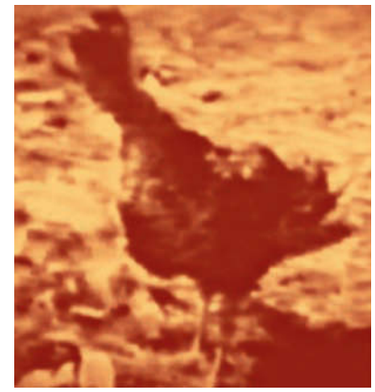
Rossellini apparently disliked this venture, which he felt overstepped its satirical intentions to fail on the side of propaganda, but it should be pointed out that this short predates George Orwell's *Animal Farm* (1945)—an acknowledged literary classic that also uses barnyard metaphors—by approximately five years. It also features scenes in which the narrator's voice is synchronized with the beak movements of the "actors," giving them the brief illusion of speech; in this detail, *Il tacchino prepotente* also predates the Oscar-winning novelty feature *Bill and Coo* (1947) by almost eight years. These facts alone lend it distinction.

Bava's first work as a cameraman in his own right is, for the most part, rough-edged but innovative. Filming on location at a real poultry farm, Bava took advantage of early morning shooting to photograph a mass of chickens marching in a group and casting very long shadows, lending dimension to what would otherwise have been a very flat shot. His views of the various animals, especially a family of kittens seeking refuge under the henhouse, reflect a tender but unsentimental spirit, and one is surprised by the fleeting audacity and grace of a near- 360° camera movement around the farmyard. His only technical misstep is the climactic fight between the two birds, which is photographed far too close to the action, without long-shots, reducing this key dramatic conflict to a staccato, blurry, mostly incomprehensible montage of flapping feathers. This approach was likely necessary to conceal the fact that Bava and Rossellini were creating the battle mostly by suggestion, with a minimum of interaction between the two birds.



BAVA*'s first screen credit.*





IL TACCHINO PREPOTENTE*'s arrogant turkey, representing England, before and after the Roman rooster plucks its proud feathers.*

The scene is a success in the sense that we believe what we see, but a failure in the sense that we also believe it is poorly shot.

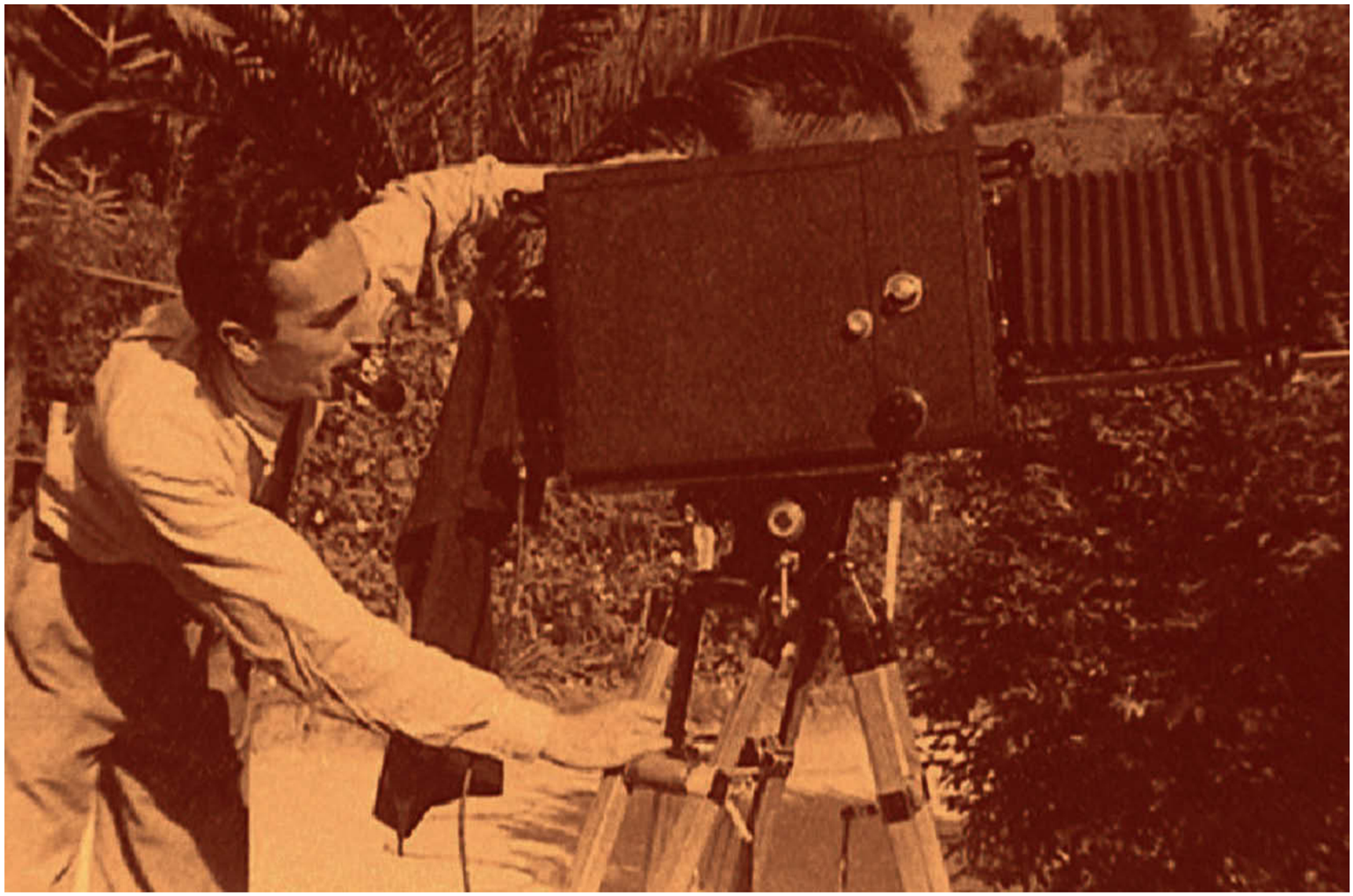
While Rodolfo Lombardi was preoccupied with filming another fish fable, *Il ruscello di Ripasottile* ("The Stream of Ripasottile," 1941), Rossellini and Bava embarked on their second—and final—short together, *La vispa Teresa* ("The Lively Teresa," 1939), which starred an uncredited, blonde 10-year-old girl and a host of insects. Vintage Russian films were very much in vogue at the time among the audiences at Cinema Sperimentale de Cinematografica screenings and, judging from this effort, Rossellini and Bava had both been bitten by the Starevich "bug"—that is, the work of the great Polish-born, Moscovite animator Ladislas Starevich (1892–1965), who was fond of building short, urbane fantasies around the antennaed denizens of the insect world.

Adapted from a popular children's song, *La vispa Teresa* is the charming story of a community of insects living in an open field—black beetles, horned beetles, caterpillars, snails, ants, and butterflies—who find their day disrupted by the arrival of a young butterfly collector determined to net a new addition to her collection. The various insects rally together in the defense of a pretty butterfly she is pursuing, but there is little they can do but buzz around and climb onto her colossal shoe. Teresa eventually captures her prey, but suddenly appreciating that the field isn't as happy a place without it fluttering about, she releases it and admires its return to nature. Relieved and overjoyed, the insects raise their collective voice in song. It is easy to interpret the material as another parable of the working-class overcoming oppression, but this time, Rossellini and Bava manage to avoid the stumble into political message mongering. The film

1 Giuseppe Lippi and Lorenzo Codelli, *Fant'italia* (Trieste, Italy: XIV Festival Internazionale del Film di Fantascienza, 1976), 152–54.

2 Some filmographies credit Bava with contributing to the photography of this film, which is officially attributed to Ubaldo Arata. Since Arata was the best friend of Massimo Terzano, it is conceivable that Terzano filled-in for Arata, or supplemented his work in some fashion. Bava would have assisted Terzano in such an event, and could have even been loaned out to Arata.

3 Tag Gallagher, *The Adventures of Roberto Rossellini—His Life and Films* (New York NY: Da Capo Press, 1998), 55.



MARIO *and his beloved De Brie camera, whose rear cloth allowed him to hide from onlookers.*

simply is what it is, or we are tempted to accept it that way.

Somewhat longer than its predecessor at about 8 minutes, *La vispa Teresa* is a completely winning, enchantingly photographed short that becomes all the more remarkable when one realizes that its natural setting was largely recreated indoors at Scalera Film, and that a good deal of the action was achieved by means similar to stop-motion animation—that is, the moving of an articulated model, one frame at a time—though, in this case, some of the models were live (or dead) insects. Some of the insects—the black beetles, for example—were at times substituted onscreen by ingeniously constructed models.

An accidental eyewitness to the production was 18-year-old Federico Fellini, who remembered encountering Rossellini and Bava as they worked intently inside a "closet" at Scalera Film. "Inside a small enclosure made of nets and rope were a turtle, two mice, and three or four beetles," he recalled. "[Rossellini] was shooting one frame a day, very complex and very laborious, with great patience. He kept shooting for months."[4] Rossellini's biographer, Tag Gallagher, notes that Fellini was probably indulging his tendency to exaggerate in his last sentence, because "in fact, Roberto's attention flagged quickly." Therefore, it is possible—indeed, virtually certain—that Rossellini left most of the patient animation work to his cameraman, whose province they would have been in the first place.

For some shots requiring the camera to track the flight of the butterfly, Bava likely attached a hair-like monofilament to the insect and restricted its flight to the area in front of the camera lens—a technique demonstrated by the actor Ian Charleson in the coda sequence of Dario Argento's thriller *Opera* (1987). For another shot, shown only fleetingly, a winged beetle was affixed to a pane of glass and photographed in front of a rear-projected shot of moving clouds; here we sense an artist knowing exactly how long to sustain an illusion without destroying it in the eyes of the average viewer. The photo-micrographic animation is wholly successful—an astounding thing to be able to say seventy years further on—with the animation separable from the live action footage only by the presence of certain lifeforms that could not have been animated, such as ants and the sensuously undulating caterpillars and snails.

Bava's first cinematography in a controlled studio environment shows a quantum improvement over his earlier location effort. Every fascinating detail of the insects' physiognomy is underscored with light and caressing shadow: the countless hairs of the wriggling woolly worm, the luminous

4 Ibid., 58.

transparency of the snail's head, the shoe-like shine of the black beetle's armor. One senses that Bava was paying homage here to the teachings of his father's colleague, entomologist Roberto Omegna. Another impressive image is a ground-level, insects' perspective of Teresa as she towers above them, knee bent, net in hand—which must have been achieved by Bava with a deep focus lens and a deep hole in the ground. The film's credits are hand-written (in what appears to be Bava's own handwriting) in chalk on a piece of framed slate, with Bava's credit ornamented with line drawings of cameras and butterflies. The music is credited to Simone Coccia.

The two Rossellini shorts were considered lost for decades until their surprise recovery in 1997. Once the elements were found, they were restored by the Compagnia di San Paolo, and now bear opening title cards crediting this organization and the Archivio Nazionale Cinematografico della Resistenza. A broadcast on RAI-3 in the late 1990s has been their only public showing since their restoration, and they remain difficult to see outside the Archivio Nazionale.

LA VISPA TERESA: *The huntress and her captive. A caterpillar takes a shortcut over a snail in a delightful example of Bava's nature photography.*

La vispa Teresa was based on a popular Italian children's song by Luigi Sailer (1825–85), originally titled "*La Farfalletta*" ("The Little Butterfly"). Here is the original text, accompanied by my own loose, rhyming translation:

La Farfalletta	**The Little Butterfly**
La vispa Teresa *avea tra l'erbetta* *a volo sorpresa* *gentil farfalletta*	The lively Teresa In the fields she did spy A lovely Little butterfly.
e tutta giuliva *stringendola viva* *gridava a distesa:* *"L'ho presa! L'ho presa!"*	It so dazzled her eyes That she plucked it from flight And cried up to the skies: "Mine! This beautiful sight!"
A lei supplicando *l'afflitta gridò:* *"Vivendo, volando,* *che male ti fo'?*	The thing started crying And to her it boo-hooed: "By just living and flying, What wrong did I do you?
"Tu sì mi fai male *stringendome l'ale.* *Deh, lasciami: anch'io* *son figlia di Dio."*	"You turned my wings blue When you pinched them so hard. Don't you know that I, too, Was created by God?"
Confusa, pentita, *Teresa arrossì:* *dischiuse le dita* *e quella fuggì.*	Its words so impressed her That her hand opened wide; Then the butterfly blessed her And returned to the sky.

Old Fantasy & New Realism

Bava's solo work for Roberto Rossellini was undertaken as part of a game plan, to gain independent experience and to rack up some solo camera credits rather than for any kind of meaningful remuneration. According to a (grievously incomplete) handwritten list of his credits, which he drafted in the mid-1970s, Mario was permitted to co-photograph his next feature assignment with Massimo Terzano, 1939's *Il socio invisibile* ("The Invisible Partner"), directed by Roberto Roberti—the father of Sergio Leone—and starring Clara Calamai (*Osessione*).

His next job with Terzano was *Ecco la felicità!* ("See the Happiness!")—the Italian-language version of *La comedie du Bonheur* ("The Comedy of Happiness"), which was directed by Marcel L'Herbier simultaneously with a French version. (The cinematography of the French version is credited to both Terzano—who is second-billed—and Maurice Desfassiaux, who lensed René Clair's silent fantasy *Paris qui dort/The Crazy Ray,* in 1924.) It isn't known to what extent Desfassiaux actually worked on the picture, or took advantage of Terzano's lighting, but the Italian version was released first, in December 1940, while the French release was delayed until 1942.





In the volatile early months of the new decade, Bava assisted Terzano on a film directed by Corrado D'Errico: *La compagna della teppa* ("The Company of Thieves"). Born in Rome in 1902, D'Errico is a fascinating case; he worked as an assistant director and screenwriter on silent pictures, and in 1934—one year before he began his directorial career—he published an early Italian science fiction novel, *Chiaro di luna*. Between 1935 and 1941, he would direct nearly a dozen dramatic pictures, including several costume dramas. Tragically, he died in September 1941—not yet 40 years of age—only six months after the release of *La compagna della teppa*.

It's a 19th century story about a gang of art thieves working out of an opera house, is comparable to the future collaborations of Michael Powell and Emeric Pressburger. Above all, it is a lavishly appointed costume picture, but it is also a picaresque romp in which imaginary characters encounter real historical personages—including the celebrated composer Gioacchino Rossini, who is visiting the theater in question to conduct a special performance of one of his operas—and in which the highest achievements of civilization are shown in stark contrast to Man's meanest and most selfish aspirations. Witty and dryly comic, the film is evidence of a unique and dazzling talent that the Italian cinema and never quite managed to replace.

So talented and prolific was D'Errico that two of his films—*Capitan Tempesta* ("Captain Tempest.") and its sequel, *Il leone di Damasco* ("The Lion of Damascus")—were released posthumously, in January and March 1942. Like *La compagnia della teppa, Capitan Tempesta* was photographed by Massimo Terzano with Bava serving as camera operator, co-credited with Sergio Pesche. According to a statement included in the credits, two versions of the film were shot at the same time, one in Italian and the other in Spanish. The same is likely true of its sequel, which was shot at Scalera Film immediately afterwards.

Based on a novel by Emilio Salgani, *Capitan Tempesta* is a pulpy, historic adventure akin to *The Scarlet Pimpernel*. The action is set in the year 1570, when Famacosta was under attack by the Turks and had to be defended by Venetian resistance fighters. The title character is the mysterious, caped, and helmeted figure who leads the resistance; in one of the film's most surprising moments, Capitan Tempesta is revealed to be a "*bella donna*," Leonora Bragadini (Carla Candiani)—the daughter of the Venetian general, Marc Antonio Bragadini. She is in love with the heroic soldier Marcello Corner (Adriano Rimoldi), and beloved of the crafty and ambitious villain Nijinski (Carlo Duse), who arranges to frame Marcello as a traitor by delivering him into the hands of the beautiful and corrupt Damascan princess Haradia (Doris Duranti), and drugged to believe that the Princess is Leonora. Nijinski also arranges for Leonora to visit the palace incognito, and she arrives just in time to see Marcello in Haradia's lustful embrace. (This is a truly remarkable shot, with the kiss in foreground, softening in focus as Leonora peers through a fabulously Byzantine drape, with a lantern whistling whorls of smoke off to one side.) After learning the truth of the matter from Haradia's handmaiden Suleika (Dina Sassoli), who pities Marcello, Capitan Tempesta tries to rescue her lover but is caught herself and chained with him to a rock in a chamber slowly filling with water. The couple are rescued at the last minute by Leonora's burly servant and the heroic Mulai el Kader (Carlo Ninchi), who forms a romantic attachment to Suleika.

More than any other example of Massimo Terzano's cinematography I have seen, *Capitan Tempesta* points the way to Mario Bava's future identity as an artist and filmmaker. It is an excellent example of the kind of heroic costume picture that bridges the classic mythological pictures of the silent era and the "sword and sandal" movement that Bava would spearhead in the 1950s. It is a purple pageant of larger-than-life characters, sword-crossing adventure, exotic and occasionally macabre atmosphere (Nijinski is shown procuring Marcello's drug from a wizard in a fabulous laboratory equipped with contemporary lab equipment, bubbling bottles, and a human skull), and the influence of American chapterplays. Terzano's camerawork is sophisticated, stylish, and audacious; an early in-studio exterior of the Damascan palace is an extended, two-level crane shot that begins atop the palace, then drops down to document the various movements of layer-upon-layer of passersby, which take the camera on a 180° tour of the immense set and literally dozens of extras. It is in space-defining, extended prowling camera movements such as this where we see one of Terzano's most important influences on Bava's future style, not only in his baroque approaches to lighting, but in the way he choreographed his camera movements to increase the verisimilitude of a film's settings. We can see this influence in the 360° shot in *Il tacchino prepotente*, and also in the 360° turn inside the crypt of the Vajda family, one of the most celebrated shots in Bava's directorial debut, *La maschera del demonio*. The women—Leonora, Haradia and Suleika—are all photographed like divinities, with the close-up that introduces the veiled face of the Princess qualifying as a stunner. It is easy to see in *Capitan Tempesta* the seeds of such future films as Riccardo Freda's directorial debut *Don Cesare di Bazan,* which followed later in 1942, and such key costume adventures of the 1950s as Freda's *Teodora imperatrice di Bisanzio/Theodora, Slave Empress* (1954), and Pietro Francisci's *Orlando e i paladini di Francia/Roland the Mighty* (1956),



SILHOUETTED *view of Massimo Terzano's camera unit (Bava possibly among them) on an unidentified late-1930s production.*

both of which benefitted from Bava's creative participation.

Remarkably, Bava's hand can be seen—even at this early stage of his career—branching out into the provision of some surprising trick shots. The establishing shots of Venice, for example, are entirely composed of stock footage, postcard photos pasted on glass, and one remarkable shot of a Venetian cathedral seemingly viewed from a window—which is actually a photo of the structure cut out in the shape of a window and placed against a black background. Bava was also likely responsible for the miniature shots of the Spanish armada, shown sailing across a sparkling sea, against a cloudy cycloramic sky.

Splendid examples of film as flights of fancy, *La compagna della teppa* and *Capitan Tempesta* can be seen in retrospect as the end of an era in Italian cinema. As Italy inched nearer to war, there would be no room in Mussolini's cinema for such bourgeois escapism.



MARIO *measures the distance between his camera and an unidentified actress.*

On June 10—although prior involvements in the Spanish Civil War and the occupation of Albania had indicated Italy's inadequacy as a military power—Benito Mussolini responded to his fears of losing a piece of the continental pie by formally declaring war against the Allies, and siding with the man he privately derided as "quite mad . . . a silly little clown": Adolf Hitler. The declaration of war was tantamount to an empty boast; unknown to Hitler's Germany and to the Italian public at large, there was no real Italian defense budget. Mussolini's "armies" were making due with rifles minted in 1891 and artillery dating back to World War I; their "three armored divisions" existed only on paper, and the military vehicles exhibited in Fascist rallies were in fact police property. Consequently, when Germany insisted that Italy lose some of its own blood in their joint battles, Mussolini's soldiers were marched into confrontations where their deaths were fundamentally guaranteed. Meanwhile, the pugnacious stylings of *il Duce*'s Maciste-inspired public image remained jut-jawed and unbowed.

At the Istituto LUCE, Eugenio Bava was ordered to get cracking on a series of documentaries to bolster the national confidence. Part of this effort was the filming of counterfeit victories for the Axis powers to appear in weekly newsreels. Mario Bava and Rino Filipini were two of the cameramen who worked with Eugenio on the filming of faked land battles and aerial attacks, notably the bombing of Malta.

"In Rome, we were as ingenious as they were on the front," Mario later boasted. "My father and I faked that bombing; we invented it at Cinecittà with strips of photos. In other words, the LUCE newsreel was a hoax—a special effect that we created!" [5]

As Mussolini's Fascism swelled to delusional epic proportions in response to the desperation of the times, the very ways in which Italian people behaved and interacted was reinvented. Historian Tag Gallagher paints the following portrait of their day-to-day reality: "Listening to foreign broadcasts was banned and the *squadristi* were revived to hunt down transgressors; Jews were banned and driven off the streets; women were banned from professions and told to stay home; handshakes were banned and replaced with the Fascist salute; *Lei*, the word everyone used for 'you,' was banned and replaced with the more egalitarian *voi*; the old way of marching was banned and replaced with the German goose-step; even Saturdays were banned and replaced with 'Fascist Saturdays,' when every male was expected to be in a stadium or in a parade ground; 'Giovinezza' was played at the slightest pretext at sports and movies, and woe to anyone who declined to stand up and join in!" [6] This aggressive system of enforced national pride served to delude the Italian public, to provide them with a 3-dimensional fantasy of patriotic enthusiasm that denied the greater reality that Fascism wasn't working, that the national economy was crumbling, and that their showy war in Ethiopia was a disaster exacting a terrible human cost. At heart, the Italians knew differently—they saw that half their incomes were being spent on food—but it was somehow easier, and more reassuring, to believe in Mussolini's lies.

5 Dante Matelli, *L'espresso,* May 1979.

6 Gallagher, 61–62.



ITALIAN *due-foglia, art by Martinati. Mario's first important special effects sequence sells the documentary.*

Mario Bava's wartime duties—which, incidentally, included no actual military service—also occasionally extended to photographing Mussolini's speeches and rallies at the Mussolini Forum. None of this documentary footage is credited, but a portion of the archive of film that exists on *il Duce* is undoubtedly his work. Being one of the few privileged insiders to see the actual schism between the proud, posturing public figure Mussolini projected, and the insecure man in need of constant reassurance that he was behind closed doors, the young cameraman came to understand that illusion also had its place in avenues well outside the cinema.

Uomini sul fondo

First released: February 13, 1941
B&W, 1.66:1, 99 minutes

Production: Scalera Film.
UK: *S.O.S. Submarine,* 1952.



MARIO *aboard the submarine where UOMINI SUL FONDO was filmed.*

It was during this intensive period of patriotic work that apolitical Mario Bava received an unexpected call from Giuseppe "Peppino" Caracciolo. A Neapolitan cameraman active since 1918, Caracciolo had fallen ill during the production of *Uomini sul fondo* ("Men in the Deep"), a propaganda film for the Centro Cinematografico del Ministero della Marina—the filmmaking division of the Italian Navy—and needed someone to substitute for him as director of photography. Mario's big break had finally come.

The director of the film was Francesco De Robertis (1902–59), a former journalist who had ascended to the executive seat of the CCDMDM. De Robertis was a formidable man; he was not only a Commander of the Italian Navy, but had earned his stripes as a "hyphenate" filmmaker by writing, producing, directing and editing the documentary short *Mine in vista* ("Mines in Sight," 1940), beating Orson Welles to this distinction one year before *Citizen Kane* (1941). At the time, De Robertis' achievement was certainly respected, but his diversity of achievement was barely noticed. As Bava pointed out, "These were the years before specialization."[7]

The reason why Bava was chosen to step in, rather than Caracciolo's own camera operator, is interesting to ponder. Certainly, Mario was well-known to everyone in the industry because of his duties at the Istituto LUCE; it is equally possible that he was recommended to Caracciolo by Terzano, or perhaps by Roberto Rossellini, who was working on the production as an assistant director. He may also have been approached because he, alone among the working cameramen in Italy, was known to have the special ancillary talents that the production required.

Bava recalled the story of his hiring: "Peppino Caracciolo, the cameraman, rang up and ordered me to meet with De Robertis, who was in Le Spezia making *Uomini sul fondo*. He sent me because I was young and inexperienced. In time, I met with the *'Commandante'* . . . We hit it off and I remember having dinner with him aboard the Albatross, the submarine he commanded. The sea was rough, so I stayed close to the escape hatch, in case we capsized."[8]

It's typical of Bava to paint himself as a hapless fool and accentuate his nervousness in this recollection, but a photograph taken of him aboard the Albatross shows a young technician very much in self-control. At 26 years of age—the age at which his father photographed *Quo vadis?*—Bava wore a trim mustache that complemented the angles of his dark brows and eyes, framing a frank and discerning gaze. Despite the close and claustrophobic quarters, Bava went to work each day wearing a jacket and necktie, a formality that was compulsory at the time.

Uomini sul fondo is the story of the A103, a submarine that grazes a cargo ship during war maneuvers and sinks, trapping its crew on the ocean floor. As gas seeps into the foremost compartment, the ship's Commandant orders it sealed; he releases a buoy equipped with a direct-line telephone and sends a raft to the surface, allowing his men to exit one-by-one in a special retrievable, airtight cylinder capable of elevating them to the raft. After two men (and the ship's mascot, a German Shepherd) accept this option, the remaining seven crewmen determine to remain aboard ship with their Commandant, for better or worse. A Naval ship, the Titano, discovers the crewmen on the raft and organizes a rescue, sending a bathysphere below to determine the extent of the damage, followed by another diver who volunteers to test an experimental diving suit designed to withstand the pressure of extreme depths. This diver must use a special underwater torch to clear wreckage from a valve that will accept the hook-up necessary to fill the A103 with enough gas to raise it, but clearing the wreckage is not enough—the valve is jammed. Fortunately, one of the crew hears the insistent banging of the diver against the hull of the ship, and dons a gas mask to enter the sealed compartment. There, he succeeds in opening the valve from the inside. His heroism results in his own death, but his sacrifice is rewarded by the rescue of his shipmates.

7 Alberto Abruzzese, et al., *La città del cinema—produzione e lavoro nel cinema italiano 1930–70* (Rome, Italy: Napoleone, 1979), 83–89.

8 Ibid.



UOMINI SUL FONDO*'s submersible rescue chamber is met on the surface by a motorized rescue raft.*

Uomini sul fondo is a film of historic significance, because it appears to be a documentary but is actually a work of drama. Therefore, it could be argued that it was the first Italian feature to represent the style of filmmaking that would soon become known as *neorealisme,* or neorealism.[9] It also had the distinction of being the first movie ever filmed aboard an actual submarine; there were no actors in the cast, which was entirely composed of Italian Navy seamen; and no attempt was made to glamorize the cast or the situation, at least not in the accepted terms of movie glamor. And yet *Uomini sul fondo* is not a documentary, because it is clearly a scripted story, played for suspense, in which the exterior views of the rescue mission had to be cleverly faked. Of course, cinema audiences of the day were unsophisticated, and many accepted the film at face value as a document of actual heroism; for some reason, it is a reputation that the film continues to carry after the passing of sixty years, perhaps because it is more often discussed than actually seen.

Uomini sul fondo was a groundbreaking combination of documentary and drama—in essence, a feature-length counterpart to the faked propaganda newsreels which Eugenio and Mario Bava forged at the Istituto LUCE; on reflection, this may also have been one of the motivating factors behind Caracciolo's procurement of Bava's services. It has the coarse, unpolished complexion of fact, and yet—for anyone who takes a moment to look—it is quite openly fiction, told in part with the humble wizardry of Bava's special effects.

The film was so original in conception that De Robertis had a difficult time persuading the necessary support systems that such a thing was possible. "It was only after months and months of opposition, struggle, skepticism, and every kind of obstacle that the film got underway," he later mused. "No one believed real sailors could be substituted for actors. No one could believe that a Naval officer could—just like that—turn himself into a story writer, a scenarist, a director, and everything else. I'm referring to the Film Bureau, the various production houses, all the movie people involved . . . It was a real battle. Even after the shooting began, it didn't end. It went on all through production, in the form of the most amicable and respectful lack of confidence, on and on right up to the first private screening, which was for the film crew. Finally, I received the first and most expressive sign of faith when Monaco, the chief electrician, shook my hand firmly and said, his voice breaking with emotion, '*Commandante,* I was really *worried!*'"[10]

The fact that Bava was first summoned to replace Caracciolo due to illness suggests that he was not recruited initially to lend his special effects expertise to the filming, yet it is impossible to imagine what *Uomini sul fondo* might have been *without* special effects photography. It is possible that Bava, after proving himself as Caracciolo's replacement, made it quietly known to his director that there were ways in which to depict the actual rescue mission from outside the submarine. Since these effects would have been filmed at the Istituto LUCE, which was also government-funded, it is possible that Bava had the wherewithal to present De Robertis with some test footage to help sell this suggestion.

Judging by the look of these seabottom exteriors, a miniature submarine was built and manually maneuvered inside an aquarium filled with actual, cloudy sea water. Considering the sweaty, unpolished look of the dramatic footage, Bava cleverly filmed these trick shots as murkily as they would have appeared had they been actually filmed on location. The miniature sub was equipped with radio-controlled opening/closing compartments that released scale models of the buoy, the raft and the passenger cylinder, and tiny counterparts were also prepared of the bathysphere and two versions of the experimental deep-diving suit. It says a lot about the success of these scenes that they were chosen to represent the film on the theatrical release poster, and that audiences and critics still remember *Uomini sul fondo* primarily as a documentary.

In addition to staging and filming the exterior underwater rescue, Bava also shot some special effects inserts that occur inside the submarine—notably, the climactic shot of the dead hero's hand (a doll-sized recreation!) as it splashes, clenched and lifeless, into the bubbling, gassy waters on the floor of the damaged compartment. This somewhat expressionistically staged shot qualifies as a signature touch, anticipating images in Bava's later work, notably the shot of Theseus' hand sinking below the lava in *Ercole al centro della terra/Hercules in the Haunted World* (1961). The backgrounds of the main titles—a silhouette cut-out of a battleship matted over a moving backdrop of airbrushed clouds, and a painted stack of undulating waves dappled with light reflected off a small pool of rippled water—also look very much like Bava's work, and would have been made on his father's watch at LUCE.

As with all productions of the Centro Cinematografico del Ministero della Marina, *Uomini sul fondo* was considered a patriotic effort and issued

9 Bava's future editor, Mario Serandrei, is credited with coining the word "*neorealisme*" in response to Luchino Visconti's *Ossessione* (1943), an unauthorized filming of James M. Cain's novel *The Postman Always Rings Twice*. The idea of a "new realism" relates to the harsh "truths" being shown in such films, which had so long been repressed or disavowed during the false realism Italy had endured under Mussolini's rule. Neorealism is often mistaken as a reference to the realism of these films—a misnomer since, while these films may be gritty due to the crude circumstances of production, they are also usually stylized.

10 Gallagher, 67.

without screen credits. Some published accounts acknowledge "*Fotografia di Giuseppe Caracciolo e Mario Bava,*" making it Bava's first credit as a fully-fledged cameraman on a feature film. Other filmographies list him as one of several cameramen who worked on the production, including Caracciolo, Angelo Baistrocchi, Carlo Bellero and Mirko Bisogni. The participation of these other cameramen is possibly explained by the hectic montages of the rescue mobilization, which encompasses more angles of battleships and seaplanes rising to the occasion than any single photographer could have amassed single-handedly.

Had Bava been credited onscreen, *Uomini sul fondo* would certainly have signalled the start of an auspicious career. As it happened, his contribution went unnoted and unnoticed when the film premiered on February 28, 1941, and so he continued to earn his living by assisting Terzano, and by doing odd jobs at the Istituto LUCE.

Due to wartime embargoes, *Uomini sul fondo* would not be shown in English-speaking markets until 1952, when it received a British release under the title *S.O.S. Submarine.*

La corona di ferro

First released: October 20, 1941
B&W, 1.66:1, 97 minutes

Production: ENIC (Ente Nazionale Industrie Cinematografiche), Lux Film. **Distributor**: Lux Film. **France**: *La Couronne de Fer,* 1/13/43. **Portugal**: *Corôa de Ferro,* 3/27/44. **Spain**: *La Corona de Hierro,* 10/5/42. **US**: *The Iron Crown,* Superfilm Distribution Corporation, Minerva Films, Classic Pictures.

Though released in early 1941, *Uomini sul fondo* was actually produced in the latter months of 1940. This leaves Mario Bava's professional itinerary for 1941 completely unaccounted for. By an interesting coincidence, it was in 1941 that the vast resources of Italian cinema were pooled at the behest of Benito Mussolini into the production of an extraordinary epic film that represents one of the high watermarks of Italian film production, as well as the rebirth of Italian fantasy: Alessandro Blasetti's *La corona di ferro/The Iron Crown.*



MASSIMO GIROTTI *and Elisa Cegani as Arminio and Elsa in* LA CORONA DI FERRO.

Produced entirely at Cinecittà, next door to the Istituto LUCE, *La corona di ferro* is (among other things) an eye-popping showcase for trick shots and special effects photography, all of which are uncredited. Given their proximity to the production, despite the lack of any concrete proof of their participation, it is extremely doubtful that Mussolini would have entrusted the film's extensive effects work to anyone other than Bava, father and son.

Filmed at immense cost, *La corona di ferro* was an anomaly at the time of its release. There had never been much of a fantastic element in Italian cinema; indeed, prior to this moment in history, Italian fantasy seems to have been limited to heroic fantasy, while darker examples such as Eugenio Testa's *Il mostro di Frankenstein* (1920) and Guido Brignone's *Maciste all'Inferno/Maciste in Hell* (1925) were much rarer. With the adoption of the Alfieri Law in 1938, Mussolini decided which films from the outside world were acceptable in Italy, and horror movies and escapist fantasies were, most emphatically, not permitted. The films which were allowed to play in Italian theaters were those which he felt would result in a stronger, more courageous and unified country. Though *La corona di ferro* features a Tarzan-like hero, a Cyclopian archer, an oracle with the ability to transform herself into a deer and other fantastic elements, all presented with a flair and flamboyance worthy of Powell and Pressburger, it also functions as a Mussolinian fable, which is the aspect that allowed it to be made.

An ancient tome tells the story of King Sedemondo (Gino Cervi, bravely modelling his performance on the public persona of *il Duce*), who took his crown from the head of his own dead brother, assassinated at Sedemondo's command after leading his nation's army into victorious battle. The Queen of the defeated King is released, later giving birth to a daughter named Tundra, who will figure later in the story. Returning home in "victory" and looking forward to seeing his own newborn child, Sedemondo and his troops cross paths in the woods with the escort of the Iron Crown, a treasure which is being taken to the Pope as a gift from the Emperor of Byzantium. A spinning woman (Rina Morelli) who lives in a forest cottage explains the unique power of the Crown, which is to seek out where Evil exists and remain until Goodness has been restored. The spinner speaks elliptically to Sedemondo of an evil woodcutter who once murdered his good brother in order to possess his goods, saying that the murdered man's family regained their lost property when the son and daughter of the two brothers fell in love and married. Sedemondo explains that he would be smarter than the woodcutter and would avoid that possibility by raising the two children as brother and sister, making their future love forbidden. Feeling superstitious, Sedemondo takes forceful possession of the crown and has it carried far outside his kingdom, to ensure that his evil deed remains undiscovered. Carried by the mighty cyclops Farkas (Umberto Silvestri), the crown resists being carried away by growing heavier and heavier, until Farkas drops it and watches as it sinks irretrievably through solid rock, beneath the earth's surface. When Sedomondo returns home, the widowed Queen and Sedemondo's wife, informed of his dark deed, have switched their infants in the cradle, fooling him into accepting his brother's son Arminio—the rightful heir to the throne—as his own child, while his newborn daughter Elsa is raised in the castle as a "false" sibling.

Some years later, King Sedemondo learns the truth and moves to slay Arminio, but Elsa intervenes—both children are marked on the upper arm by a single stroke of his angry lash. At his order, Arminio is carried into the wood by Farkas and dropped into an inescapable valley of lions, while Elsa is sequestered behind

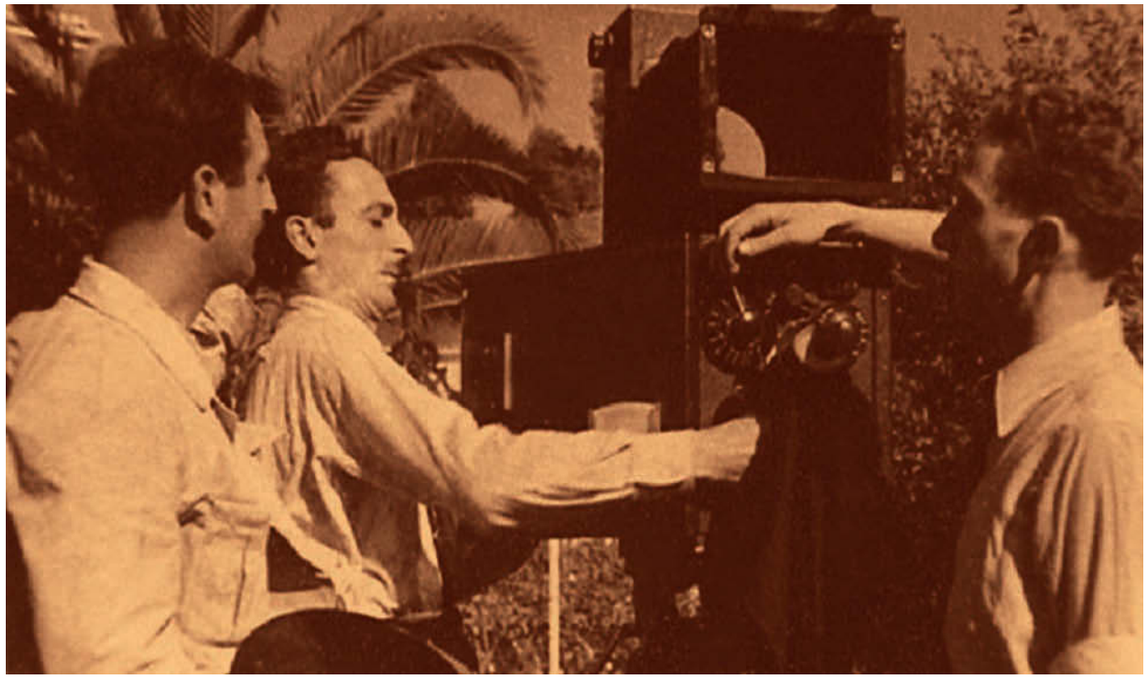


FOREGROUNDED *models and mushrooms—a form of illusion common in Bava's work—lend verisimilitude to the spinning woman's home in the woods.*

three gates, ensuring that she will never fall in love until he finds the right man for her. Princess Elsa (Elisa Cegani) languishes there for twenty years, until the King announces a tournament, open to the royals of other countries, with marriage to his daughter as the prize. Meanwhile, Arminio (Massimo Girotti)—raised to robust manhood by a pride of lions—is freed from the enclosed valley by an avalanche, triggered by the spinner woman while in the guise of a passing deer. Arminio helps to liberate a group of the conquered people enslaved by Sedemondo since their defeat many years before. They are led by the rightful Queen, Tundra (Luisa Ferida), disguised as a man. Tundra is attracted to Arminio and persuades him to represent her people at the coming tournament.

Many kings and princes from other lands come to Sedemondo's kingdom to participate in the tournament and vie for his daughter's hand. Arminio makes his way to the castle, given a sense of mission by a dream in which Princess Elsa pleaded with him to free her. He tells the story to all who will listen, and Elsa overhears it herself while posing as one of her own handmaidens. She warms to this stranger, and he to her, beseeching the "handmaiden" to arrange a meeting between himself and the Princess. That night, in a garden where it is too dark to see her face clearly, Arminio asks the Princess to let him compete in the tournament, but only as a representative of Tundra's people. He does not wish to marry the Princess, as he has already lost his heart to her "handmaiden."

At the tournament, Sedemondo—besieged by second thoughts about his daughter's fate—withdraws her hand as prize, announcing that the victor will now receive riches and property. The competitors object, even when he pathetically offers his entire kingdom as a substitute; thus, Elsa is compelled to remain in bondage. Numerous princes lose their lives in arena-staged combat until only Prince Aliberto (Osvaldo Valenti) remains. He is bested by Arminio, who, unlike Aliberto, is able to survive in a lion pit. When Arminio is introduced to Princess in the light of day, he recognizes his beloved; she asks if he will marry her—and he promises to tell her later, in her private garden. Tundra, intent on killing Elsa, eavesdrops on their meeting and overhears the Princess' unexpected wish to make peace with her people, to restore their freedom. Tundra drops her knife in shock and,



THE PALM FRONDS *visible in the background of this unidentified shot, suggest Mario may be preparing to film the radio-controlled exterior shots of Elsa's private garden.*



THE DEATH *of Elsa brings a stop to the conflict between Sedemondo and Tundra on this incredible interior set built at Cinecittà.*

conflicted, runs into the woods. Meanwhile, Sedemondo advises his daughter to ensure Arminio's love by turning him against Tundra.

Tundra goes to the Princess' garden to retrieve the knife. Arminio discovers her and misjudges her intentions. She responds to his violent anger by setting fire to a tree near the Princess' rooms—her signal for her troops to invade. As the fire rages, the two women meet and Elsa recommends that Tundra meet and stop her troops at the Valley of Natursa, where the cyclopean Farka stands armed to assassinate any intruder. After Tundra's departure, Elsa and Arminio discover the necessary clue to recognize each other as siblings, and Elsa, horrified by the trap she has set for Tundra, races to the Valley of Natursa in time to receive the arrow meant for her rival. She accepts her fate as just punishment and apologizes as Tundra's army arrives, coincidentally with that of King Sedemondo. As the two armies face one another, a deep chasm opens between them that swallows Elsa's fallen body. Wracked with grief, Sedemondo orders his men to surrender their weapons to the chasm as well, at which point the sunken ground opens to reveal the Iron Crown, its job now done. Arminio and Tundra are married and crowned as the new rulers of the kingdom.

Though it clearly belongs on any short list of great Italian films, *La corona di ferro* has been historically ill-served by its ties to the Mussolini era, and blind eyes are turned to it in most English-language studies of epic filmmaking. Resplendently photographed by Mario Craveri and Vaclav Vich, who between them forged a perfect fusion of Eisensteinian formalism and the freewheeling exuberance and romanticism of the MGM Tarzan pictures, the film is also a triumph of production design (Virgilio Marchi) and confectionery wardrobe (Gino Sensani), which somehow transcend the monochrome cinematography to glitter like gold. Many of the picture's key production personnel were reteamed the following year on another costume picture: *Don Cesare di Bazan* (1942), the directorial debut of Riccardo Freda, who would become Mario Bava's most important mentor. *La corona di ferro* was also among the earliest films to be edited by Mario Serandrei, who would become Italy's premier *Maestro* of the editing table and supervise the creative cutting of most of Mario Bava's best films of the 1960s.

The film's myriad special effects shots include precisely the kind of illusions at which Eugenio and Mario Bava excelled: the live effect of the Iron Crown sinking into solid rock (which could pass for an excised scene from Bava's *Ercole al centro della terra/Hercules in the Haunted World*); the combination of glass mattes and actual palm fronds in the Princess' gardens (which resemble the overgrown villa seen in the final reel of *Lisa and the Devil*); miniatures like the high angle shot of Sedemondo's bayside kingdom with its model ships in the harbor; the cloudscape visible through the marble columned windows of Elsa's bedchamber; the radio-controlled miniatures of the three gates shielding Elsa's domain from the outside world, as well as other mechanical gadgets like the working robot scorpion (the symbol of Sedemondo's kingdom) presented to Princess Elsa by Prince Eriberto—who himself looks very much like a model for Bava's later villain, Javutich, played by Arturo Dominici in *La maschera del demonio/Black Sunday*.

A further argument in favor of Mario's involvement in *La corona di ferro* is that it would have provided him a perfect opportunity to make the acquaintance of the film's production supervisor, Luigi "Leo" Menardi. This would be a most fortuitous meeting because, in the coming year, Menardi would hire Mario to photograph a directorial project of his own, thus finally awarding him the professional title he had worked so hard to achieve.

La nave bianca

First released: September 14, 1942
B&W, 1.66:1, 77 minutes

Production: Scalera Film, Centro Cinematografico del Ministero della Marina. **France**: *Le Navire Blanc*, 1943.

Pleased with Bava's extraordinary efforts on *Uomini sul fondo*, Francesco De Robertis and Giuseppe Caracciolo hired him again on their next production—*La nave bianca* ("The White Ship")—this time, as Caracciolo's camera operator. The story goes that the film was conceived as a Naval documentary set aboard a hospital ship; however, in the midst of shooting, Roberto Rossellini (still working as De Robertis' assistant) persuaded "the Commandant" that the picture might be more effective if, once again, dramatic scenes were integrated. Initially hesitant, De Robertis gradually warmed to the idea. And so it was that *La nave bianca* mutated into yet another early example of docudrama.

That is how the story *as it is commonly accepted* goes—and it is one of the reasons, along with *Roma città aperta*, why Rossellini is commonly regarded as the father of neorealism—but it does not take into account what De Robertis had already achieved with *Uomini sul fondo*. Certainly, Rossellini would later direct the films that are most often cited as the starting points of neorealism—*Roma città aperta/Open City* (1945) and *Paisà/Paisan* (1946)—but these works were built on a foundation learned by Rossellini during his tenure with Francesco De Robertis.

"In my opinion," Bava insisted, "De Robertis was the true father of neorealism. Rossellini stole everything from him. De Robertis was a great man, and . . . he was friendly with Rossellini, and let him reshoot some things, and eventually allowed him to take full credit for the picture." [11]

Watching *La nave bianca*, it's obvious that Rossellini's input amounted to much more than simply "reshooting some things." If De Robertis was truly the documentarian and Rossellini the dramatist, the end result is about 80/20 in Rossellini's favor. More importantly, Rossellini's inspired reinvention of the material resulted in a potent new dimension in what Mussolini had defined as Fascism's "strongest weapon"—namely, motion pictures. By combining propaganda with human drama, Rossellini had discovered a means of intensifying a film's message, of administering it under the skin of a rapt audience.

Bava's presence is immediately felt as *La nave bianca* opens with two trick shots. The film begins with the camera staring down the barrel of a battleship's cannon, which then pivots slightly while rising proudly to reveal other cannon on either side. A very dramatic opening, but the cannons were in fact radio-controlled scale models, placed in the foreground of a back projection plate of the ship's midsection. Photographed with a wide-angle lens to present an illusion of grand scale, the models were perfectly detailed but small enough to allow the camera to capture the entire width of the barrel while also retaining a focus sharp enough to read the inscriptions around its circumference. This is followed by a view from the side of the battleship, which is actually a motion background plate of passing ships with a foregrounded photographic glass matte of three cannons; that is, photographs of three cannons arranged on a sheet of glass and placed between the background plate and the camera. What gives this shot away is the sharp edges of the cannons—not soft-edged as they would appear in reality—and the fact that the lighting on their shafts does not move or change as the ship executes a slow turn.

In expanding *La nave bianca* from a documentary about a hospital ship into a dramatic narrative, it was decided to open the story aboard a Navy battleship and focus on its young crewmen. The goal of introducing the cast of characters is done promptly and effectively with an interior shot of a half-dozen crewmen passing the time. Some are writing letters to their sweethearts, some are playing games, and they are all doing a lot of talking—but there is another crewman sitting apart from the others, reading, pegging him as the "sensitive" sailor. All of this is impressively conveyed in a single 180° shot—operated by Bava—that finds the young cameraman once again indulging his liking for revelling in the dimension of a set, to communicate a greater sense of its realism.

An effective study of military camaraderie, the movie develops a sense of separation between the quiet crewman, Augusto Basso, and the others, as personified by the talkative ringmaster of the bunch, Morero. But when their ship is under attack, the two sides ally themselves visually when Morero and Basso encounter one another in a smoky corridor; Morero pauses in the midst of emergency to good-naturedly show the horseshoe that he keeps in his pocket for good luck; Basso replies by smiling and patting the medallion he wears around his neck. (The shape of the pendant is halved, not unlike a yin without a yang.)

The point—that these outwardly different men are the same underneath, and on the same team—is further driven home when an explosion knocks Basso unconscious and separates him from his medallion. When he is discovered—droplets of his blood striking the hand of another crewman below decks—it is Morero who spearheads his rescue and the retrieval of his charm. Most of the ship's men are wounded (some of them more gruesomely than any American war film of the period would have permitted) and transported to the hospital ship Arno, where they are tended by a flock of Sisters of Mercy from the *Croce Rossa*. (At this point, Renzo Rossellini's score—the only credited contribution to the picture—of staunch, militant readiness turns decidedly syrupy.) The angelic nurse who tends to the comatose Basso, Elena Fondi, is eventually revealed, as he regains consciousness, to be wearing a medallion complementary to his own. In her civilian life, Elena was a schoolteacher who corresponded with Basso and sent him the medallion for luck as he went to war. It was to help them recognize one another at a planned meeting, an appointment which the Navy prevented Basso from keeping.

The symbolism is obvious—Elena being the face that "launched a thousand ships"—but it must be noted that this *crocerossina* is the first of many Elenas to surface in Bava's work, as in his life. It is here, in the depiction of her character, that the camera operator's influence can be felt. Her face is so splendidly, sculpturally lit at all times, that she becomes worthy of Marlowe's mighty line. Her close-ups, all madonna lighting and angel faces, can be determined as Bava's contribution by comparing the film's visual approach with De Robertis' next film, *Alfa tau!* (1942), which is for the most part lacking in glamor and grace of movement, and also commits numerous sloppy, technical errors—"crossing the line" during conversations (i.e., photographing two actors supposedly facing each other from the same angle), shots that don't cut together fluidly, even out-of-focus shots. [12] Clearly, Bava's great contribution to the look of *La nave bianca* was sensuality—not a carnal sensuality, of course, but an assured fluidity of movement, an inviting use of shadow, and a spiritualized way of depicting the heroine. The film's human aspect is so accentuated that it almost becomes depoliticized.

The extent to which *La nave bianca* is, or isn't, Fascist propaganda has been a subject of debate for decades among *cinéastes*, but the truth—for this writer, anyway—falls somewhere between the two extremes. Apart from the apparent influence of Leni Riefenstahl in some shots (which is consistent in all of Caracciolo's photography I've seen), the film implies visually that it is for



MEMBERS *of the Italian Navy play themselves in LA NAVE BIANCA, a pioneering work of neorealism.*

home, and for faces like Elena's, that the Navy is fighting—not for country or political ideals. Nevertheless, when *La nave bianca* was presented at the Mostra di Venezia in 1941, it was awarded the Coppa del Partito Nazionale Fascista ("Cup of the National Fascist Party") in recognition of its outstanding value as Fascist propaganda.

Bava's experience of forging military victories at Istituto LUCE had given him an encyclopedic knowledge of their available library of stock footage, which also served him and his feature assignments in good stead. This may seem at first an editor's contribution, but Bava's remarkable ability to select and manipulate unrelated footage to the benefit of various projects became part of his reputation. It was a talent he would be called to use time and again throughout his career, from assignments as disparate as *La morte viene dallo spazio/The Day the Sky Exploded* (1958) to *Moses the Lawgiver* (1975). Thus, his participation can also be felt in *La nave bianca*'s extensive uses of stock footage to involve its cast in moments of war. One particularly clever sequence details an attack on the ship by a biplane sea bomber, which Bava introduces by cutting away from the response to a call for "All Hands on Deck" to a model aircraft, swooping low on an invisible wire. This is followed by an apparent *camera truca* shot of the model plane flying across the sky in the top half of the frame, which is matched to the horizon line of the sea, as filmed on the bottom of the frame. At this point, the model is replaced with stock footage of an actual aerial attack (the unmatching film stock turns noticeably grainier), intercut with the battleship's retaliation and close shots of cast members to further sell the illusion, with the plane's fate finally suggested—without an actual shot of anything crashing into the water—by the salty plume of an anonymous explosion at sea.

In Bava's hands, neorealism was just another illusion.



SANT'ELENA, PICCOLA ISOLA: *Elsa De Giorgi and Ruggero Ruggeri are featured in this atmospheric shot of an early, seemingly lost Bava work.*

Sant'Elena, piccola isola

First released: February 12, 1943
B&W, 1.66:1, 82 minutes
Production: Era Film, Scalera Film.

L'avventura di Annabella

First released: March 31, 1943
B&W, 1.66:1, 85 minutes
Production: ACI (Alleanza Cinematografica Italiana).

After working on the epic *La corona di ferro*, Luigi "Leo" Menardi's next project was the romantic comedy *L'avventura di Annabella* ("The Adventure of Annabella"), filmed in late 1942 at Titanus Studios. [13] The story of two young working-class lovers—Annabella (Fiorella Dolfi) and Roberto (Maurizio D'Ancora)—who have been told by their parents that they must pretend to be wealthy in order to attract a mate, it was written by Menardi in collaboration with Luigi Giacosi, Paolo Moffa, and Stefano Vanzina (later known as "Steno"). The supporting cast included a newcomer named Anna Magnani, who would achieve stardom only two years later in Rossellini's *Roma città aperta/Open City*. Behind the camera was Mario Bava, who—according to all previously published references—was acting as sole director of photography on a feature film for the very first time.

Films are not always released in the order in which they were made, so it may well have been his first . . . but Bava was also the sole director of photography on another feature released to theaters six weeks prior to *L'avventura di Annabella: Sant'Elena, piccola isola* ("St. Helen, Tiny Island"), co-directed by Renato Simoni and Umberto Scarpelli. Not mentioned at all in many Bava filmographies, and mistaken by others as a short or documentary film, *Sant'Elena, piccola isola* was in fact a dramatic film starring Elsa De Giorgi and Ruggero Ruggeri, and the surviving still photos reveal a production rich in the visual stylings Bava had learned at the side of Massimo Terzano. The film itself has not been available for viewing, and it is my own suspicion that it was indeed Bava's first film as a director of photography. The name Elena, which already had a special significance for Mario as the name of his beloved sister and only daughter, would resonate throughout his life and filmography as the name of various characters, most importantly the alter ego of Lisa Reiner (Elke Sommer) in *Lisa and the Devil* (1973). It makes sense that the name would also signify his first feature as a cameraman in his own right, and the dates of release support this intuition.

As for *L'avventura di Annabella*, it fared better with audiences than with critics of the day. In the April 25 issue of Vittorio Mussolini's magazine *Cinema*, reviewer Giuseppe De Santis complained that "Mechanical plot twists too often resolve the [story's] situations, usually to predictable ends. Additionally, the film often veers from a tone of realism to the histrionic, to the grotesque, to the parodistic without any sense of psychological continuity. It's all very arbitrary . . . A woman seated beside me was perspiring, she was laughing so hard. They tell me that public opinion is more important than that of the critics—so there you have it!"

Sadly, after decades of effort, I was unable to see or review either of these early Bava works. Judging from the comments of De Santis, however, it sounds like *Annabella*'s visual style was reflective of the young couple's honesty and pretensions, while perhaps overstating the latter to a point that occasionally teetered on the fantastic. In this regard, it sounds like the film offered a logical point of progression—for Bava—from the docudramas of Francesco De Robertis, while also providing for Italian audiences a much-needed, comedic escape hatch from their darkening days of economic distress and their fears about the coming war.

Bava would later reunite with Steno on several projects, but there would be no more movies for him and Leo Menardi, who directed only one other picture: *La moglie in castigo* ("The Punished Wife," released 1944). Menardi's death is not recorded in any film references, but his complete disappearance from the later Italian cinema suggests he may have died during the war.

11 Abruzzese.

12 In his Alberto Abruzzese, *La città del cinema* interview, Bava mentions in passing that he participated to some extent in the filming of *Alfa tau!*, adding that "half of it was later reshot in Rome" by the credited cameraman, Giuseppe Caracciolo.

13 "Titanus Studios" is actually a vague epithet; this information doesn't necessarily tell one where a film was shot. *L'avventura di Annabella* may have been shot at Titanus' original studio in Farnesia, or it may have been shot at Appia Studios, built by Cines in 1935 and badly damaged in a major fire later that same year, after which Titanus bought and rebuilt it. In the 1950s and 1960s, the name "Titanus Appia Studios" sometimes appeared on films, but some of these—including such important Bava-related titles as *I vampiri* and *La maschera del demonio*—were actually shot at Scalera Film near Tuscany, which Titanus later came to own. Although Titanus got the credit, Scalera Film was in fact the birthplace of the Italian horror film.



Triumph and Apocalypse

THOUGH ITALY had officially entered World War II in 1940, it was not until 1943 that Italian lives first felt the elemental impact of World War II on their home turf. "When the blackouts started," Bava said, "it was made a law that all automobile fenders must be painted white, but 90% of the people pasted strips of paper on them instead. Everybody was convinced that the war would be over in fifteen days, maybe less. Instead, we were struck by famine, so everyone hurried to Rome like horses to oats." [1]

Between the fall of Mussolini in July 1943 and the Allies' liberation of Rome from German occupation on June 25, 1944, Cinecittà was bombed, looted, and all but destroyed. Useless for film production, the ruins of Mussolini's Cinema City were adopted as a makeshift shelter for hundreds of Italians and other refugees left homeless by the war. Having finally launched his career as a cameraman, and with two features to his credit, Mario Bava's career stopped cold as the Eternal City assumed the look and smell of a tomb. He photographed no features in 1944 and 1945, but little was being produced in Italy in the wake of the Occupation. In 1942, the Italian cinema's most robust year to date, 127 films had been made and released—followed by 72 in 1943, 17 in 1944, and only 4 in 1945. Most of the active film community fled Rome in the latter months of the war, only to return after the peace treaty had been signed with the Allies.

Mario himself spent the war years working in the Annona, a municipal service that ventured out across enemy lines to find and bring back food for starving Italian families. Lamberto Bava explains: "My father had to go in a truck with other people—*carabinieri*, soldiers discharged from the Army—to the North, near the lines still under Nazi occupation, to buy food for the people of Rome. Anything that could be found: potatoes, tomatoes, apples. He had to pass through the enemy lines, risking his life, but at least he could bring home something to eat." Mario found this important, though dangerous, position with the help of a man named Lamberto, who subsequently became the namesake and godfather of his only son.

Lamberto Bava was born on April 3, 1944—some time after the Allies' successful invasion of Sicily in June 1943, yet still before the Liberation, when the impact of the war on the Mediterranean was at its height. As with Mario, whose middle name was not legal, Lamberto's middle name was considered to be "Francesco Giuseppe," after his two grandfathers, but these patronymics were not formally entered on his birth certificate. The boy resembled his mother Iole as much as his sister Elena (now 6) had taken after Mario. The birth of a son is obviously a key event in the life of any man, and happening when it did, this latest addition to his family surely steeled Mario's determination to do whatever needed to be done to provide for his family.

Mario did not drive the Annona truck himself—he didn't get a driver's license of his own until 1951, at the age of 37—but he risked his life daily by thwarting the *Fascisti*. He once threw himself out of the truck during an air raid, which left him with a scar on his chin that he carried for the rest of his life. Mario's grandson Roy was told that Mario carried on his person, at all times during this period, a small photograph of himself with Mussolini, taken at the Istituto LUCE; it saved his life more than once. "If the Fascist guards stopped his truck and gave him trouble, he would show them this old picture. They would be so impressed, they let him pass!"

In the peace treaty Italy had signed with the Allies, there lurked a "no-quota" clause that effectively ended Mussolini's embargo against films from outside countries. Within a year, Italian screens were dominated once again by a welcome flood of films from America, England, and France. American films alone soon claimed roughly 80% of Italian boxoffice profits, while Italian films became the victim of a national embargo of conscience; they reflected national betrayals and agonies too recent, too deeply rooted, to be overlooked. It was the beginning of a long-standing Italian bias against its own cinema, which is central to many aspects of the story this book will tell.

In April 1945, Benito Mussolini was captured with his mistress Claretta Petacci by Communist partisans, who shot them both to death and strung them up by their heels from the girder of a bomb-gutted building in Milan. The masses soon assembled in curiosity . . . looking on in horror . . . and then vented their pent-up hatred against the *Duce*'s unresisting body: men kicking his head until it caved-in with a sickening crunch, women hiking their skirts to insult his battered face with urine. Two days later, Adolf Hitler committed suicide with his paramour Eva Braun.



MARIO *astride his much-envied wartime bicycle.*

That night, Mario Bava must have held his infant son close to his chest as he ruminated on what had happened, translating the gossip about the profanation of the *Duce*'s corpse into hideous images, filing them away with the other memories never to be spoken about, and wondering on behalf of his young children if the horror would ever end. He may have also taken the occasion to destroy the photograph that linked him to Mussolini and his corrupt, fallen empire.

In later years, when the director Sergio Leone was asked why so many of his Westerns dealt with people living in towns on the edge of extinction, he responded, "I'm a Roman—all I have to do is look around me." The films of Mario Bava carry similar scars, left by the memory of the apocalypse Rome had suffered in the last years of the second World War. Though none of Bava's films as director are set during the war years, the majority share a prevalent obsession with the collapse of great empires, usually as a result of decadence from within, and caution those who survive these armageddons to never be too confident that such nightmares could never happen again. The Vajdas of *La maschera del demonio/Black Sunday*, the Menliffs of *La frusta e il corpo/The Whip and the Body*, even the fashion empire presided over by the Countess Christiana Cuomo in *Sei donne per l'assassino/Blood and Black Lace* or the bayside property of Countess Frederica in *Ecologia del delitto/Twitch of the Death Nerve* are indicative of houses or holdings of the nobility that become soiled and corrupted by greed, murder, and the thirst for power. In the midst of nightmare, as in *Lisa and the Devil*, there is always a deep and palpable longing for earlier times when its protagonists were younger and when times were uncomplicated

and blissfully naïve. Even when the horrors of the past have been laid to rest, as in *Baron Blood*, we are shown that we run the risk of reactivating them if we do not regard them with the proper sobriety.

As a child, Benito Mussolini is reported to have said, "One day, I shall make the whole world tremble!" One need not look too deeply to find essentially the same promise emblazoned on the family crest of the Du Grand family in *I vampiri,* and sworn by Princess Asa in the moments prior to her public execution in *La maschera del demonio.*

Rebuilding the Italian Cinema

At the time of the American Occupation, Rome was a city of ruins both ancient and recent. Italy had been freed from war, but only after it had been wasted by it; her once-magisterial, world-class cinema was now all but extinct. Then gradually, working cameras once again found their ways into the hands of Italian filmmakers.

"My first job after the war, just after the allies arrived in Rome, was a documentary about the Christian Church," Bava remembered. "The director was a fellow named Gemmiti from the Istituto LUCE. We were walking around on the cornice of a building, twenty-five meters high—for the simple reason that we were starving. We were trying to keep our balance with our cameras in our hands. When I moved to the right I was fine but, moving to the left, I felt dizzy. Today, I'd surely fall. We even slept there, because we had no way of getting around Rome." [2]

The man Bava mentions was almost certainly Arturo Gemmiti, whose only recorded film work of the decade was not a documentary, but a neorealist feature entitled *Montecassino nel cerchio di fuoco* ("Montecassino in the Ring of Fire"), made immediately after the Occupation and distributed by Scalera Film in 1946. The film was set in the Abbey of Montecassino, founded by St. Benedict in 529 A.D., which had a history of being repeatedly destroyed and miraculously rebuilt—first in 577 (when it was brought down by the Longobards of Zotone, the Duke of Beneventum), then in 833 (when it was raided and burned by the Saracens), again in 1339 when a devastating earthquake levelled all but a few walls, and lastly on February 15, 1944, when the monastery—which provided shelter for hundreds of civilians, knowing it to be an inviolable safety zone—found itself poised between two warring armies, who destroyed it once again. It was not yet rebuilt at the time Gemmiti's film was made, but the Italian Government financed its complete restoration by 1954. *Montecassino nel cerchio di fuoco* was a neorealist treatment of the human dynamics within the Abbey on the night it was destroyed by Rome's enemies and allies. Future director Pietro Germi played a small role in the picture. Mario Bava is not one of the three cameramen credited with the production (Piero Portalupi, Vittorio Della Valle and Angelo Jannarelli) nor was he credited with its special effects, which were attributed to one R. Battistelli. Nevertheless, this production was Bava's first film project following the Occupation.



Immediately after the war, Mario found work as a photographer in the occupation camp of the American soldiers, in the area of the Foro Mussolini. "He specialized in photographing black soldiers," Lamberto Bava reveals. "It happened just by chance. He had to print hundreds of pictures a day, right after taking them, with wretched equipment, so they came out however they came out. There was one photo of two black soldiers that came out so underexposed he almost didn't want to give it to them, but the soldiers were very happy with it and recommended him to their friends. They all came because the underexposure made them look lighter-skinned, almost white. Mario immediately understood and began to intentionally make them look lighter-skinned. Those were different times."

Mario's own postwar memories paint a poignant vista of survival in a crippled landscape: "I was actually considered to be a gentleman because I managed to fix up a bicycle meant for an 8-year-old child. I used it to take my wife (who sat on the handlebars) to the hospital to visit her father. Everyone said I was fortunate to have such a means of transportation—like I was driving around in a Rolls-Royce! When I worked as a photographer at the Foro Mussolini, the Americans invited me to join them at their mess hall. When I saw all of their white bread and marmalade, I could think only of all the children in my neighborhood who were starving to death. So I stuffed my camera case with marmalade and sugar and peddled back to my home in Porta Latina on my toy bicycle." [3]

Characteristically, Bava's account makes no mention of the risk

YOUNG *Lamberto Bava visits a park with sister Elena, circa 1947.*

1 Alberto Abruzzese, et al., *La città del cinema—produzione e lavoro nel cinema italiano 1930–70* (Rome, Italy: Napoleone, 1979), 83–89.

2 Ibid.

3 Ibid. Porta Latina is a southern Roman neighborhood, named for the ancient, twin-towered portal heralding the entrance to the vicinity, on a road that connects, further on, to the famous Via Appia.

he was taking in doing this. "Anyone who worked for the US Army could eat as much as they wanted, but they couldn't take anything offbase without running the risk of being fired," Lamberto explains. "But my mother, my sister and I—the newborn—were starving! So my father began to take home cans of film, which could not be opened because it could not be exposed to the light—and they were full of butter and marmalade."[4]

In the wake of the Occupation, it was commonly agreed that the only way for the Italian cinema to continue to exist was to co-exist with American features in the form of supportive short subjects and documentaries. Accordingly, a new law was passed which offered a 3% rebate on boxoffice takings to any filmmaker whose documentaries found backing from a commercial production house. These documentaries, like most, were inexpensively made celebrations of Italian music, painting, sculpture, architecture, and surviving landscape—things representative of an Italy predating Fascism; they were reminders that Italy had produced countless fragile treasures which had survived not just this most recent war, but centuries of instability, because they were made by a strong and resilient people.

Mario's first credited work after the war were short films of this kind: *Donne belle nella pittura italiana* ("Beautiful Women in Italian Painting") and *Paolo Veronese, pittore della gioia e del fatto* ("Paolo Veronese, Painter of Joy and Truth"), both directed by Raffaele Saitto and released in 1946. Bava and Saitto would collaborate once again, on *Il mito di Giorgione* ("The Georgian Myth") in 1947, but by that time, Bava had begun to direct short films in his own right.

L'orecchio

In the wake of wartime, every Italian with a motion picture camera was photographing rubble, the drama of people reassembling their lives and homes, and the surviving treasures of Italy's museums. Mario Bava, on the other hand, was turning his attentions *inside*.

Mario understood that the best way to ensure his survival in the rocky business of picture-making was to offer something that others could not, so he undertook a project that exploited the knowledge of science and cartoon animation he had learned at his father's side. The result was a somewhat legendary, home-made short entitled *L'orecchio* ("The Ear," 1946), which attracted a great deal of attention and admiration from those fortunate enough to see it. Whereas the other shorts being encouraged by the new law were generally travelogues or other static examples of the documentary form, Bava took advantage of all the skills at his disposal, wedding stock documentary footage of orchestra performances and everyday street



LA FAMIGLIA BAVA: *Elena, Lamberto, Iole, and Mario—enjoying a rare opportunity for outdoor play, circa 1948.*

sounds with original animation, to magically illustrate the process biomechanics of hearing. Of this remarkable debut, Riccardo Freda enthused (in his Foreword to this book) that "with very little means at his disposal, Bava managed to create special effects wholly comparable to those seen twenty years later in the film *Fantastic Voyage*." Unfortunately, *L'orecchio*—Mario Bava's first directorial effort—no longer exists.

"I made them entirely by myself," Bava recalled about *L'orecchio* and his documentaries. "I was the director, the cameraman, even the best boy. I made my cuts directly onto the negative, to save myself the cost of work prints. Those documentaries helped me to stay ahead of the game for a year or two."[5]

Mario supplemented his painstaking work on this one-man project by accepting every other offer that came his way—anything and everything, as long as it was respectable, as long as it paid. For the moment, it was a matter of survival; in the years to come, even when Italy was revelling in the most prosperous years of its cinema's history, Bava would maintain this breathless pace as a kind of superstitious compulsion, eventually driving himself to the point of nervous exhaustion.

"My father worked very hard in the world of cinema, perhaps up to twelve hours a day, including Saturdays," Lamberto Bava confirms. "On Sundays, when I was really little (I can't remember how old), my father used to go and have a rest and I would go to rest with him. And this man, who must have been extremely tired, held me in his arms as he slept—and I remember the smell of cigarettes, which for a child is the smell of a man, and I can remember the smell of his tobacco and the shade in the room because the blinds were drawn."[6] Formerly a pipe smoker, Mario now smoked cigarettes exclusively—Lucky Strike or Chesterfields during the period of which Lamberto is speaking. (In later life, he switched to Marlboro.) Throughout his adult life, he smoked an average of two packs per day, a habit that Lamberto holds accountable for his father's early death.

Il barbiere di Siviglia

First released: April 6, 1946
B&W, 1.66:1, 90 minutes

Production: Tespi Film. **Distributor**: Regionale. **US**: *The Barber of Seville*, Excelsior Pictures Corporation, 5/5/47 (in Italian with English narration).

Mario's first postwar feature assignment came from his mentor Massimo Terzano, who asked him to work again as his *operatore*—a backward step for someone who had graduated to camerawork in his own right, perhaps, but welcome income nevertheless. Mario assisted Terzano in filming Gioacchino Rossini's opera *Il barbiere di Siviglia* ("The Barber of Seville"), the second feature directed by another pioneer of the Italian documentary: Mario Costa.

Several Italian sources cite *Il barbiere di Siviglia* as a film that Terzano co-photographed with Bava, which may be true, but the film's main titles credit only Terzano as cameraman, with Bava mentioned further down the list as "*operatore*." Perhaps, unofficially, Terzano extended the olive branch of equality to his assistant by allowing him to shoot certain scenes independently, or perhaps Bava was compelled to take over in the event of Terzano's failing health. By and large, *Il barbiere di Siviglia* is photographed in a fairly straightforward, stagebound fashion in the manner of silent films, with minimal lighting effects and camera movement. However, there are a few shots that seem to belong to another emerging personality: a cutaway from Conte d'Almaviva (Ferruccio Tagliavini) strumming his guitar, which shows the gigantic shadow he is casting on a wall already occluded with the shadows of hanging vines; the closing shot of a scene in Rosina's (Nelly Corradi's) bedroom, as the camera pulls back to reveal a network of shadows on the backside of her vanity table; and so forth. These images stand out starkly from the shots surrounding them. If they are indeed Bava's contribution, they would show him already preoccupied with using his camera to move away from people, toward the study of atmospheres and psychological projections.

Il barbiere di Siviglia was later released in America as *The Barber of Seville*, with its original Italian soundtrack augmented by English narration. This commentary was scripted and read by Deems Taylor, best-known for his narration of another musical feature, Walt Disney's animated classic *Fantasia* (1940).

Il barbiere di Siviglia was Mario Bava's last official collaboration with his cinematographic mentor. (It would be fully consistent with Bava's character to continue to assist Terzano on an uncredited basis, as long as his schedule permitted.) With or without Bava, Massimo Terzano would direct the photography of only two more features—Gianni Franciolini's *Notte di tempesta* ("Stormy Night," 1946) and Giorgio Bianchi's *Cronaca nera* ("Black Chronicle," 1947) before his death on October 18, 1947, at the age of 55.



LAMBERTO *on an outing with his paternal grandmother Emma, circa 1949.*

4 Ibid.

5 Ibid.

6 Lamberto Bava, *Mario Bava Maestro of the Macabre* interview transcript, 2000.

L'elisir d'amore

First released: February 8, 1947
B&W, 1.66:1, 85 minutes

Production: Prora Film.
Distributor: Zeus Film.
US: *This Wine of Love.* Superfilm Distributing Corporation, 4/48.



OFFICER *Tito Gobbi vies for the hand of Nelly Corradi in L'ELISIR D'AMORE.*

Immediately following *Il barbiere di Siviglia*, Mario Costa chose Mario Bava to photograph his next film, *L'elisir d'amore.* It was the second Italian film to be made of this popular opera by Gaetano Donizetti in a six year period, the previous example being Amleto Palmeri's 1941 version for Elios/Fono Roma/Lux Film. *L'elisir d'amore* is the story of Nemorino (Gino Siminberghi), a penniless young man in love with the beautiful Adina (Nelly Corradi), who has eyes only for the handsome young officer, Sgt. Belcore (Tito Gobbi). Nemorino uses the little money he has to buy a love potion from the flamboyant huckster Dulcamara (Italo Tajo), whose vest is festooned with medals, and who travels with a turbanned black dwarf with a miniature parasol. When the magic mixture—nothing more than some covertly poured *Vin du Bordeaux*—doesn't work, the shyster insists that lovesick Nemorino needs to buy more to bring about the minimal result. To afford more potions, Nemorino joins the army, but then receives an unexpected inheritance—which attracts many young women. When Adina notices Nemorino's newfound popularity, and that he rejects it to serenade her on his last night as a civilian, she realizes that she loves him after all. As the local townsfolk witness this turnabout, they figure that Dulcamara's potions are responsible, and he can't keep up with the demand.

Reteaming the popular Corradi and Gobbi from *Il barbiere di Siviglia*, *L'elisir d'amore* is most historically important for featuring the first true supporting role of Gina Lollobrigida—whose screen persona would be cultivated, in the years ahead, by Bava's attentive and appreciative lighting. Bava would photograph seven of the actress' early films, and all of her most important Italian ones. This great star was born Luigina Lollobrigida on July 4, 1927, at Subiaco, near Rome. In 1946, young Luigina was approached on the street by a man who asked if she was interested in working as a film extra. Her interest at the time was in becoming an opera singer, and reasoning that the money she earned might help her to pay for singing lessons, she accepted. And so she appeared briefly onscreen in a party scene in Riccardo Freda's period swashbuckler, *Aquila nera/The Black Eagle* (1946).

One year later, Mario Costa also happened to pass her on the street and expressed the ever-popular suggestion of putting her in the movies. This time, Gina sought the approval of her parents, and Costa won their confidence. For her appearance as one of Adina's chorus of bonneted girlfriends in *L'elisir d'amore*, Gina was to be paid 15,000 *lire* [$9.00]—which eventually rose to 40,000 [$25.00] given overtime—and used the money to buy a coat and umbrella. Using the name Gina Loris, she found follow-up work as a model in *fotoromanzi,*[7] and



GINA LOLLOBRIGIDA: *A supporting cast member with a bright future.*

entered that summer's Miss Rome competition, where she was voted the first runner-up. She subsequently entered the Miss Italia contest, held a short time later in Stesa, where Gina came in third—after the victor Lucia Bosé, and first runner-up Gianna Maria Canale. All three women would have distinguished careers in the cinema as a result of this competition, but none would go so far as she whom the press christened "La Lollo." Though she is only a face in the chorus in *L'elisir d'amore*, it is impossible to take one's eyes off of Lollobrigida when she is onscreen. Either Costa or Bava took note of this uncanny quality, because she is one of the few background players who rates her own cutaway close-up during one of Nelly Corradi's numbers.

Bava served as his own camera operator on *L'elisir d'amore*, and took advantage of this opportunity to reinvent the Italian cinema's traditional approach to filming opera—which had always been static and stagebound, with everything captured in medium shot. Bava reminded Costa that they weren't just filming an opera; they were making a *movie*. It may be difficult to appreciate on these grounds today, but when *L'elisir d'amore* was first released, it represented a magnificent technical liberation for filmed opera. Bava's camera isn't terribly



MARIO *takes a light reading of opera great Tito Gobbi during the filming of L'ELISIR D'AMORE.*

mobile, but he and art director Aldo Calvo took great pains to lend dimension—or a sense of dimension—to the camera set-ups, filming scenes through hanging vines, through false window frames, through foregrounded onlookers framing the singers. Bava also dabbled in extending the dimensions of his available settings by suggesting offscreen environments with light and shadow. Obtaining scrap foliage and branches from a local florist, he hung these in the path of his brute light to paint the walls of sets as though sunlight was filtering into rooms through an imaginary arbor. For the sequence of Nemorino's melancholy serenade, the scene is introduced with a lovely shot of a full moon reflected in a studio pool, which pans right—past ripples and reflected trees—until it reaches the inverted reflection of our dejected hero. This is the first of many such "reveals" in Bava's work, introducing a character into a scene by catching their reflection in a pool of water, spilled wine, or even blood. The film also begins and ends with a long-shot of the town square, in which Bava completed Calvo's studio sets with a glass matte of roofs, chimneys, and treetops.

Although he approached the work at hand with vigorous innovation, Bava personally found the process of filming opera to be very taxing. The music on-set, obviously, was nonstop; the soundtrack was recorded in advance and played back (and back and back!) while the actors struggled to synchronize their lip movements not only to the completed score, but also to the meticulously choreographed movements of Bava's camera.

"I went home every night with a throbbing head," Bava groaned. "I sang to myself so much that my children learned all of '*L'elisir d'amore*' from me!" [8]

When the film was released in Rome, its camera innovations were recognized by the critics—though as usual, the director was given credit for them. The critic for *Intermezzo* wrote: "Of the various films that faithfully reproduce the great operas on the screen, this one seems to us the best of them all, because its director was careful to observe the unique requirements of cinematographic presentation, which are quite different to those of presenting something on the stage. And the photography is splendid . . . so let us conclude by affirming that, of its kind, this painstaking work of Mario Costa merits every consideration and many tributes." [9]

L'elisir d'amore was sufficiently well received to win the most unusual accolade of distribution in the United States, where it was released as *This Wine of Love* in the spring of 1948. Evidently, something went wrong in the translation, as suggested by the film's reception by reviewer Thomas M. Pryor in the pages of *The New York Times*: "It hardly seems likely . . . that *This Wine of Love* will prove to be popular with moviegoers who have no special interest in opera, for there is nothing about the film to command attention other than the music." [10]

7 The plural form of "*fotoromanza*," these were a specialized "women's" type of *fumetti* (singular: *fumetto*); that is, a kind of comic book, illustrated with sequential photographs rather than artwork. The word *fumetti* means "smokes" and it was coined for this medium of storytelling because the Italians likened the word balloons used to convey dialogue to puffs of smoke.

8 Abruzzese.

9 *Intermezzo*, August 14–16, 1947.

10 *The New York Times*, April 19, 1948.

Bava's work on *Il barbiere di Siviglia* and *L'elisir d'amore* would have accounted for only one-third of his year, at most. The rest of the time was spent looking for work, creating work for himself in the form of new short subjects, and in photographing documentary shorts for others.

Mario's most frequent filmmaking companion during this period was a 40-year-old documentarian named Pietro Francisci (1906–75), who had been active as a feature film director since 1934's romantic dramas *Rapsodia in Roma* ("Rhapsody in Rome") and *La mia vita sei tu* ("My Life with You"). Beginning in the latter months of 1946, Bava photographed four short films for Francisci, all released in 1947: *Cristo a Gerusalemme* ("Christ in Jerusalem"), *Musica nel cielo* ("Celestial Music"), *Passaggio del mar* ("Sea Crossing"), and *Le resurrezione* ("The Resurrection"). The first and last were studies of Christian images in Italian paintings, and the second contrasted Angels in paintings with choral music. *Passaggio del mar*, on the other hand, is the likeliest setting for an anecdote Bava liked to tell about the risks he was sometimes obliged to take as a documentary cameraman. To film the landing of a sea plane, Bava and his camera (in a special waterproof rig) were strapped to the plane's ski leg as it was flown high into the air for a landing on the Tiber. It was a brave thing to do, but Bava made a joke of his daring, laughing that so much water had sprayed over him from the skis that he nearly drowned.



DIRECTOR *Pietro Francisci, one of Bava's most important professional allies of the late 1940s and 1950s.*

Bava worked well with Francisci, and when the director made his return to feature films the following year, Bava followed. It was the beginning of one of his career's most important alliances.

Natale al campo 119

First released: December 22, 1947
B&W, 1.66:1, 85 minutes

Production: Excelsa Film. **Distributor**: Minerva Film. **France**: *Noël au Camp 119*, 10/14/48, 83m. **US**: *Escape From Reality*, Superfilm Distributing Corporation.

The features Bava photographed during the years of Italy's postwar convalescence stand out as the most contemporary, humorous, and humanistic films he ever made. During these years, most Italian films had little hope of being distributed outside the Italian provinces, which gave them a sense of national identity that they have only recently begun to recover. They spoke Italian and addressed Italian subjects, with a mixture of warmth and humor and exaggeration that remains peculiarly Italian.

Under the sponsorship of Vittorio De Sica, Pietro Francisci directed *Natale al Campo 119* ("Christmas at Camp 119")[11] in 1947. De Sica starred, co-scripted, and served as production supervisor, and the supporting cast included several actors who would play significant roles in Bava's later career: Aldo Fabrizi (the acclaimed star of *Roma città aperta*, who also co-scripted), Massimo Girotti (the handsome athletic star of *La corona di ferro*) and, in his second screen appearance, a young Adolfo Celi (oddly cast as an American sergeant). It is the sentimental story of a group of Italian soldiers who must spend Christmas in an American prisoner-of-war camp. When their radio breaks down on Christmas Eve, the men pass the time by sharing their bittersweet memories of home—Rome, Milan, Naples, or Venice, as the case may be.



MASSIMO GIROTTI *and Aldo Fabrizi (both seated) and Vittorio De Sica (conducting) enliven a sad Christmas with happy music in NATALE AL CAMPO 119.*

The film was later distributed in America under the title *Escape From Reality*, which is appropriate—not only because the film allowed its characters to find temporary liberation from their worries in sweet reverie, but because *Natale al Campo 119* contains some of the earliest indications that the postwar Italian cinema was beginning to dream again, to drift away from documentary realism and neorealism. It is a film that stands with one foot in both worlds, consisting of several stories mostly filmed on location, and framing footage centered around a stagebound, stylized, clearly artificial concentration camp set—thus inverting the fabric of reality and illusion, as it were. The art director was Italy's



FOLLIE PER L'OPERA*'s Constance Dowling is content to flirt with Aroldo Tieri . . . until he prefers Gina Lollobrigida.*

premier *sceneggiaturista*, Gastone Medin (1905–69), whose richer-than-life approach to film decor was a key ingredient in the development of the *telefoni bianchi* ("white telephone") films of the 1930s.[12] The message is subtle but eloquently conveyed, and one that would be echoed later in the century by Francis Ford Coppola and Stanley Kubrick: War is an unnatural state, antagonistic to all that is most important in life.

Natale al Campo 119 is a charming basket of human dreams and foibles, laughter and pain, adversity and camaraderie, and it contains a number of memorable images—including shots of various Italian art masterpieces being taken down from museum display and crated away for safekeeping at the height of wartime. The film acknowledges no museum cooperation, which suggests that none of the masterpieces shown were actually used, but were rather alternately supplied by Bava's trick photography. For example, one shot of a young couple meeting in front of Sandro Botticelli's *The Birth of Venus*, for example, is surely achieved via rear-screen projection. Rear-screen projection is more obviously employed during the close-ups of Massimo Girotti rowing his gondola through the canals of Venice.

But the film's most effective (and affecting) moments are those which catapult the film beyond reality and stylization into the realm of the spectral, in ways that anticipate Bava's later concerns as a director. At one point, the searchlight from the (highly artificial-looking) watchtower is allowed to strike the camera lens, signalling a flash-cut to another dimension, in which a black character—who exists nowhere else in the film—is shown walking mournfully though the barracks, observing the poignant expressions of the cast like a personification of their sorrow, as the soundtrack plays a stirring rendition of the gospel standard, "Motherless Child." The sequence ends with an image that will have resonance for anyone familiar with Bava's later film *Operazione paura/Kill, Baby . . . Kill!*: a shot of De Sica and Peppino De Filippo staring numbly through the greasy, unwashed window of their barracks. The composition is identical to those of the superstitious villagers peering outside at Dr. Eswai upon his arrival at Karmingen.

The film's cinematography credit is shared by Bava and someone identified as "Ferrer Tiezzi." The division of labor may be explained by the presence of numerous "travelogue" shots photographed in Italian cities other than Rome, but the matter of Tiezzi's identity is obscured by the main titles, which contain an unusual number of sloppy errors. Composer Angelo Francesco Lavagnino is listed as "Francesco Lavagnini," editor Gabrielle Varriale as "Variale," etc. The film's second cameraman was, in fact, Augusto Tiezzi (1910–80), who had also photographed Francisci's feature debut *Io t'ho incontrato a Napoli* (1946).

Follie per l'opera

First released: September 29, 1948
B&W, 1.66:1, 97 minutes (passed by Italian censor board at 94m)

Production: Scalera Film, GE.S.I. **Distributor**: Scalera Film. **US**: *Mad About the Opera,* Motion Picture Sales Corporation, 95m

Bava's next collaboration with Mario Costa—*Follie per l'opera*—would mark another significant step in the evolution of filmed opera. Perhaps spurred on by *The New York Times*' review of *L'elisir d'amore* (and others like it) to devise an opera film that was more universal in its entertainment value, writers Costa, Giovanna Soria, and two upcoming *maestri* of Italian comedy—Mario Monicelli and Stefano "Steno" Vanzina—delivered exactly that.

Follie per l'opera stars Aroldo Tieri as Gino, a two-bit Italian journalist based in London, who wants to marry Dora (Gina Lollobrigida) but is barred by her father Carlo Scala (Carlo Campanini), an Italian restauranteur. When Carlo's friend, Don Antonio (Aldo Silvani, billed as "Aldo Sylvani"), a local parish priest, mentions that his church was destroyed by bombing, Gino conceives the idea of staging an evening of opera performances at Covent Garden to fund the church's restoration—and persuades Carlo to guarantee Dora's hand in marriage if he can pull it off. Dora and Gino arrange a hefty loan from McLean (Lamberto Picasso), a local businessman who covets Carlo's restaurant, on the premise that the eatery will become his if they cannot repay the loan by midnight after the performance. By tricking Margaret (Constance Dowling)—a secretary at Covent Garden, who happens to be enamored of him—Gino obtains stationery from the renowned theater to secure the participation of artists like Tito Schipa, Tito Gobbi, Gino Bechi, and the La Scala Ballet

11 In Italian, "119" is pronounced "*cento diciannove*," but as the film's setting is an American POW camp, it's probably fair game to take the shortcut and say "one-nineteen."

12 Indeed, this Italian genre may owe its coinage to one of Medin's early assignments, *Il telefonista* (1932).

Company. When Margaret learns how she has been used, she turns against Gino and determines to sabotage the evening.

For those who can look past its surreal depiction of London as a city inhabited solely by Italians (even the BBC commentators are Italian!), *Follie per l'opera* is an enjoyable light comedy with romance and robust music, as well as an underlying melancholy tied to wartime loss and dislocation. As one sequence touchingly conveys, a roomful of Italian expatriates are moved to visible homesickness by a radio performance by Beniamino Gigli, opera being used as a metaphor for the Italian spirit. Costa's film clearly sought to inspire the postwar rebuilding of more than a single church.

By this point in his career, Mario Bava had become a more confident cinematographer, with a knack for lighting individual shots to make them alluring, comic, erotic, mysterious, dramatic, reassuring, antic, or purely decorative—before the actors on-screen spoke a word. He used light in the way film composers use *leitmotifs*: to reinforce character. Gino is always overlit, making him appear not only brazen but slightly absurd; Margaret is enveloped in velvety, come-hither shadow patterns that grow progressively dangerous, until the scene in which she rouses a crowd of union workers to crash the non-union opera performance, when Bava lights her like an authoritarian dictator, her shadow completely disengaged from her body, as though to suggest the dual purpose of her motives; Dora is softly, virginally lit, except for one delicious moment when she unmasks Tito Gobbi (posing as his own secretary) by tricking him into a public performance, and looks on tauntingly as he sings "*Dicentencello vuie*."

Follie per l'opera also contains some trick shots that once again show Bava working well outside the traditional boundaries of cinematography. With the exception of a scene filmed on location at a Roman airstrip, the film was shot entirely at the studios of Scalera Film, including the London "exteriors." The first exterior—as Carlo, Dora, and Gino take a taxi home from a piano concert—was actually filmed in the courtyard of Scalera's





TWO ITALIAN FOTOBUSTE:
Tito Gobbi's climactic performance of "Prologo" from Leoncavallo's "Pagliacci," and Gina Lollobrigida with Aroldo Tieri.

production office, where the walls were covered with false storefronts. Borrowing his father's super-steady Mitchell camera and *truca*, Mario exposed only the lower half of the frame as a few cars and taxis drove past the *façades* and dropped off the actors at the courtyard entrance. A night shot of city traffic was also filmed. Later, he rewound the film and, with the lower half of the frame now protected, matched a maquette of the buildings' upper floors and various clustered buildings huddled on a background hillside to what was already filmed. To match the night footage, Bava added several lightable windows to the maquette, as well as a flashing miniature neon sign. While not particularly recognizable as London, the shots remain very impressive—indeed, the average viewer would not recognize these as trick shots at all. Remarkably, Bava would later use not only the same technique, but the exact same location and vantage, to stage a scene on a street in Montmartre for Riccardo Freda's *I vampiri* (1957).

Bava did not photograph *Follie per l'opera* in its entirety—Gigli's musical performance of Chenier's "*Si, fui soldato*" was excerpted from Franco Rossi's *Solo per te, Lucia* ("Alone with You, Lucia"), a film photographed by Arturo Gallea in 1952—but Bava's presence is strongly felt during the other musical highlights, notably Maria Caniglia's performance of "*Casta diva*," staged as a stirring Viking ceremony beneath a towering, gnarled tree—a prop trunk cleverly "extended" by a Bava glass matte painting—presaging the impressive, tree-dominated Viking set in Bava's early directorial effort *Gli invasori/Erik the Conqueror* (1961).

Follie per l'opera proved a popular success and was distributed in America by the Motion Picture Sales Organization, under the title *Mad About the Opera*. This English-dubbed version, which comically billed Gina Lollobrigida as "Lollo Brigida"—was evidently a disaster, prompting *The New York Times* to mistake it for "a chunk of farce which, for silliness and overacting, has seldom been equalled hereabouts." Abroad, *Follie per l'opera* had the distinction of becoming the first international motion picture to be imported and shown in the USSR after the war.

The Bava Squad

Follie per l'opera was the first of Mario Bava's photographed work to properly acknowledge the principal workers on his camera team.

Bava's *operatore* (camera operator), was Corrado Bartoloni, a lean, fair-haired technician who had learned his trade working for cameraman Vincenzo Seratrice on such films as Rossellini's *Un pilota ritorna* and Mario Bonnard's *Avanti c'è posto* (both 1942).

"I started at Cinecittà during the war," Bartoloni explained in a recent Italian television interview, "because letters had been sent out from Cinecittà, announcing that they were looking for cameramen and camera assistants. Some went, and some stayed." His duties? "To start with, I stayed behind the camera. I couldn't even change the film in the camera without permission, because the camera assistants were extremely territorial about their duties. The only thing I had to do was keep the camera clean. Meanwhile, waiting behind the cameraman, little by little, you started getting more important jobs, first of all cameraman-assistant, then cameraman . . ."

Today, such technological advances as the video tap allow cinematographers to oversee their work from a TV monitor, relegating the task of physically



CAMERA OPERATOR *Corrado Bartoloni takes a break with Mario on a 1950s production.*

operating the camera to their operator. Bartoloni's duties on Bava's films were more limited, because the risks involved at that time were so great. "When we were preparing a shot, we set it up by looking through a particular lens, but during the actual shooting, only the cameraman could view the take through the viewfinder—because it was his responsibility to say, 'It's good—print!' or 'It's no good—let's do it over,'" Bartoloni explains. "Many times, the directors of photography—including Mario Bava—did the shooting themselves, riding the camera, because it was so difficult to keep one's eye on the lighting values. In those days, we weren't able to see the printed footage until four or five days after we shot it. We usually kept at least two or three takes, just in case the director said, 'This is all wrong, you see too much air over their heads' . . . In other words, the shot was not tight enough, leaving too much space between the heads of the actors and the upper frame. We were extremely precise about these sorts of things; when an actor had to speak, we were expected to have some 'air' to his left, or to his right, and so on . . ."

Bartoloni was absolutely enamored of Bava's visual style and his command of cinematic technique and technology. The two men got along extremely well, and worked together on all of Bava's most important camera jobs for the next decade, a period which would include some of the greatest commercial successes in Italian film history. Asked to share his personal memories of Bava, Bartoloni offers: "He was a very intelligent man, very cultured and confident about his abilities. He used to direct directors a lot of the time, but he was an easygoing, quiet fellow. He used to complicate his life during productions by designing extended takes and elaborate camera movements, unbroken takes lasting sometimes 8–10 minutes—but he liked doing this sort of thing. He was my *Maestro;* I learned from him everything I would ever learn."

For his camera assistant, Bava selected Ubaldo Terzano. A logical and compassionate choice, Ubaldo was the son of Bava's late mentor Massimo Terzano. Mario's grandson Roy Bava offers some insight that may pertain to this case: "He [Mario] paid a lot of attention to the human side of the people working with him. He liked to surround himself with familiar people, because he knew them and how to motivate them, but he also took an interest in their personal lives. He really cared about the people who worked with him, and he took an interest in their problems, like marital problems, or even economic problems. He sometimes hired people, knowing that they weren't exactly geniuses but needed to work, and in these cases, he was happy to have them and to help them." Thus, Bava would certainly have felt the need to repay his *Maestro*'s past guidance and kindness by giving his son a job in which he could continue the family trade.

The working relationship between Bava and the young Terzano would become a significant one, with Ubaldo eventually graduating to the position of *operatore* (and later, director of photography) when Bartoloni left the squad in 1958 to work as a cameraman in Italian television.

The Richwild Shorts

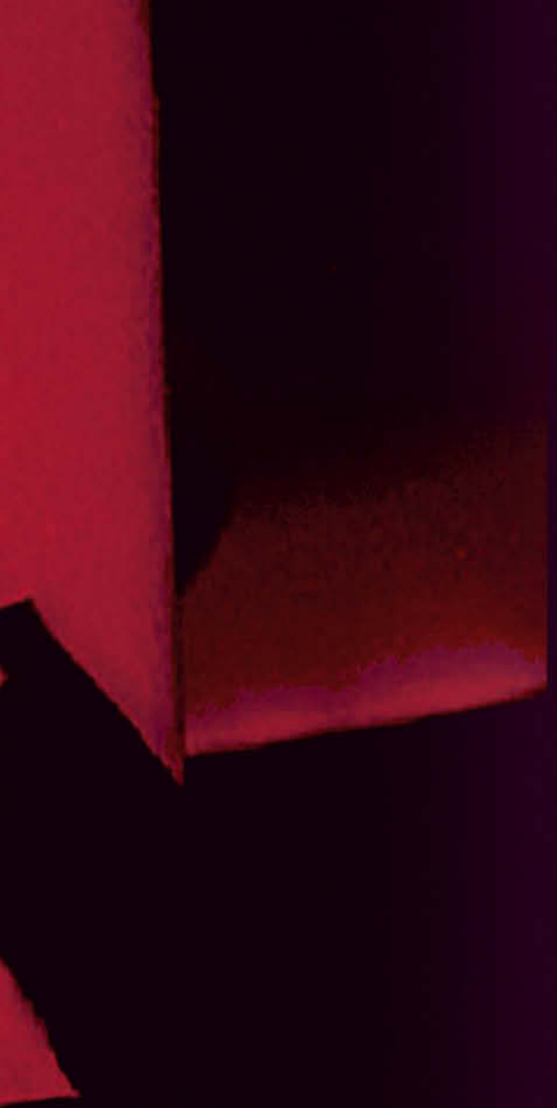
During this period of upward mobility, Bava continued to supplement his career in feature cinematography by making a series of shorts for Richwild Produzione. These were one- and two-reelers, bulletins and valentines on the prevailing themes of Italian culture and religion, encouragements to a rebounding national spirit. Over the course of the next decade, Bava would photograph thirty more shorts, but he would follow the critical success of *L'orecchio* with only five of his own: *Anfiteatro Flavio* ("Flavio Amphitheater") and *Santa notte* ("Holy Night," both 1947), *Leggenda sinfonica* ("Symphonic Legend," co-directed with Riccardo Melani, 1947), *Variazioni sinfoniche* ("Symphonic Variations," 1949), and *L'amore nell'arte* ("Love in Art," 1950). These shorts were sufficiently well received in their time for their modest director to boldly refer to them as "famous" in the following anecdote:

"We Italians have a certain genius. People from other countries are more hard-headed than us. I remember an incident from the famous documentaries I made in '47 for Mr. Richwild. He wanted to have some swans built for 'Swan Lake' [a segment of *Variazioni sinfoniche*]; instead, I cut some swans out of white paper and hung them on branches that were moving strangely, out-of-focus, in the background. I was in such a hurry that I asked someone to hold the branches . . . and during Tchaikovsky's 'Nutcracker Suite,' he waved them in tempo with the music! If you ask an American to hold your branch, you can bet it won't swing—because he'll find some gadget to hold it for him. The fact that our branch moved in time with the music proves that we'd have become millionaires if only we'd gone to America." [13]

As Bava's words attest, it is imprecise in some ways to call his short films documentaries, because they mixed their documentary and stock footage with elements of fantasy and trickery. One of the legendary anecdotes about Bava is that, for one of his documentary shorts, he wanted to photograph the ornate interior of a church in Rome, but the church—fearing that hot lights might have an adverse effect on the ancient art adorning the premises—refused his request. Therefore, one morning, Bava visited the church with an ordinary still camera and telephoto lens and took hundreds of photographs, which he then used to wallpaper the interior shell of a scale model of the place, including the hollow of its dome. Onscreen, the final result was such a perfect replica of the original that no one knew it was a trick shot until Bava confessed what he had done.

13 Abruzzese.





Tragedies and Comedies

1948 WOULD BE a pivotal year in the career of Mario Bava, though the totality of his known output for this period is limited to a single feature and a short.

The short film in question was the most widely-circulated of his many documentaries: Carlo Castelli Gattinara's *Il demoniaco nell'arte*. Scripted by Enrico Castelli Gattinara, this was a visual essay on the infernal images in paintings by Pieter Brueghel, Hieronymous Bosch, Mathias Grunewald, Martin Schongauer, and other Flemish and German painters of the 15th and 16th centuries. Filmed in 16 mm, this 16-minute short was actually distributed to American schoolrooms in 1950, under the title *The Demon in Art,* sporting an English-language narration track by film critic Arthur Knight, best known for his "Sex in the Cinema" series of articles for *Playboy* magazine.

Bava's only feature of 1948, *I pagliacci (amore tragico)* stands out as his first masterpiece as a cinematographer. As such, it warrants detailed discussion.

I pagliacci (amore tragico)

First released: December 2, 1948
B&W, 1.33:1, 90 minutes

Production: Itala Film. **Distributor**: Artisti Associati. **Finland**: 6/4/54. **France**: *Paillasse (Amour de Clown)*, 1/6/50, 86m. **Germany**: *Bajazzo*, Jugend-Schnoed, 1950. **UK**: *Loves of a Clown*, 1950, 80m. **US**: *Loves of a Clown*, Motion Picture Sales Corporation, 4/16/50, 67m.



ITALIAN *due-foglia.*

One of the dramatic highlights of *Follie per l'opera* was Tito Gobbi's climactic performance of "*Prologo*" from Ruggero Leoncavallo's classic opera *Pagliacci*, which figured prominently in the film's advertising. This sequence proved so popular with audiences that Mario Costa was inspired to film the opera in its entirety. In the earlier film, Mario Bava had filmed Gobbi's performance with very direct, naked lighting, but the singer had infused his reading with such silken, knowing menace that, despite the starkness of Bava's *mise en scène*, the scene had a sinister, decadent quality that harkened back to the great UFA (*Universum Film Aktien Gensellschasft*) films that came out of Germany in the 1920s. It was this intensively cinematic style that Bava and Costa courted in their follow-up, to often powerful effect.

I pagliacci (we will dispense with the subtitle for discussion purposes) is the story of a *commedia dell'arte* troupe that travels the countryside in a *cavalleria rusticana*, or rustic caravan, bringing opera to the common folk. Their current production is *Pagliaccio e Columbina*, in which the title character—a clown by trade—discovers that his wife is unfaithful and must continue to wear a smile, though his heart is breaking, while allowing her to run away with her lover, the harlequin balladeer Arlecchino. The troupe consists of Canio (Afro Poli, sung by Galliano Casini), the troupe's middle-aged leader, who portrays the cuckold; his beautiful young wife Nedda (Gina Lollobrigida, sung by Onelia Fineschi), who plays the unfaithful Columbina; Beppe (Filippo Morucci, sung by Gino Sinimberghi) who plays Arlecchino, and the deformed fool Tonio (Gobbi), who secretly adores Nedda on stage and off. Upon their arrival in a new town, Canio is greeted like a hero and invited for a drink, but when someone jokingly suggests that Nedda might not be safe if left alone with Tonio, Canio's jealousy flares. He makes it known that, if Nedda ever strayed from him, things would not end so happily as they do in the play. While Canio is away, Tonio sees Nedda singing to herself and her sweet voice emboldens him to declare his love, but she repels his advances. Later, Tonio spies on Nedda as she meets secretly with Silvio—a handsome young local—and watches them as she succumbs to his lovemaking. The spiteful Tonio goes to Canio with the news of her faithlessness, and as the lovers return, the cuckold overhears Nedda promise to meet Silvio after that evening's performance, and run away with him. Canio flies into a rage and chases the lover away before he can see his face or learn his name. During that evening's performance, when Canio hears Nedda sing—singing to Arlecchino the very words she spoke to Silvio in parting—he goes mad with jealousy and stabs her to death on stage. Silvio rushes to her defense and is also stabbed to death. As Canio realizes with horror what he has done, the skies erupt in a terrible, apocalyptic storm from an offended Heaven.

Unlike most opera films, *I pagliacci* requires some familiarity with the circumstances of the play's composition to be fully appreciated, not only in terms of its inspired construction, but also in terms of what it hoped to mean in terms of the history of opera on film. *Pagliacci* was the third opera written by Ruggero Leoncavallo (1858–1919), a Neapolitan composer whose earlier historical romances were met with public indifference. Inspired by the success of Pietro Mascagni's opera *Cavalleria rusticana* (which Massimo Terzano had photographed in 1939, very likely with Bava assisting), Leoncavallo decided to likewise tailor his third opera to popular, contemporary tastes; *Pagliacci* (the plurality indicating Canio's synonymity with Pagliaccio) was an uncompromisingly bitter story of love, betrayal and murder, but it also boasted a remarkable story-within-a-story construction that played hob with the proscenium separating fantasy from reality, in ways that anticipated the slightly later works of his contemporary, playwright Luigi Pirandello. *Pagliacci* was an instant success when first performed in 1892, when Leoncavallo was 34 years of age—the same age as Bava when he photographed Costa's film so brilliantly.

Leoncavallo's opera is equipped with its own prologue, but Costa and Bava precede it with an impressive 7-minute introduction—filmed entirely from the composer's point of view—intended to acquaint audiences with the circumstances and emotions which resulted in the opera's writing. The first image we see is a close-up of a gloved hand holding a letter addressed to *Signore* Leoncavallo, informing him that his opera *I medici* must be closed due to lack of ticket sales. The letter is sadly lowered out of camera range to reveal the wall of a theater, newly plastered with a poster for the successful *Cavalleria rusticana*, overcast by Leoncavallo's silhouette, with a broad-brimmed hat and handlebar mustache. As an embittered voice-over bemoans the sad state of contemporary life, the POV camera dollies through the night streets, passing a haggard woman in black selling fruit, pushy boys hawking newspapers full of ill tidings, until Leoncavallo is nearly killed by an abusive coachman while trying to cross the street to his front door. The camera pans left into a shadow, which masks a cut to the interior of the composer's apartment building, which then—as the camera surges forward—dissolves upstairs to his dwelling, where the gloved hand parts a velvet

curtain to reveal the centerpiece of Leoncavallo's home: his *pianoforte* ("my only consolation"), which occupies a darkened room. "We" light a lamp, carry it to the keyboard, and "our" feverish hands pound out raw emotion that gradually coalesces into the familiar themes of the opera at hand. The camera wanders away to a framed landscape on the wall, which allows the camera to cut to a continuation of the shot, which crosses the room to a shadowed area, from which a clown with tri-parted hair—the "Prologue" of the opera—is manifest.

Today's cinema boasts numerous, progressively showy examples of this kind of "unbroken take," all of them inspired by Russell Metty's opening shot for Orson Welles' *Touch of Evil* (1958). At the time Costa's film was made, however, there was only one such celebrated example: the introductory sequence of Rouben Mamoulian's *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* (1931), photographed by Karl Struss, which incidentally included a shot of Jekyll's (Fredric March's) hands playing a pipe organ. Close examination of Struss' sequence reveals, however, that it isn't even fifteen seconds in progress when the first of numerous cuts is made, as the butler Poole (Edgar Norton) steps into the room. Other cuts and dissolves abound in the sequence until the camera meets Jekyll head on at his evening lecture, but it remains a remarkable sequence in that it sustains its subjective stance for so long. In memory, particularly in the years before it was possible to analyze and deconstruct the sequence and thereby determine what went into its creation, one remembered it as being accomplished entirely *without* cuts. With these facts in mind, Bava's sequence—a fluid procession of takes with ingeniously concealed interruptions—embodies a clear advancement of this technique that deserves to be better known and appreciated.

Bava must have seen the Mamoulian film during its initial release, because its subjective introduction of Jekyll was removed from all prints at the time of its re-release in the late 1930s, and remained "lost" until the film's complete restoration in the late '80s. Bava's interest in Struss' work may have been rooted in the fact that Struss had been the first American cameraman to work in Italy, where he photographed MGM's *Ben-Hur: A Tale of the Christ* (1925), a film whose trick photographic innovations would have an additional impact on subsequent Bava projects, such as *I vampiri* (1957).





ITALIAN *fotobuste of Beppo (Filippo Morucci) and Nedda (Gina Lollobrigida) performing for an appreciative crowd, and Caino (Afro Poli) threatening Nedda.*

As mentioned earlier, another outstanding influence on the cinematography of *I pagliacci* is the look of such UFA productions as F. W. Murnau's *Der Letzte Mann/The Last Laugh* (1926) and Josef von Sternberg's *Die Blaue Engel/The Blue Angel* (1930). One of UFA's outstanding cameramen, Karl Freund (who shot *Der Letzte Mann*) had a visual style that some critics compared to the frescoes of the 13th century Florentine painter Giotto, so it may well be that Bava's apparent UFA influence was, more accurately, a manifestation of his education in Renaissance art.

I pagliacci has a wealth of brilliant ideas, the next of which is Mario Costa's decision to cast Tito Gobbi not in the expected dual role of Silvio and Beppe, but as Silvio and Tonio—the handsome and the ugly, the beloved and the hated. Complicating the geometry further, Costa and his co-writers decided that the opera should not be introduced by Tonio—as Leoncavallo envisioned—but by a sinister, somber circus clown who introduces himself as "Prologio," the embodiment of prologue—a role also played by Gobbi. Bava's photography in this sequence is mystical and daring, moving from intimidating close-ups of the clown's demented ranting to sudden long-shots revealing him as the master of ceremonies at a theatrical event. The final shot moves from a long-shot toward the stage, across the proscenium, toward a curtain, which Prologio opens to reveal an establishing shot of a rustic setting—one of Italy's earliest travelling matte shots.

The camerawork and lighting are impressive throughout the film, with the stagebound exteriors enlivened by lighting filtered through actual tree branches that were hung around like Nature's goboes. The anticipated highlight of Poli's "*Vesti la giubba*" (the opera's most famous aria) is also impressive, sung into a mirror that promptly darkens as it plays Canio's memory of the day the caravan found Nedda starving on the side of a road, the day he proposed, and the day they were wed—a silent montage impressively synchronized to the musical score, all subtly intercut with glimpses of the beauties of nature. (This sequence is an excellent example of what Bava's work in art shorts had taught him about combining music and image.) The natural feel of the visuals build to the moment just before the evening's performance begins, when a long-shot shows the audience seemingly assembled before a patch of forest, which proceeds to take our breath away by being raised like the stage curtain it is. This shot would have been a delightful illusion had it stopped there, but it proceeds to trump itself as Bava's stationary camera suddenly pushes forward over rows and rows and rows of heads in the audience, until it reaches the stage. The camera hovers so closely above the heads of the audience, and the crowd is so wide, that all of the usual explanations of how such a shot is accomplished (crane, cameraman carried on a board, etc.) crumble to dust.

The performances are intense, with Poli at his maddest resembling Boris Karloff's Gorka in Bava's *I tre volti della paura/Black Sabbath*, and Gobbi's Tonio looking even more like Luciano



THE JEALOUS *Canio stabs Nedda to death at the climax of their stage performance.*

Pigozzi's Losat in *La frusta e il corpo/The Whip and the Body*, similarities which reflect—as they should—Bava's range of influence on the production beyond his cinematographic province; a conscientious cameraman always works with the costume and art department heads to give a film a consistent look. Gina Lollobrigida is ravishing as Nedda, but her first major performance is compromised by her failure to embody the singing of Onelia Fineschi as well as she does her character. She must have realized this herself, because she subsequently began to study singing and was able to provide her own singing voice in some important later pictures.

Lollobrigida was reportedly frightened by the script's dramatic demands, which were in a league different to anything she had attempted before. "When Mario Costa first asked me to play the lead in *I pagliacci*, I refused," she confessed. "A week later, after he had screen-tested a number of other actresses, he came back, trying to get me to change my mind. At the time, I was earning a thousand *lire* [$0.62] a day for each appearance. I asked him for *one million* [$625.00], quite certain that he would refuse. To my surprise, he agreed!" [1]

The climax remains one of the most breathtaking *tours de force* found in the Italian cinema of this period, as the cuckolded Canio's performance obliterates all separation between illusion and reality, by stabbing Nedda to death before a shocked audience. As blood splashes Nedda's cleavage, Silvio rushes the stage from the audience and is stabbed to death over the floorlit proscenium. As Silvio's sagging body is supported by the crowd and his eyes roll back in his head in death, the murder seems to unleash a cosmic scream that reigns from that moment until the final *Fine* and fade-out. The night skies suddenly explode in a potent, wrathful tempest that recalls the apocalyptic storm in Tod Browning's own caravan horror story, *Freaks* (1932). Hysterical and stylized reaction shots of both cast and audience cut-away to dark, charcoaled clouds and vivid splashes of white-paint lightning—a spectacular display, crudely but effectively animated by Bava himself. (A frame-by-frame study reveals that the lighting was not literally "animated," but masked by black paper and exposed in increments.) In an especially powerful touch, Bava slyly incorporated *one deep-set eye* among the clouds in the shot immediately following Silvio's death, conveying a fleeting, subliminal impression of a hell-faced leviathan on high, puppeteering this cosmic eruption.

In later years, Bava would return again and again to brutal "acts" of murder staged in illusory environments. With this in mind, the finale of *I pagliacci* becomes a seminal moment in the history of an Italian horror cinema as yet unborn; it is the progenitor of the "performance murders" that Bava would stage in such later films as *La donna più bella sul mondo/Beautiful but Dangerous* and *Sei donne per l'assassino/Blood and Black Lace*.

Like Costa's *Follie per l'opera*, *I pagliacci* received an American release from the Motion Picture Sales Organization, under the sexier title *Loves of a Clown*. The American version was poorly subtitled by Charles Clement, who left entire sets of lyrics untranslated, to the extent that the job appears not even half-done. Even worse, the American distributor deleted Bava's magnificent Prologia sequence altogether, and replaced it with a filmed introduction by novelist Sinclair Lewis. When prints were struck for 16 mm circulation, the Lewis intro was also dropped.

Nevertheless, Bava's achievement did not go unrecognized. His work on *I pagliacci* firmly established him among the elite of his profession. In recognition of his work in this outstanding effort, Bava was welcomed as a member of the Associazione Italiana autori della fotografia Cinematografica (AIC), the Italian equivalent of the American Society of Cinematographers (ASC). Beginning with his next picture, he would be credited onscreen as Mario Bava, A.I.C.

Antonio da Padova

First released: June 7, 1949
B&W, 1.33:1, 81 minutes

Production, **Distributor**: Oro Film. **Germany**: *Antonius von Padua*, Jara Film, 1952.

The early months of 1949 found Bava reunited with director Pietro Francisci. The project was a religious docudrama, *Antonio da Padova*, which shuffled a fictional story—about a woman (Sylvana Pampanini) who prays to St. Anthony for the safe homecoming of her husband (Carlo Giustini) after the war—with an account of the young St. Anthony's (Aldo Fiorelli) life, as it is read in a book by the woman's son (also Fiorelli). Produced by Francisci's brother Mario, the film presented Bava

with the opportunity to renew his acquaintence with the great actor Aldo Fabrizi, who played an important supporting role in the picture, allowing them to further cement what would become a significant professional alliance in the coming years.

The cast also included Bava's erstwhile documentary cohort Raffaele Saitto, and a new young actor by the name of Sergio Fantoni, who would later play significant roles in Bava-related features like *Ercole e la regina di Lidia/Hercules Unchained* and *Esther and the King*. Critics commended Fiorelli's "measured performance" but complained that "movies and the lives of saints have never been compatible" and while appreciating that Francisci was attempting to do something innovative, "the two parts never quite gel, leaving the film seriously defective."[2]

Nevertheless, the film proved a notable commercial success. "In all, we shot maybe 4,000 meters of film," Bava reckoned. "Because the film's subject was the members of the Churches of Saint Cosma and Saint Damiano, there were only nineteen cast members. The film made a sack of money because it was shot entirely in the parish."[3]

Antonio da Padova also marked Bava's first collaboration with one of his most important later associates, art director (and later director) Flavio Mogherini (1924–94). A trained architect, the Florence-born Mogherini had entered the film business in 1946, assisting set designer Carlo Egidi on Piero Ballerini's opera film *Lucia di Lammermoor*. This production had utilized several of the cast and crew members Bava had known while working for Mario Costa, including Nelly Corradi and Gina Lollobrigida.

"We grabbed Mogherini the minute we saw his models and designs," Bava recalled. "He began making the grotto [for the film] with heavy stones, which he brought in a truck, but we eventually made it with *papier-maché*, as though it was a Nativity scene. It looked wonderful on the screen. When [Carlo] Ponti's lawyer Todini got an eyeful of this grotto, he immediately offered me a job working for Ponti."[4]

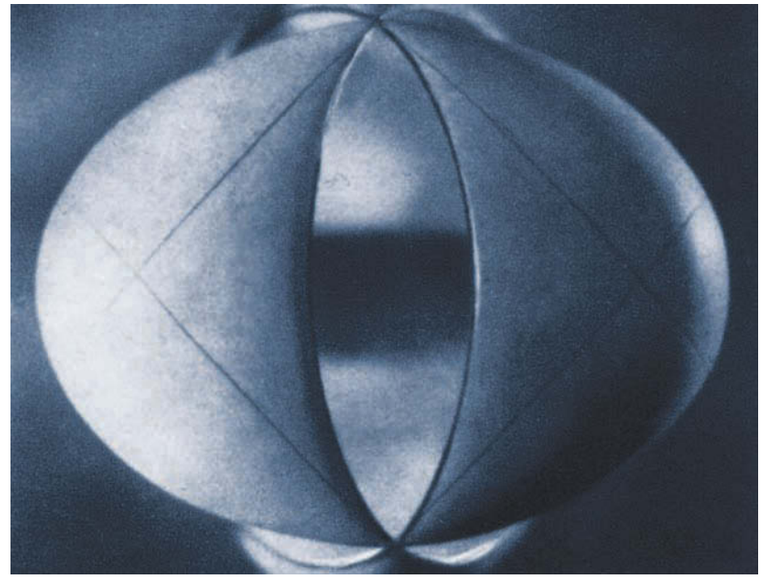
At this point in time, film producer Carlo Ponti (b. Magenta, Lombardy; December 11, 1912) was an important man but not yet the powerful movie mogul he would become. In 1949, he was a salaried producer on the staff at Ricardo Gualino's company Lux Film. Therefore, when he offered Mario Bava a non-exclusive contract with the company, it was not the Ponti name that enticed him to sign; it was the welcome prospect of a regular paycheck.



ITALIAN *fotobusta picturing Aldo Fabrizi.*

Bava's first assignment for Lux was to photograph and supervise the special effects and animation sequences for an ambitious short entitled *Una lezione di geometria* ("A Lesson in Geometry," 1948), directed by Virgilio Sabel and based on the writings of Leonardo Sinisgalli, a poet and professor of mathematics. The whereabouts of this short are presently uncertain, but in his seminal study *The Italian Film*, Vernon Jarratt recorded this tantalizing description for posterity:

"Beginning with a spoken quotation from Lautreamont, it shows a machine tracing a series of ellipses, explains with beautiful clarity the geometric basis of the ellipse, and the algebraic formula for calculating the position of any point on it; from this point it sets off to explore, with the most logical fantasy, the infinite variety of complex shapes that occur in science, and the even more complex shapes that we find in Nature—the



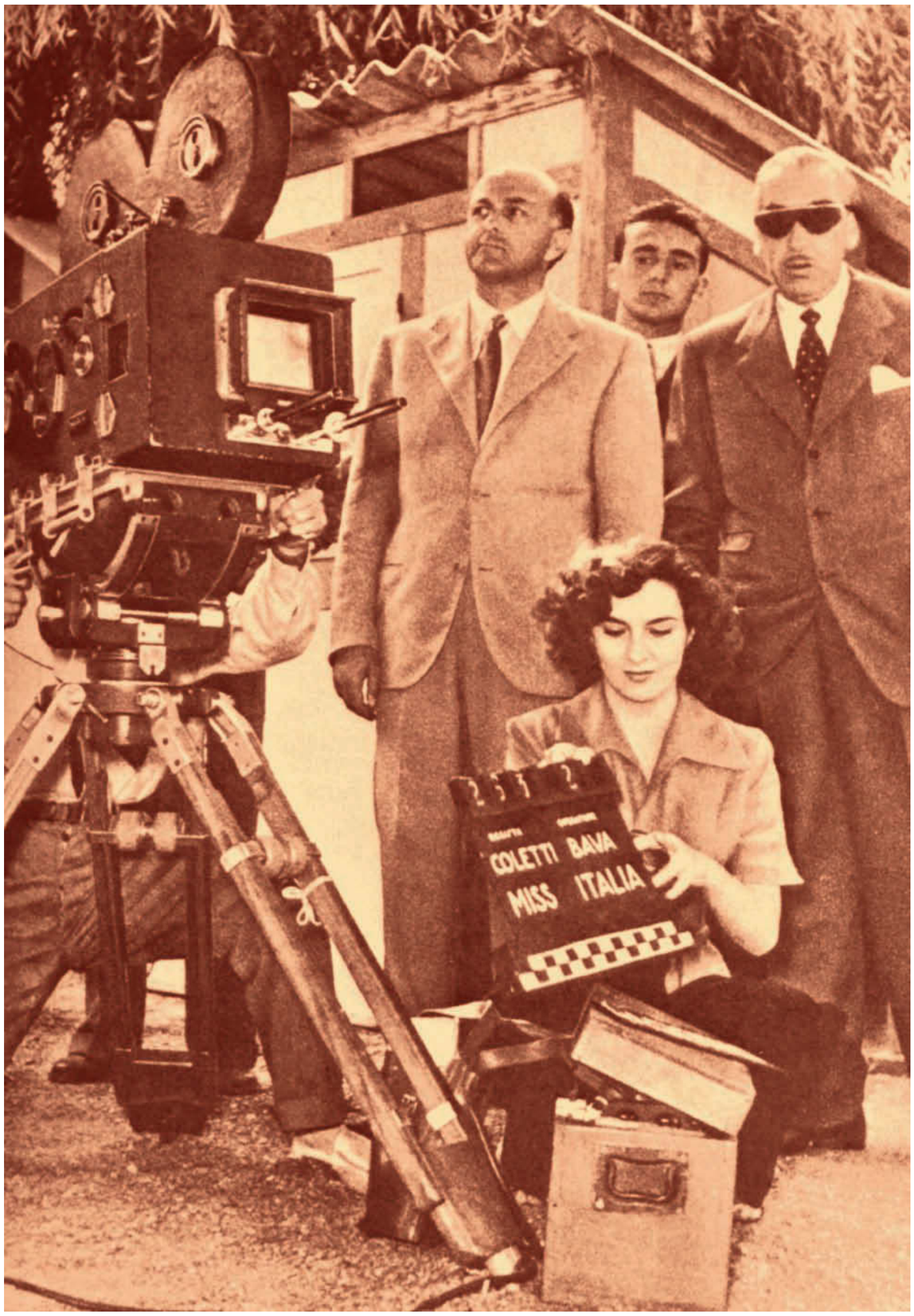
A FRAME *of mathematical animation from Virgilio Sabel's UNA LEZIONE DI GEOMETRIA, photographed and animated by Mario Bava.*

1 Maurizio Ponzi, *The Films of Gina Lollobrigida* (Secaucus NJ: Citadel Press, 1982), 17.

2 Ernesto G. Laura, review in *Hollywood* 199, 1949, as quoted in R. Citti and R. Poppi, *Dizionario del cinema italiano, I Film 2* (Rome, Italy: Gremese Editore, 1991), 360.

3 Alberto Abruzzese, et al., *La città del cinema—produzione e lavoro nel cinema italiano 1930–70* (Rome, Italy: Napoleone, 1979), 83–89.

4 Ibid.



fantastic geometry of the crystal, the extraordinary perfection of the egg, the relation between the curves traced by the cathode ray oscillograph and the movements of the heavenly bodies, and ends up, after a diversion by way of the human skeleton, by establishing the correspondence between the work of such modern artists as Archipenko, Brancusi, Picasso and Moore, and some of the more complex figures we had been studying a few minutes ago. It is photographed with great skill and beauty, and has an admirably written commentary."[5]

Miss Italia

First released: February 15, 1950
B&W, 1.33:1, 95 minutes

Production: ATA (Artisti Tecnici Associati). **Distributor**: Lux Film. **US**: *Miss Italy, My Beautiful Daughter*, Lux Film Distributing Corporation, 5/9/52.

By early 1950, Carlo Ponti had formed a partnership with a fellow Lux producer, Dino De Laurentiis (b. Agostino de Laurentiis, August 8, 1919). Both men had been moderately successful as independent producers for Lux, but once they pooled their resources, they became the most powerful production alliance in the history of Italian film.

Bava explained how this partnership was formed: "There was a hallway at Lux with Ponti on one side, and De Laurentiis on the other. They hated each other's guts because they were both milking [company president Riccardo] Gualino. In time, they came to the conclusion that they might have better luck if they combined their energies, so they co-founded Artisti Tecnici Associati, better known as ATA."[6] It must have seemed an ironic twist of events for Bava to have his paychecks signed by Laurentiis, who had entered the business as a busboy in the commissary at Cinecittà. Whenever the name of Dino De Laurentiis came up in conversation, Bava liked to reminisce about these old days, when he and others took turns bouncing bread rolls off the young Dino's head!

MARIO BAVA, *increasingly camera-shy, crouches behind the camera as Gina Lollobrigida holds the clapboard.*

One of the foundation blocks in the success story of Dino De Laurentiis was ATA's premiere production *Miss Italia*, again starring Gina Lollobrigida, which was filmed in the latter months of 1949 for director Duilio Coletti. This iconoclastic film is one of the most significant of Bava's early professional history because it was one of the first Italian films—perhaps the first—to fuse the neorealistic qualities that characterized postwar Italian cinema with a more fanciful, escapist visual quality that dared to make Rome look not as it was, but as it imagined itself to be in its wildest dreams. It is also an extraordinary film for its irony and candor, and in retrospect, one cannot imagine how or why the owners of the Miss Italia competition allowed it to be made.

Massimo Lega (American actor Richard Ney) is an Italian-American journalist who is assigned a behind-the-scenes story about the contestants of the current Miss Italia pageant. After meeting with the director of the competition and being given an assortment of photographs of the contestants, Massimo drives to their various homes to meet them. One of the contestants, Gabriella (Luisa Rossi), is embroiled in controversy because she once posed for a painting of St. Cecilia, and her priest (Carlo Campanini) feels it would be sinful for St. Cecilia to be crowned Miss Italia. Another contestant, Nadia (Barbara Leite), is the ambitious type. Another, Lilly (Constance Dowling), is the emotionally abused mistress of jewel thief Mario Vergani (played by—of all people—Antonio Mambretti Sonzogno Juva, one of the film's producers). After meeting these and other contestants, Massimo meets Lisetta (Lollobrigida), a contestant so down-to-earth that he initially mistakes her for a dressmaker. As the competition nears, Massimo and Lisetta become engaged, while Lilly's dreams come completely unravelled. While trying to save Lisetta's father (Luigi Almirante) from Mario's wrath after a suitcase mix-up deprives him of some jewelry stolen from the pageant, Lilly misses out on participating in the competition entirely. As she hears of Lisetta's victory on the car radio, she drives over a cliff, killing both Mario and herself.



PHOTOGRAPHER *Umberto Melnati demonstrates how to film a fumetti model so that she appears to be falling—an early Bava dissection of cinematic illusion.*

Like Francisci's *Natale al Campo 119*, *Miss Italia* is about the dreams of a group of people—in this case, young women—who occupy various prisons of circumstance. The film is occasionally brightened by some exceptional cases, including one none-too-bright sexpot contestant and another who scrapes together a living from work as a *fumetti* model (as Lollobrigida had done), but it is further brightened by picturesque seaside location shooting, beautiful men and women, and fabulous costumes. The pageantry trappings allow the film to simultaneously straddle fantasy and reality, while subtly breaking away from neorealism and moving once again toward the glamor that were symptomatic of the *telefoni bianchi* of the 1930s. But whereas the original *telefoni bianchi* were a response to being unable to openly acknowledge in films what was happening to Italy under Mussolini's rule, *Miss Italia* depicts these images of beauty and glamor as a dream commonly cherished by all Italians, whether as participants or as spectators, and as a positive, healing ritual for the unbowed spirit of a war-ravaged country. It is a film that uses escapist imagery to intensify and lend dimension to a confrontational entertainment.

Miss Italia is not subject matter typical of Bava, but it accommodates some exceptional visuals that presage images that will surface later in the films he directed. There is a splendidly photographed fashion show, whose velvet-edged lighting contains something of the atmosphere found in *Sei donne per l'assassino/Blood and Black Lace*. Even more effective is the transition as the camera pans slowly away from a crying woman and pauses, before dissolving to the next scene, on an ornate lampshade strung with glass-beaded pendants echoing the woman's tears (this recalls the scene in *5 bambole per la luna d'agosto/5 Dolls for an August Moon* wherein an *objet d'art* of glass balls is upset and sent rolling into a bubble bath where a woman has committed suicide, the glass balls forecasting and merging with the bubbles).

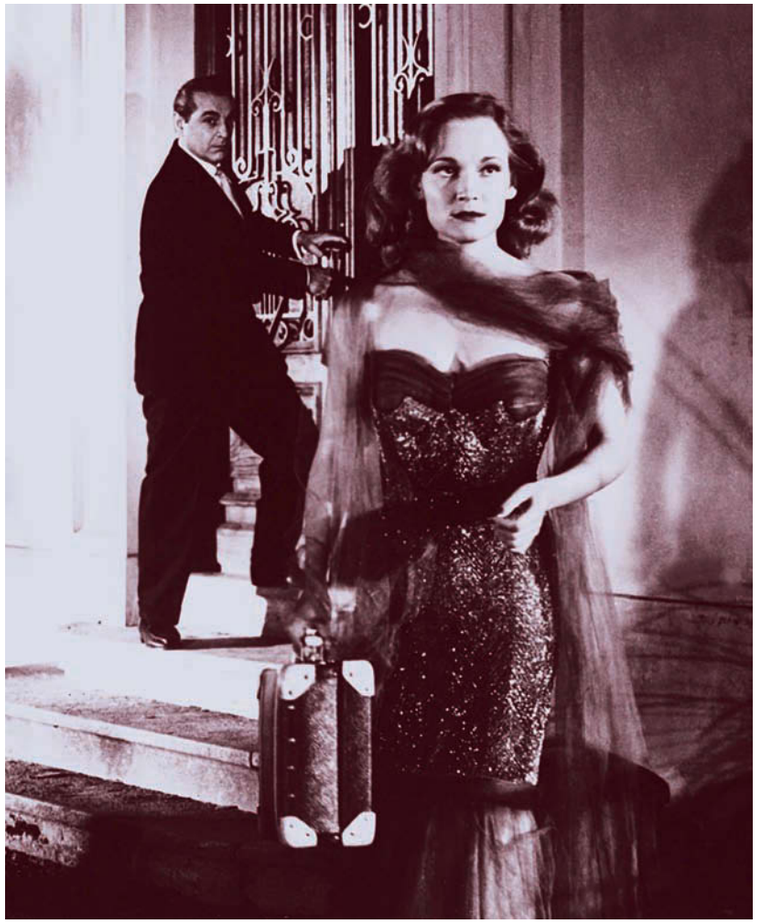
Two other scenes are also of particular interest. The first follows Massimo to the studio of a photographer (Umberto Melnati) who is using one of the contestants to stage panels for a *fumetti*. For the predilection of Massimo, the photographer uses a series of before-and-after shots to explain to his guest how certain special effects are achieved—after the model's

5 Vernon Jarratt, *The Italian Cinema* (London, UK: The Falcon Press, 1951), 92–93.

6 Abruzzese.

skirt is blown up over her face by a gust of air, the cameraman explains that she will be falling from a great height in that panel—and afterwards, he is shown working closely with the model to coax a frightened expression out of her. Bava's personality is particularly strong in this scene, which also provides another metaphor for the film's comparative views of illusion and reality, as well as illustrating how a cameraman might help to create a scene of terror.

The second outstanding scene is Lilly and Mario's climactic death drive, which incorporates a few miniature special effects inserts that were supervised by Bava. These involved a miniature tree-lined hillside, a small car with bright headlights (which appears to have been manipulated behind the miniature set on a simple rod), and a second model car and hillside built around a small pool, allowing the vehicle to be rolled into the water with a splash. The effects are somewhat obvious—when we first see the miniature, we are tipped off that something otherwise unstageable is about to happen, which badly deflates the surprise outcome—but they also have a charming naïveté, and more importantly, a style. The sequence works nevertheless on the strength of the performances, the suspense of anticipating Mario's discovery that he has still not recovered his stolen jewels, and also thanks to one unexpected effects shot—a subjective view of several roadside columns passing by the speeding car in an almost Expressionistic queue that recalls the finale of Fritz Lang's *Das Testament des Dr. Mabuse/The Testament of Dr. Mabuse* (1933).



CONSTANCE DOWLING *as the hellbound Lilly, about to lead Mario (Antonio Juva) to his death.*

Quel bandito sono io!

First released: May 11, 1950
B&W, 1.66:1, 89 minutes

Production: Lux Film (Rome), Renown Pictures (London). **Distributor**: Titanus. **UK**: *Her Favourite Husband,* Colin Leslie–Orlux Films, 12/49, 88m 5s, Certificate "U," passed with cuts. **US**: *The Taming of Dorothy,* Eagle–Lion Classics, 79m.

By 1947, reconstruction of the war-ravaged Cinecittà had been undertaken. By 1949, most of its original sound stages were once again operational; only four were never rebuilt. Despite the piecemeal resurrection of this central facility, it did not attract immediate business from the outside world on the basis of lower studio costs alone. A more decisive initiative came about as a result of a new Italian law regarding imported films—that the income from these productions could not be removed from the country, meaning that the assets of numerous international film companies became frozen in Roman banks. Furthermore, in 1949, a new "dubbing tax" was placed on all non-Italian language films, in an effort to intimidate outside productions from meddling in the convalescence of the Italian film marketplace. The two laws had the combined effect of bringing the Mountains to Mohammed: film companies from other countries began to send representatives to Rome, in the hopes of forming new and mutually profitable alliances with Italian producers. By being half-Italian, the resulting productions could also sidestep the obligation of the dubbing tax.

An early example of the new "co-production" was Bava's next Lux assignment: *Quel bandito sono io!* ("That Bandit Was Me!"), directed by the novelist and filmmaker Mario Soldati (1906–99). Though it was filmed in Rome by an Italian crew, the film was essentially a British production—co-produced by Lux's Carlo Ponti and John Sutro of Great Britain's Renown Productions, who had been responsible for the financing of such pictures as Michael Powell and Emeric Pressburger's *The Forty-Ninth Parallel* (1941) and Carol Reed's *The Way Ahead* (1944).

Based on a play by Peppino De Filippo, the screenplay was a joint effort between Stefano "Steno" Vanzina, Mario Monicelli and Soldati, though the film was acted primarily in English, from dialogue written by Noel Langley (one of the contributors to 1939's *The Wizard of Oz*) and the possibly pseudonymous W. F. Templeton (who never received another screen credit). The dual lead role was played by Canadian actor Robert Beatty, but most of the supporting cast were British actors, including Jean Kent, Margaret Rutherford, Gordon Harker, Max Adrian, and Norman Shelley.

Quel bandito sono io! is a situation comedy about Antonio (Beatty), a timid bank clerk whose life is dominated by his wife Dorothy (Kent), their pesky toddler Giorgio, and Dorothy's parents (Rutherford, Harker), who have been invited to live with them without Antonio's approval. Antonio meekly accepts whatever comes his way, even his wife's open flirtations with her lawyer, Catoni (Adrian, in a delightfully effusive performance). Our hero's life is soon to be further complicated by a criminal named Leo (also Beatty), who looks exactly like him, but Leo has problems of his own, namely Angelo—his former crime boss, whom he has framed in order to inherit his glamorous moll Rosanna (Tamara Lees)—who escapes from prison to have his revenge. As fate would have it, the fugitive Angelo seeks food from a party hosted by Antonio, and attacks him, mistaking him for Leo. Catoni comes to his rescue and the newspaper stories of Angelo's recapture bring Antonio to Leo's attention. He abducts Antonio, poses as him to quietly rob his bank, and is caught dining with Rosanna—by Dorothy and Catoni! Dorothy demands an explanation of his two-timing, and Leo poses as Antonio . . . but only up to a point. Returning home with her, he loses patience with Antonio's situation and orders Dorothy's parents to their room, and takes his hectoring wife across her knee and spanks her! (Hence, "The Taming of Dorothy.") By the next morning—



QUEL BANDITO SONO IO! *features the striking Tamara Lees (center), seen here taunting British co-star Jean Kent.*

presumably after a night of uncommonly wonderful lovemaking—Dorothy's attitude toward her husband has completely changed. With the help of his housekeeper, Antonio manages to elude Leo's henchmen—an escape that coincides with Angelo's latest prison break. Antonio gets back home, where he and Leo have a number of "near miss" non-encounters before the police arrive to question him. His newly sweet "*piccola*" dutifully hides him, but Leo is hiding on the same premises. The story is resolved in a grand chase through the rooms of the apartment, with twin chasing twin, wife chasing husband, and police chasing everyone, until everything is straightened out. In the end, Antonio realizes that the only way to remain the master of his home is to trick his wife and in-laws into thinking that the police arrested the wrong twin.

Here, for the first time, Mario Bava was formally credited not only with a film's cinematography, but also with its special effects—namely, about a half-dozen in-camera split-screen shots that allowed Beatty to play opposite himself. The majority of these shots are seamless but fairly straightforward, with Beatty sharing opposite sides of the screen with himself, on either side of a vertical line provided by an object on set (a pillar at the bank, the folded corner of a decorative partition, etc.). More interesting are a couple of shots that take an adventurous approach to finding ways for Beatty to cross those dividing lines, to baffle audience members who may be sophisticated enough to know something about how the other shots were done. For example: when Antonio escapes from Leo's henchmen and returns to his apartment, there is a shot in a darkened kitchen of the two men narrowly missing each other. The shot begins with Leo (we assume) standing center-screen, his face averted and looking toward the door; he dashes behind the door, just before it opens to reveal Antonio; Antonio then races toward the camera, crossing into the same area where Leo stood; as he passes in front of the camera, he blocks Leo, who turns toward the camera as Antonio exits the shot. The trick was accomplished very simply: Leo, in the first shot, was Beatty's stand-in (he never faces the camera, but we've been tricked by persistence of vision into believing he is Leo), and at the point when the trenchcoated Antonio (whose face we *have* seen) races forward to eclipse Leo and block the camera's view, a pause-cut allowed Beatty and his stand-in to change positions. When the camera began rolling again, the stand-in continued running past the camera, and Beatty turned toward it in the background, selling the entire illusion. In another shot, a tight close-up of Leo taunting Antonio with a gun, the waved pistol inhabits the area where the shot would appear to be split; in fact, this

is a rear-screen trick shot, with Beatty (as Antonio) and Lees inhabiting the foreground, acting to a background of Beatty (as Leo) and a henchman, photographed with a deep-focus lens that tricks the eye into perceiving everything on the same level. While playing the scene opposite himself, Beatty (as Antonio) waved the gun in front of his own face, the movement appearing to be engineered by Beatty from the background plate, thus introducing another layer of deception to the shot.

Quel bandito sono io! is visually inventive throughout, with Bava taking full advantage of recent innovations in deep-focus photography to stage the film's action in depth, which is particularly useful in circumstances where the protagonist and antagonist are played by the same actor and depicted as leading parallel lives. By dividing the action in depth, as well as width, Bava provides Soldati with twice as much space in which to surprise the viewer's expectations.

The story's twin motif is further reinforced by the use of mirrored set decorations. In one shot, a man is shown walking briskly toward the camera from the right, but before we've had time to consider anything but his movement, he arrives on the left, revealing our initial impression as his mirror image. Later, when Dorothy hides Angelo from the police, she places him inside an open closet, whose door is closed to reveal another mirrored surface—in which we see a reflection of Leo running for a hiding place of his own. The mirror motif is picked up again during Angelo's final escape from the police, as some of the action is photographed as reflected by the shiny curvature of a parked car's hubcaps.

Elsewhere, Bava can be seen working his usual magic—using light and shadow with eloquence, making women beautiful—but he's beginning to push beyond his influences and on the road to becoming himself. Men are lit and shaded sharply, women softly—with texture and diffusion. Honest women are lit to highlight their entire face, while the duplicitous Rosanna has only her eyes illuminated—literally masking her in light—when she acts dishonestly. Similarly, the honest characters are lit directly, while Leo and his cronies are usually lit from behind, or at some indirect angle. When confidences are shared, the characters are also lit from behind, at a low angle, suggesting that the light—like their whispered words—are coming from the corner of their mouths. There is also a thematic consistency in the use of scrim patterns, the shadow *motifs* seen on various walls: they run neatly parallel in Antonio's normal household, zigzagged in Leo's crooked hideaway, and finally cross-hatched like prison bars at the police station. Discussed out of context, these lighting practices may sound overly cerebral or self-conscious, but they do not draw overt attention to themselves and, most importantly, never upstage or overwhelm the film's comic agenda. It helps that *Quel bandito sono io!* is more of a smart comedy than an outright farce; it was intended to provoke laughter with its cleverness and elegant surprises of expectation. This approach is signalled immediately with the musical footage that provides the backdrop to the main titles, as we are directly (even ogreishly) serenaded by a man singing and accompanying himself on a mandolin. As the credits end, we learn that this entertainment was provided by one of Leo's henchmen, while his other partners split the money from a bank heist.

The movie's buoyancy—aided in part by Nino Rota's sprightly score—makes it very apparent that Bava and Mario Soldati worked happily together. Bava later described Soldati as "one of the few intelligent persons I've ever known in the cinema, perhaps even too intelligent for this business," and remembered their collaboration as one of ease and humor. In fact, the working atmosphere Soldati created on the set was so creative and supportive that he and Bava entered into a game similar to that of Antonio and Leo, swapping not lives, but their onset responsibilities. On occasion, Bava allowed Soldati to light the sets and frame shots, while Bava was given his first taste of feature film direction. "Soldati turned out to be a marvelous cameraman," Bava attested.[7]

Worthy of special mention is the presence of the stunning Austrian actress Tamara Lees, whom Bava photographed in such a way as to declare her the first of his great *femmes fatale.* Born Diana Helen Tamara Mapplebek in Vienna on December 14, 1926, Lees made her first screen appearances in British comedies like John Irwin's *A Piece of Cake* (1946) and Anthony Askwith's *While the Sun Shines* (1946). By 1949, Lees was still unable to secure better than minor roles in British films—including Brian Desmond Hurst's *Trottie True* (in which her *Quel bandito sono io!* co-star Jean Kent was billed far above her) and Terence Fisher's *Marry Me*—but in Italy, where beauty was prized far above voice or dramatic talent, she was placed immediately under contract to Lux and became a star. *Quel bandito sono io!* was her first Italian co-production and her first significant role, thanks in large part to Bava's careful, adulatory attention to her mysterious, glacial beauty. Lees would remain in Italy for the remainder of her screen career, working frequently with Bava in the early 1950s. She retired from onscreen appearances in 1961, thereafter working in the dubbing industry.

Bava's work during this period was suave and steady, showing a noticeable advancement in the planning and layering of images; it showed a cameraman in total command of his *métier.* The Italian film industry responded to what they saw. "At that time," Bava reminisced, "if I stopped working for even an hour, I would receive forty calls offering me something else to do!"[8]

As long as these jobs didn't interfere with his obligations to Lux, Bava took them on. A number of these jobs have certainly gone unrecorded by history, but in addition to the two features he shot in 1949, it is known that he also photographed a half-dozen known documentary shorts—one each for Riccardo Melani (*Le porte d'oro,* "The Golden Doors") and N. Pasqualini (*Arte nella porcellana*, "Art in Porcelain"), and three for Telloli: *Fantasie di statuine* ("Fantasy in Sculpture"), *Porcellana nell'arte* ("Porcelain in the Arts"), and *Il vangelo del Beato Angelica* ("The Gospel of the Blessed Angels"). In the coming year, Bava would further supplement his career with six more, including works for Luciano Emmer (*Disastri della guerra*, "Disasters of War," *La festa di Sant'Isidro*, "The Feast of St. Isidore"), Marino Girolami (*I nuraghi*), Augusto Petrone (*Sulle orme di Esculapio,* "On the Trail of Esculapeus"), and Luigi Comencini (*L'ospedale del delitto*, "Hospital of Crimes").

Bava's short films, particularly those made for other directors, may appear to be impersonal works for hire, but it would be a mistake to underestimate their place in his filmography. In more ways than one, his short films can be seen as an ongoing process of self-discovery, acts of cinematic *hommage* through which Bava arrived at a better understanding of the filmmaker he hoped to become. A cursory overview of their subject matter reveals an interest in the lives of the Saints, art and civilization, his homeland, Greek and Roman history and, above all, a reverence for artisanship. He was unquestionably his father's son, in search of an interest or perspective that would distinguish him not only as a craftsman but as an individual. Over time, a steadily emerging detail of interest in the shorts is the relationship between art and the imagination; a couple of the later shorts (such as Comencini's *L'ospedale del delitto*) also brought Bava into haunting contact with the darker possibilities of the imagination, bringing him that much closer to coming face-to-face with the self-expression that eluded him. The shorts also offered Bava opportunities to experiment with special effects, trick shots, and other forms of fanciful illusions, not to mention the art of montage. On the whole, the shorts are conspicuously more serious in tone than the comedies and melodramas that were Bava's principal bread and butter during this period, and also more personal. In the 1950s, the self-knowledge he had acquired from working in short form cinema began to express itself through his feature work, adding to his distinction as a cameraman.

Vita da cani

First released: September 28, 1950
B&W, 1.66:1, 108 minutes

Production: Carlo Ponti Cinematografica. **Distributor**: Lux Film. **Argentina**: *Vida de Perro.* **Belgium**: *Achter het Voetlicht*, Pathé Consortium Cinema, 8/56. **France**: *Dans les Coulisses,* Pathé Consortium Cinema, 1955. **UK**: *It's a Dog's Life,* Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer, 1952, 86m 36s (shortened export version), Certificate "U," passed with no cuts.

Bava's next assignment, *Vita da cani* ("A Dog's Life"), represents a significant turning point in his career. It is the production where important professional acquaintances became close and trusted friends, encouraging his work—and theirs—to new levels of shared achievement. Aldo Fabrizi, Gina Lollobrigida, Tamara Lees . . . Bava had photographed them all before, but in this film, along with newcomer Marcello Mastroianni (credited onscreen as "Marcello Mastrojanni"), they evolved beyond what they had been onscreen before. Bava's camerawork was partly responsible, but *Vita da cani* was also the right vehicle for making stars. The comic story was the invention of a consortium of writers led by Fabrizi and the directorial axis of Steno and Mario Monicelli, for whom Bava would photograph two more features in the coming year. The bonds founded here with Fabrizi and Lollobrigida were at least equally important.

Steno (a.k.a. Stefano Vanzina, 1915–88) and Monicelli (b. 1915), college-educated contemporaries, had entered the film business with separate yet surprisingly similar experiences as assistant directors and screenwriters. In 1999, Bava's grandson Roy Bava worked as a second assistant director to Monicelli, still active in his mid-80s as a film director. "He's amazing," Roy marvels, "still a young man in his energy and his attitudes. When I met him, I introduced myself as Roy Bava, and he mistook me at first for Mario's son!



BELGIAN *affiche for VITA DA CANI.*

I told him no, that I was the grandson, and he couldn't believe that so much time had passed. He told me some general things about working with Mario on films like *Guardie e ladri* and said that he considered my grandfather to be the finest cameraman of his generation, and despite his great talent, he said that he considered him to be an even better friend."

Before *Vita da cani*, Bava had worked at least twice before with actor Aldo Fabrizi, but it was on this film that they formed a true alliance. Born in Rome on November 1, 1905, Fabrizi started out as a stage actor and comedian, and made his acting debut onscreen in *Avanti, c'è posto* (1942), which he also co-scripted. He achieved international recognition as the priest in Roberto Rossellini's *Roma città aperta/Open City* (1945) and made his directorial debut in 1948 with *Emigrantes* and *Benvenuto, referendo* (1949), which he also co-authored, the latter being the first production of the newly formed Alfa Film. Fabrizi continued to generate his own projects as a hyphenate, while also working as an actor on outside projects, such as his two earlier films with Bava: *Natale al Campo 119* and *Antonio da Padova*, both for director Pietro Francisci. Bava would go on to preside over many of Fabrizi's definitive comic performances. Almost thirty years later, the cameraman maintained that, during those years, "Fabrizi was the only actor I didn't mind eating with, because he was not the usual, self-conscious bag of neuroses; he was, foremost and above all, an intelligent man."[9]

Vita da cani is the story of three women from different backgrounds who become affiliated with a struggling variety troupe in hope of stardom. Franca (Lees), a blonde Milanese with natural glacial beauty, sees no future with her earthy, working-class fiance Carlo (Mastroianni), so she decides to leave Milan for Rome and aim for the top. (She makes this decision after recognizing an actress in the back seat of an idling car—an uncredited cameo appearance by Alida Valli, who subsequently played herself again in the 1953 Totò comedy *Siamo donne*.) At a rooming house, she befriends Vera (Delia Scala), a dancer with the variety troupe of corpulent comedian Nino Martoni (Fabrizi), whose stage costume consists of a plaid suit and hat several sizes too small. It's a derelict company, with a glass-eyed conductor presiding over a tone-deaf orchestra of cat-scratchers, and Franca arrives for her audition on the night that Lucy D'Astrid (Nyta Dover), the troupe's female headliner, quits the troupe . . . but Martoni likes Franca's legs and hires her as a showgirl. (The theater's backstage area is recognizably the same area also seen in the early backstage scenes of *I vampiri*, made in 1957.)

While the troupe is travelling by train between engagements, Martoni discovers a young, doe-eyed runaway, Margherita (Lollobrigida), hiding from the police in his compartment. Questioned about her at the next station, he persuades the officials that Margherita is Lucy, the headliner, and when they object that she looks nothing like the pictures on the troupe's posters, he produces a comic photo of himself that doesn't resemble his offstage persona as an example of the illusory nature of show business. (I find myself chuckling at the mere memory of this photograph.) Something doesn't sit well with the police, however, and they arrive at the troupe's next engagement, where Margherita flees from them onto the stage and gets caught up in an outrageously athletic dance performance, which climaxes with her falling through the theater's weak stage floor! Martoni also proves himself adept at impressing hotel clerks with autographed pictures of himself and, while they are distracted, leaving with his troupe's bills unpaid.

On the road, Vera receives a letter from her fiance Mario, explaining that

7 Ibid.
8 Ibid.
9 Ibid.



MARCELLO MASTROIANNI *and Tamara Lees as VITA DA CANI's tragic lovers, Carlo and Franca.*

his parents disapprove of her working as a variety dancer, and will not consent to their marriage. Martoni hustles card games, and Franca and Vera reluctantly decide to take advantage of the interest being shown in them by wealthy admirers, allowing meals to be bought for them in return for companionship. Vera storms away from her date when he gets too fresh, and when she returns to the theater, she finds Mario waiting for her; he still wants to marry her, regardless of his parents' edict.

Meanwhile, in need of a headliner, Martoni educates Margherita—now given the stage name of Rita—in singing and dancing, and her debut is met with great success. She is so aglow with achievement that she kisses her mentor, who allows himself to hope that she, Franca, might love him. Franca, on the other hand, feels intimations from Rita's overnight success that she has achieved as much as she ever will in the troupe, and accepts an invitation to a private evening with Borselli, a wealthy industrialist who sends her flowers nightly. Arriving at his apartment, she is impressed with his material possessions, but the sincere and intelligent man who greets her is short and bald. He proposes marriage. Missing the handsome Carlo, she decides to pay her first return visit to Milan in several years, to see if any sparks remain between her and Carlo, but when she arrives at his old apartment, she sees a couple of kids, bugs on the floor, and a concierge telling her that the gentleman of the house is not at home. Revolted, she agrees to marry her rich admirer. (The film communicates this by cutting from Franca's distressed exit from Carlo's apartment to a shot of Borselli on the telephone, who smiles as he silently mouths the word "*Bene*.") At a party announcing their marriage, an unexpected guest arrives—Carlo, now a young executive working for her husband. Realizing that "the man of the house" in Milan was not Carlo at all, but someone else currently inhabiting that apartment, the shattered Franca exits the party to a private room, where she leaps to her death from an open window.

Martoni decides to ask Rita to marry him, but his plan is sidetracked by an emergency summons to the office of the police commissioner, where Mario and Vera have been arrested at the request of the young man's father. Impassioned by his own unexpressed love for Rita, Martoni makes a moving case that these young people should be together and the father, seeing Vera for the first time and realizing that she is not a "typical" showgirl, consents to their union. Martoni thanks the police commissioner with an autographed picture, which pegs him as the character who has left unpaid hotel bills all over the country. "I never would have recognized you!" the commissioner says, sentencing him to an immediate few weeks in jail. By the time Martoni can get back to the theater with his engagement ring, Rita has become a local celebrity, and he overhears her accepting an invitation from another impresario to headline for his more upscale troupe. She wants to accept, but claims she wouldn't know how to tell Martoni, who has done so much for her; realizing that this could be her great chance, Martoni nobly fakes an argument with her and fires her, allowing her star to ascend. In the aftermath of this scene, he walks behind the screen of the theater for privacy, shaken by real life as a fantasy of cowboys and Indians unreels behind him. The film ends on a note of scoundrelly optimism as, once again, Martoni must make his way out of town on charm.

Made at Titanus Studios (Scalera Film), *Vita da cani* is a charming, often hilarious, occasionally moving film that covers all the hilly terrain between comedy and tragedy. It shares much in common with Federico Fellini's debut feature *Luci del varietà/Variety Lights* (co-directed with Alberto Lattuada), which was not only made the same year, but at approximately the same time at the same studio, sharing some of the same sets.[10] Ironically, while the Lattuada–Fellini film was scored by Felice Lattuada, *Vita da cani* was graced with an outstanding score by Fellini's great future collaborator, Nino Rota—another reason why it is the more appealing of the two films, in retrospect. (Rota also co-wrote some of the music hall songs, like Lollobrigida's expertly delivered "Equador," with Fabrizi and Mario Ruccione serving as lyricists. Most admirable of all, in some ways, is the music Rota composed to represent the tin-eared caterwauling of the troupe's flea-bitten orchestra.) Fabrizi was never funnier, especially in the scenes of him teaching Lollobrigida to dance by flouncing his ample bulk around in the manner of a showgirl on a makeshift catwalk that collapses under his weight, but his character also accommodates endearing moments of passion, persuasion, and pathos. It's hard to find fault with any of the film's performances; Tamara Lees is perhaps the most moving of all, as the ice goddess who cannot even shed a tear before taking her own life. Lollobrigida, in her breakout role, had the good fortune to portray a developing character: a young woman who is allowed to transform onscreen from a shy, vulnerable-looking young woman into a glamorous, voluptuous showgirl; she demonstrates considerable range in the part and, performing her own songs, she also sings well.

Though not as obvious a cinematographic *tour de force* as Costa's *I pagliacci (amore tragico)*, *Vita da cani* shows Bava continuing to evolve a



RITA *(Gina Lollobrigida) electrifies an audience with her performance of Nino Rota's "Equador."*

potent signature style. The early scenes involving Franca are heavily latticed with light and shadow, emphasizing her feelings of imprisonment, while she and Carlo stand somehow apart from them, occupying the same tenebrations of intimacy. When she expresses her feelings to Carlo, Mastroianni turns on a hanging lamp, lighting only one side of his face, perfectly visualizing his divisive shock, while the shadows on Lees' face are softer, more resolute and decisive. As she makes her exit, pausing in the doorway to say, "*Addio, Carlo*," the light on her face could not possibly be whiter or colder. There is a certain consistent suavity in the film's use of shadow, but the style only overwhelms the realistic stance of the film when it's dealing with Franca, whose unrealistic expectations of life are her real prison. As her tragic story arc progresses, the lighting becomes more grimly stylized—in fact, the look of these scenes anticipates the chilly yet velvety atmosphere of Bava's *Sei donne per l'assassino/ Blood and Black Lace*. At the moment she takes her own life, Bava makes the choice of not following her as she walks out of frame; instead, the camera remains focused on the pair of lovely, ornate, painted doors that she closes behind her before exiting frame to leap quietly from a window—the first of Bava's beautiful deaths.

A scene in a hotel bedroom shared by four of the showgirls is also a standout, with the women softly lit while the only visible light sources are a pair of lamps—foregrounded and backgrounded—both in the shape of a flower, both glowing brightly, and the light peering through an arrow-like arrangement of shutter slats. When Vera sits beside the foregrounded lamp to write a letter, she dampens its light by placing a newspaper over it, which Bava complements with the choreographed brightening of a secondary keylight. Here, as Vera's roommates prepare for bed hazily in the background, Bava appears to be temporarily without the deep focus lens that was in his arsenal for *Quel bandito sono io!*; the movie contains several instances of noticeable focus adjustment from foreground to background, as the content of a scene demands. At times, such as during an argument that breaks out when a strange woman recognizes Rita in a bar, Bava cleverly creates the illusion of deep focus by arranging the actors of the foreground and background on the same approximate plane, or field of focus, while emphasizing the "foregrounded" actors with key lighting.

Bava also photographed Gina Lollobrigida splendidly. Her early scenes are carefully lit to prevent her from standing out in any way, but after her "Ecuador" performance, the actress' hair and bare shoulders are suddenly caressed with luminous backlighting to lend her enchantment, and another light is positioned to compliment her bosom when she pivots to one side. The moment was apparently not missed on Howard Hughes, who—evidently in response to her appearance in *Vita da cani*—invited Lollobrigida to come to Hollywood and sign an exclusive seven-year contract with him and RKO. She agreed, arriving in Los Angeles on June 22, 1950, whereupon she began taking English lessons. It was a slow process, however, and by October, Gina's husband Milko Skofic (whom she married in 1949) began to complain. Putting her marriage first, the actress flew back to Rome despite her contract and the anger of Hughes; it was a wise move because, by this time, RKO was already a ghost of its former standing in the Hollywood community, and Hughes produced only three more films subsequent to 1950. Lollobrigida's marriage, on the other hand, survived until she and Skofic divorced in 1966.

10 The Lattuada–Fellini film also features a diverse variety troupe of colorful performers, but narrows its focus to a single, ambitious young girl (Carla Del Poggio, Lattuada's wife) who wants to break into show business via Peppino De Filippo's humble company. As in *Vita da cani*, the impresario is talked into hiring a beautiful young girl he meets on a train, while everyone else is sleeping, and he soon falls in love, only to have his heart broken as she passes him on the showbiz ladder.

Hollywood on the Tiber

Simultaneously with Gina Lollobrigida's and Marcello Mastroianni's steps into the spotlight in *Vita da cani*, another young Roman actress—Sofia Scicolone—was making made her screen debut as a slave girl in a Metro–Goldwyn–Mayer spectacle being shot at Cinecittà. That actress would be remembered by her future screen name, Sophia Loren; that production—Mervyn LeRoy's *Quo vadis* (a color remake of the silent classic), starring Robert Taylor, Deborah Kerr and Peter Ustinov—would be remembered as the film that changed everything. In its wake, Rome became known as "Hollywood on the Tiber."

Filmed in Rome in an effort to liberate billions of MGM *lire* held captive in Roman banks, *Quo Vadis* was the first major Hollywood production to be filmed in the Eternal City since Fred Niblo's *Ben-Hur: A Tale of the Christ* fell victim to catastrophic accidents and pre-war ideological tensions. That experience, in addition to the devastating commercial failure of the 1924 German-Italian co-production of *Quo Vadis*, had so impressed itself on the Italian film industry that there had been few subsequent attempts to revive the native genre of the Ancient Roman spectacle. Carmine Gallone's *Scipione l'Africano* (1937)—whose titles Bava had designed at the Istituto LUCE—was one of two notable exceptions, but in its depiction of the titular Roman senator bent on global conquest, it was readily interpreted (indeed, by Mussolini himself) as a Fascist allegory, a declaration and affirmation of national politics and purpose, rather than as an escapist fantasy.

The other exception was Alessandro Blasetti's *Fabiola* (1949), a French-Italian remake of Enrico Guazzoni's 1916 silent epic which—budgeted at 500 million *lire* [$312,000]—is said to have been the most expensive film produced in Italy up to that time. (In Italy alone, it recouped slightly more than this investment.) *Fabiola* was essentially a whodunit set in Ancient Rome, as emperor Fabius Severus (Michel Simon) is bludgeoned to death on the eve of his liberation of his Christian slaves, an act falsely blamed on the Christian gladiator Rhual (Henri Vidal)—the secret paramour of the King's daughter Fabiola (Michele Morgan)—by members of a disapproving senate. The principally French cast was complemented by outstanding supporting performances by the key players of Blasetti's *La corona di ferro*—Massimo Girotti (as Sebastian, the martyred leader of the Christian underground) and Gino Cervi as the guard Quadratus—and once again, it was magnificently photographed in black-and-white by Mario Craveri and crisply edited by Mario Serandrei, whose name now habitually appeared on all of the best features coming out of Rome. Though more somber and ultimately not as rousing as Blasetti's earlier masterpiece, *Fabiola* is also historically noteworthy for the viciousness of its arena sequences. Here, Christians are not only fed to the lions, but graphically nailed to cruciform displays, burned alive, tied to poles and used to bludgeon other Christians tied to other poles, dropped from high towers, even dismembered with cleavers. In shots that retain their capacity to shock half a century later, one female victim is stripped nude before she is slain, and we are also shown a young man in a lion den, dazed in the post-traumatic shock of having one of his legs eaten off. Covered in black blood, his stump flails in such a way that an actual amputee must have been used.



US *lobby card.*

Fabiola was a tremendous success throughout Europe, and its popularity—not to mention the desire to spend otherwise unspendable millions—surely prompted MGM to undertake their new version of MGM's *Quo Vadis*. The film was such a major event in Rome that Harriet White—the first American actress to relocate to Rome with the express goal of working in the Italian film industry, who subsequently won starring roles in Rossellini's *Paisà*/*Paisan* and Primo Zeglio's *Genoveffa di Brabante* (1947)—illustrated the enormous gulf between Italian and American films by consenting to play a 5-second cameo in the picture. As Nero (Peter Ustinov) reluctantly walks onto his balcony to greet his public, White can be seen hoisting a small infant into the air and crying, "Look, my baby! The Emperor!" She remembered that the extras were paid the equivalent of five dollars and a *cestina* (or "box lunch"); she also remembered getting into a fistfight that day with a fellow extra, who recognized and taunted the "big star" for "slumming." Later taking the name of her husband, art director Gastone Medin, Harriet White Medin would become one of the best-loved character actors associated with Mario Bava's body of work.

Quo Vadis (the question mark dropped, the untranslated title was seldom questioned by US audiences) became such a big hit for MGM that it prompted the American release of



VITTORIO GASSMAN *is the unlikely hero of* IL LEONE DI AMALFI, *an early Pietro Francisci pepla.*

Fabiola by United Artists in 1951—in censored, restructured, and newly narrated form. (The same version was also released in Great Britain, by New Realm Pictures, under the more cumbersome title *Fighting Gladiator and Fabiola*.) *Quo Vadis* not only helped to reestablish a market for this kind of Italian product, but its elaborate sets were left standing at Cinecittà for a time, to be subsequently reused by Italian productions like Mario Soldati's *O.K. Nerone* (1950). Thus began the tradition of popular Italian cinema aping the recent successes from America.

Il leone di Amalfi

First released: 1950
B&W, 1.66:1, 90 minutes

Production: Oro Film, Laura Film. **Distributor**: Oro Film.

È arrivato il cavaliere!

First released: December 6, 1950
B&W, 1.66:1, 92 minutes

Production: ATA (Artisti Tecnici Associati), Excelsa Film.
Distributor: Minerva Film.

Mario Bava's colleague in documentary filmmaking, Pietro Francisci, was one of the first directors to stake a claim in this new era of Italian costume epics, beginning with *Il leone di Amalfi* ("The Lion of Amalfi," 1950, a.k.a. *Il ribelle di Amalfi*, "The Rebel of Amalfi"), shot at Safa–Palatino Studios. The film starred Vittorio Gassman as the son of the leader of the Amalfi republic, imprisoned by his father's enemy (Carlo Ninchi) since childhood, who with the help of two women conspires to overthrow his jailers and return triumphant to his homeland. Still at work on *Vita da cani*, Bava was unavailable to photograph the picture, but he was free by the final week of special effects photography and stepped in to provide his



A COMIC *cheesecake shot from* È ARRIVATO IL CAVALIERE!

friends, Francisci and art director Flavio Mogherini, with some uncredited assistance. In the words of actor–screenwriter Fiorenzo Fiorentini, "In *Il leone di Amalfi*, the palace of Saladin was only a model built by Bava, but it looked like an immense castle right out of a fairy tale!" [11]

Vita da cani and *Il leone di Amalfi* performed similarly well at the boxoffice, earning 253 and 256 million *lire* [$158,000 and $159,000] respectively, proving that Italian audiences were warming once again to films of escapist fantasy. Both pictures were tales of people triumphing over adversity, but the more realistic treatment proved less financially successful. (It should be mentioned that Lattuada–Fellini's *Luci dei varietà* performed only half so well, earning a mere 117 million *lire* [$73,000] upon its release.)

Bava and Mogherini closed out the year together by collaborating on a new film for Monicelli and Steno: *È arrivato il cavaliere!* ("The Knight Arrived!"), an unenthusiastically received comedy starring Tino Scotti, which was followed the next year by a third collaboration far more significant.

Guardie e ladri

First released: November 29, 1951
B&W, 1.66:1, 109 minutes

Production: Ponti–De Laurentiis Cinematografica. **Distributor**: Lux Film. **Denmark**: 5/11/53. **Finland**: 9/24/54. **France**: *Gendarmes et Voleurs*, 1981. **Germany**: *Räuber und Gendarm*, Neue Filmkunst, 1957. **Mexico**: *Mi Amigo el Ladron*, "My Friend the Thief."

One of the most beloved films from Mario Bava's years as a cameraman is *Guardie e ladri* ("Cops and Robbers"), co-directed by Monicelli and Steno for Lux Film. It was the first production of the renamed Ponti–De Laurentiis Cinematografica—formerly ATA—and the only official collaboration between Bava and Italy's premier screen comedian, Totò (1898–1967).

Born Antonio de Curtis, Totò was a long-faced Neapolitan music hall performer who first found fame on the Italian stage. He made the transition to movies in his late 30s, with *Fermo con le mani* (1937), and his dour, strong-jawed, basset hound face—a dual mask of tragedy and comedy, at once handsome and ridiculous—captivated audiences. His star billing was rapidly elevated to the very titles of such screen parodies as *Totò le mokò* (1950) and *Totò Tarzan* (1951). He joined forces in early 1950 with Monicelli and Steno, on *Totò cerca casa* ("Totò Looks for a House," which immediately preceded *Vita da cani*), and it was the genius of the two directors to recognize in Totò's shifty, sad-faced demeanor a reflection of the current Italian spirit, an embodiment of the survival instincts brought out by the recent war; an individual pride compromised, but never broken, by defeat. The Totò–Monicelli–Steno troika lasted for eight films, until the dissolution of the directors' partnership in 1954. Afterwards, Totò continued to work separately with both directors; Steno made him the subject of the first Italian film photographed in color (by Tonino della Colli): *Totò a colori* ("Totò in Color," 1952), and Monicelli finally elevated the local hero to international celebrity with *I soliti ignoti*/*Big Deal on Madonna Street* (1958).



ITALIAN *locandina.*

Guardie e ladri is the story of an unlikely friendship. Half of this friendship is Ferdinando Esposito (Totò), an aging man who supports his family of five in the postwar years by fleecing American tourists. We first meet him posing as a city guard and persuading Mr. Locuzzo (William C. Tubbs) to buy a phony Roman coin for $100 American, with the help of his American colleague "The Professor" (Aldo Giuffré). Locuzzo sees through the deception minutes later, but it's too late: Ferdinando is already gone. Later that day, a local theater is hosting the distribution of CARE packages to the local poor from an American philanthropic organization, and Ferdinando corrals a group of kids to make himself look needy and con his way inside with free admission. Supervising the program is Locuzzo, who recognizes him and sends the on-duty security cop, Lorenzo Bottoni (Fabrizi), in hot pursuit. Bottoni becomes the second half of this friendship. A lengthy, comically slow chase of the aging crook by the obese policeman ends with the two exhausted men having a philosophical conversation about whether, technically, Bottoni caught his man or Fernando got away. When they disagree, the chase resumes . . . until Bottoni slaps on the handcuffs, which Fernando escapes while feigning a

11 Franca Faldini and Goffredo Fofi, "The Fofi Papers," *Spaghetti Cinema* 72, July 2000, 2–12.





visit to the restroom. Locuzzo raises a stink at police headquarters, and Bottoni's superior (Pietro Carloni) informs him that he must recapture the crook or lose his job. Finding Ferdinando's photo and address on file in the department archives, Bottoni begins a stakeout from the barber shop opposite Ferdinando's apartment building, and initiates friendships between the children of their two families to get to his quarry. This scheme backfires when the suggestion of a family meeting is mistaken for a dinner invitation, which is enthusiastically met with a visit from the Esposito family—including Ferdinando's elderly, card-shark father (Ernesto Almirante), his wife Donata (Pina Piovani), and three children—but no Ferdinando, who remains in hiding in their freezing apartment. There is another unforeseen side effect when Bottoni shadows Ferdinando's eldest son to a secret assignation; he summons assistance from other patrolmen in the vicinity, but it turns out that the young man is not meeting his father, but Bottoni's own daughter (an early screen appearance by the future Helen of Troy, Rosanna Podestà)! After being chastised by his wife for his rudeness, Ferdinando goes to Signora Bottoni (Ave Ninchi) with an apologetic bouquet of flowers—a tribute taken from a graveyard—and the reciprocation of an invitation to dinner. As the hour approaches, Ferdinando loses courage and prepares to duck out, but encounters the arriving Bottoni family at the bottom of the stairs. As always, Ferdinando tries to charm his way out of arrest, citing the needs of his family, but Bottoni responds by explaining the needs of his own family, a family that will also suffer if he doesn't "get his man." The two families dine together, and—though "The Professor" arrives dressed as a priest, part of an escape plan—Ferdinando turns him away, agreeing to take his "three or four months" of prison. But by now, Bottoni feels such a kinship to the crook that he can't bring himself to arrest Ferdinando, who must once again use his charm to make the officer do what must be done . . .

Totò and Fabrizi were a perfect match—combining the fat and the

LORENZO *captures his prey, but not for long.*

THE BOTTONI FAMILY *(Ave Ninchi, Aldo Fabrizi, Carlo Delle Piane) at home.*

FERDINANDO *charms a cemetery icon for the free loan of some flowers.*

BAVA*'s lighting foreshadows prison as Ferdinando and Lorenzo have a heart-to-heart.*





lean, the flamboyant and the humble, the low-key and the apoplectic, the artful dodger and the seemingly artless pursuer; both actors were also particularly gifted at projecting a sense of humanity. Fabrizi is brilliant from his very first scene: in uniform, he looks serious and comic, funny yet also poignant, an object of fun but never of ridicule. Totò's performance is initially broader, but as his character reaches a dramatic crisis—realizing how his family has suffered from his clandestine lifestyle—it deepens significantly, and his farewells to his individual family members as he prepares to leave for prison are genuinely moving. Italy's top comedians would work together again several times after this initial success, beginning with *Una di quelle*, directed by Fabrizi himself in 1953.

Guardie e ladri also perpetuated Fabrizi's onscreen alliance with rotund actress Ave Ninchi (1915–97), who first appeared as his wife in *Natale al Campo 119* and had reprised this continually renamed character as recently as *Parigi ë sempre Parigi/Paris Is Always Paris* (also 1951). Fabrizi and Ninchi were a great comic duo—the archetypal Italian *papà e mamma*, two sweet people always at each other's throats—and some of their greatest collaborations were still ahead of them. *Guardie e ladri* was the second film for young Libyan actress Rosanna Podestà, who may have been recommended for the film by Ave Ninchi, who had previously worked with her in the children's film *I sette nani alla riscossa/Seven Dwarfs to the Rescue* (1951), a sequel to "Snow White" directed in Rome by the mysterious, Cleveland-born Paolo William Tamburella (1910–51).

Bava approached the filming of *Guardie e ladri* in a neorealistic style, which was imposed on him by the working-class nature of the story, the winter schedule (the actors' breath is sometimes visible indoors) and the desolate scenery, which Bava frequently imbues with a dimension of hope by including Michelangelo's Dome of St. Peter's in the Vatican Basilica in the background of the rubble-strewn exteriors. Interior shots are predominantly natural looking, with the occasional stylized glimpse of the unused or unlit (actually, very creatively lit) room. As he was adopting as a trademark practice, Bava also brought a natural aspect to the setbound interiors by using various goboes and props to suggest a "fourth wall" in his compositions, projecting the shadows of non-existent window frames and flora onto background surfaces. The scenes in the respective apartments of Totò and Fabrizi were shot in the studio, but Bava's clever "fourth wall" lighting makes them utterly convincing as actual locations. Only once does Bava indulge in symbolic lighting, during the conversation between the two leads prior to their "last supper"; after a lengthy dialogue exchange that graduates from medium shots to over-the-shoulder close-ups as the two men reach a sobering agreement, Bava adjusts to a high angle framing both men, who are shown beside a large square of crosshatched light apparently cast through a barred window.

Both Totò and Fabrizi were short men, and Bava increases both in stature by documenting the story in predominantly low angles, resorting to higher angles only when wishing to show Ferdinando at a disadvantage, or to emphasize the futility of the traps he sets for himself. Bava and his directors understood the importance of allowing the actors to dictate the comic pacing of scenes as often as possible, the film therefore contains a number of dialogue scenes conducted in long, single takes; it ends with an uninterrupted tracking shot that runs nearly two full minutes. If comedy is the juxtaposition of opposites, Bava also shows a deft knowledge of how to use the camera to create its own comic effects. For example, during the initial chase scene in the theater, long-shots of the actors cut unexpectedly to shots of the overwrought actors coming absurdly close to the lens, creating contrasts which are in themselves funny. Likewise, Bava's handling of the long chase sequence is comical in its technique; stationary shots that isolate the physical struggle of the individuals involved in the pursuit are intercut with mobile shots photographed from the lead, encompassing in depth Totò, Fabrizi, Tubbs, and the unpaid taxi driver, in which we perceive that everyone (hindered by weight, age, and poor condition) is actually running absurdly slowly, juxtaposing all their expended energy and desperation with a pathetic, yet hilariously dainty trot. Judging by the rubber tire tracks visible in the dirt, Bava captured these shots from a wagon-based dolly without laying track, a very innovative move at the time.

Asked what he remembers best about *Guardie e ladri*, camera operator Corrado Bartoloni says, "Well, the huge success of that movie is my greatest memory, the success of Monicelli. I also remember the end, when Totò has to feel sad. I remember he almost did not want to do this, because he had this personality, which was very difficult—but we had no problems with Monicelli."

Guardie e ladri was shown at the 1952 Cannes Film Festival, where jurors awarded it their top prize for Best Screenplay. (It was signed by no less than seven authors: Monicelli, Steno, Fabrizi, Vitaliano Brancati, Ennio Flaiano, and Ruggero Maccari, with story credited to Piero Tellini.) Later, Totò won the *Nastro d'argento* ("Silver Ribbon") for his performance, and the picture went on to become one of the year's top-grossing Italian films. It is regarded today as a classic of Italian neorealistic comedy.

Amor non ho! . . . però, però . . .

First released: December 7, 1951
B&W, 1.66:1, 90 minutes

Production: Excelsa Film.
Distributor: Minerva Film.

The bittersweet Excelsa Film comedy *Amor non ho! . . . però, però . . .* ("I Have No Lover! . . . However, However . . . ," 1951) was a fateful job for Bava, as it marked the first of several fruitful collaborations with director Giorgio Bianchi (1904–68) and gave him new opportunities to exalt the beauty of Gina Lollobrigida with his camera.

Giorgio Bianchi entered the film business as an assistant director to Amleto Palmeri—a writer–director from the earliest days of Italian cinema, who at a very young age had co-directed the Eleonora Duse film *Cenere*, photographed by Eugenio Bava—and specialized in romantic drama. *Amor non ho! . . . però, però . . .* was a vehicle not only for La Lollo, but also for Renato Rascel (b. Renato Ranucci, 1912–91), a diminutive, stocky, sad-faced comedian who started out in show business as a jazz drummer, a talent he displays in Bianchi's film in a nightclub sequence, when his character sits in with the New Orleans Jazz Band while eluding some armed gangsters. Rascel's brand of humor didn't travel well outside of Italy; his only American release was Steno's *Tempi duri per i vampiri/Uncle Was a Vampire*, a 1959 horror parody featuring Christopher Lee and Sylva Koscina, which launched the hit single, "Dracula Cha Cha Cha" by Bruno Martin.

Amor non ho! . . . però, però . . . is a winning mixture of woebegone romance, slapstick, and sentimentality that deliberately hearkens back to the silent era with its undercranked, high-speed chases and melodramatic storyline. Rascel stars as Teodoro Scutipizzo—the *shlemiehl* younger brother of Antonio (Luigi Pavese)—who earns his living by sitting inside a talking scale with his little dog Rof and telling people their weight in a *faux* electronic voice. One day, Teodoro loses his job when he finds himself tongue-tied by the ample bosom of a customer, whose jealous boyfriend tears the talking scale to pieces with his bare hands. While walking dejectedly home with Rof, Teodoro witnesses an attempted suicide by Gina (Lollobrigida), who in a fit of despondency over the wrongful arrest and conviction of her boyfriend, jumps off a bridge into the Alba river. Teodoro tries to save her, but as he is unable to swim, she ends up rescuing him instead. The wrathful Antonio insists that they both make up for his lost concession by working in his carnival sideshow. The timid Teodoro soon falls in love with Gina, whom he must always save from desperate attempts at self-annihilation, but his love runs afoul of his basic honesty when he discovers a newspaper item about Gina's lover. This leads him to the Mafia-run



ITALIAN *fotobusta featuring Gina Lollobrigida (Renato Rascel pictured in corner).*

Tabarin nightclub, where he successfully locates documents exonerating him. He dutifully steals them, eludes the gangsters, and delivers the proof of his innocence to the police. Meanwhile, Antonio has abducted Gina for his own carnal uses, and Teodoro must rescue her—although Gina ends up rescuing herself, and Teodoro as well. Returning home, Teodoro prepares to propose marriage, but just then, her boyfriend arrives a free man, and Gina leaves with him, without so much as a backward glance.

Amor non ho! . . . però, però . . . is of particular interest as the earliest *credited* collaboration of Bava, father and son. Eugenio Bava is acknowledged in the film's main titles as the designer of special effects, and the film contains two standout effects sequences: a delightfully sustained and well-synchronized triple exposure scene of Teodoro at the center of an argument between his "devil" and "angel" (both Rascel in appropriate costume) as he decides whether or not to present the evidence of his rival's innocence to the police; and, where Eugenio's talents surely came into play, a charming moment when Gina rests her head on Teodoro's shoulder and a nearby bush bursts into bloom with animated flowers.

Mario's contribution is also first-rate. Lollobrigida never looked more ravishing than she does here, skimpily dressed in a thin, tasseled bedspread after surviving her suicide swim, and Bava found a kindred spirit of sorts in production designer Mario Chiari, [12] who loaded Antonio's warehouse with turn-of-the-century bicycles, sagging draperies, dressmaker's helpers, Roman helmets, dolls, and dead clocks (whose hands are once pulled off for use in an impromptu swordfight)—the sort of darkly evocative ephemera that adorned the dwellings of the most disturbed characters in Bava's later films. But their greatest showpiece takes place in the "*Ramo d'Argento*" ("The Silver Branch") of the Tabarin nightclub, a two-tiered, fully-enclosed set that Bava introduces with one of his most impressively choreographed shots to date: a 90-second, tracking crane shot that manages to cover most of the twin-levelled set by following one character, and then another, and then another—adding to the story and situation with each transitory vignette—while the walls of the set are dazzled by a constant mesh of rotating, stencilled light.

12 Chiari (1909–89) was a Florentian production designer who had previously contributed to such important films as *La corona di ferro/The Iron Crown* (1941, also co-scripted), *Fabiola* (1949), and *Miracolo a Milano/Miracle in Milan* (1951). He would work with Bava again on *Terza liceo* (1954) and *Le avventure di Giacomo Casanova* (1955). In later years, he designed *Lo spettro/The Ghost* (1963), *Doctor Dolittle* (1967), and the Dino De Laurentiis remake of *King Kong* (1976).



La famiglia Passaguai

First released: December 20, 1951
B&W, 1.66:1, 75 minutes.

Production: Alfa Film.
Distributor: Rank Film.
Germany: *Aufruhr im Familienbad* ("Uproar at the Family Bath"), Rank, 1953.

La famiglia Passaguai fa fortuna

First released: February 20, 1952
B&W, 1.66:1, 75 minutes

Production: Alfa Film XXXVII.
Distributor: Rank Film.

Papà diventa Mamma

First released: September 25, 1952
B&W, 1.66:1, 84 minutes

Production: Alfa Film XXXVII.
Distributor: Rank Film.
Spain: *Papá se Convierte en Mamá*, Rey Soria Films

Despite the style and ingenuity he had brought to their collaborations, Mario Bava was not destined to work more than once with Totò or Renato Rascel; it was a deliberate choice, apparently, as he found neither of them particularly likeable. Instead, Bava found his greatest *simpatia* with a man whom many consider Italy's greatest postwar comedian, and also one of its most talented actors, writers, and directors: Aldo Fabrizi.

Fabrizi got along so famously with Bava that he recruited him to photograph a series of comedies he had chosen for his return to the director's chair. The first of these was *La famiglia Passaguai* ("The Passaguai Family," 1951), based on Anton Germano Rossi's comedic story *La cabina 124* ("Cabin 124"), published in 1931. A comedy of errors built around an ordinary Italian family's cursed attempts to spend a pleasant day together at the beach, *La famiglia Passaguai* is a gem of riotous, slapstick comedy, but never far removed from underpinnings of neorealistic bittersweetness and warm humanity. (The name "Passaguai" itself suggests finding a way to overcome one's troubles.)

The film starred Fabrizi himself as the endearingly apoplectic patriarch Valenzi Passaguai; Ave Ninchi as his huge, jealous, argumentative wife Margherita; Giovanna Ralli as their attractively maturing daughter Marcella; Carlo Delle Piane (one of the great faces in Italian cinema of this period) as her mercenary, younger brother Pecorino [the name of a popular ewe cheese]; and Giancarlo Zarfati as Gnappetta, the *piccolo* of the family, who communicates with the world almost exclusively in raspberries. Complicating Peppe's day at the beach—as they do during his days at the office—are Mazza (Peppino De Filippo), a womanizing twit accountant; Viletti (Tino Scotti), his overbearing shrimp-of-a-boss; and his very decorative secretary Marisa (Nyta Dover), who types maybe three words a minute.



THE PASSAGUAI FAMILY, *from left to right: Ave Ninchi, la piccolo Giancarlo Zarfati, Carlo Delle Piane, Aldo Fabrizi and Giovanna Ralli.*

ITALIAN *promotional banner.*

Making matters worse are the dogged presence of Enrico (Pietro De Vico), the much-detested boyfriend of daughter Marcella, three eavesdropping old busybodies snooping on everything that transpires in the Passaguais' beachside dressing room, and a certain *Signore* Treppi (Luigi Pavese), who cannot seem to buy a refreshing watermelon that Valenzi's incessant bungling does not break, and whose attractive wife Iole (Iole Sylvani) keeps finding her way quite innocently into Valenzi's arms.

Released at Christmas time, the film proved so popular with audiences that two sequels followed in short order, also photographed by Bava: *La famiglia Passaguai fa fortuna* ("The Passaguai Family Get Rich") and *Papà diventa Mamma* ("Papa Becomes Mama"). A master of tragedy and comedy and those places where the two intertwine, Fabrizi was comparable as an actor and personality to Jackie Gleason, and the *Passaguai* series could reasonably be called the Italian equivalent of *The Honeymooners*.

"It would make me so happy to see it again!" Bava exclaimed when reminded of this project. "I remember people laughing their eyes out when it played the Cinema Imperial in Rome. We worked from a script that said nothing more than 'Fabrizi buys a watermelon, Pavese does something else, etc.,' and we had a contest every day to see who could dream up the most jokes. We almost died laughing!" [13]



PEPPE's *nightmare in* LA FAMIGLIA PASSAGUAI FA FORTUNA: *Bava's first extended sequence of surreal cinematic horror.*

Macario, a popular comedian from Turin) while bumming a ride in the Alfa Romeo of his wealthy landlord, the great stage actor Gardini (Luigi Pavese). Embarrassed that he has not been as successful as his dapper-looking friend, Peppe takes advantage of the misunderstanding and passes himself off as a millionaire, expecting their paths will not cross again. On the contrary, Giocondo is broke too, and he decides to pose as a Count to lure Peppe into joining him as a partner in a new construction company. Peppe—smelling money—agrees, not realizing that it is *his* imaginary millions which are expected to underwrite the scheme.

La famiglia Passaguai fa fortuna is not as funny as its predecessor, because much of its humor arises from troubles that the protagonists get into by their own volition, rather than finding themselves victimized time and again by hilariously escalating cosmic circumstances outside themselves. Even the

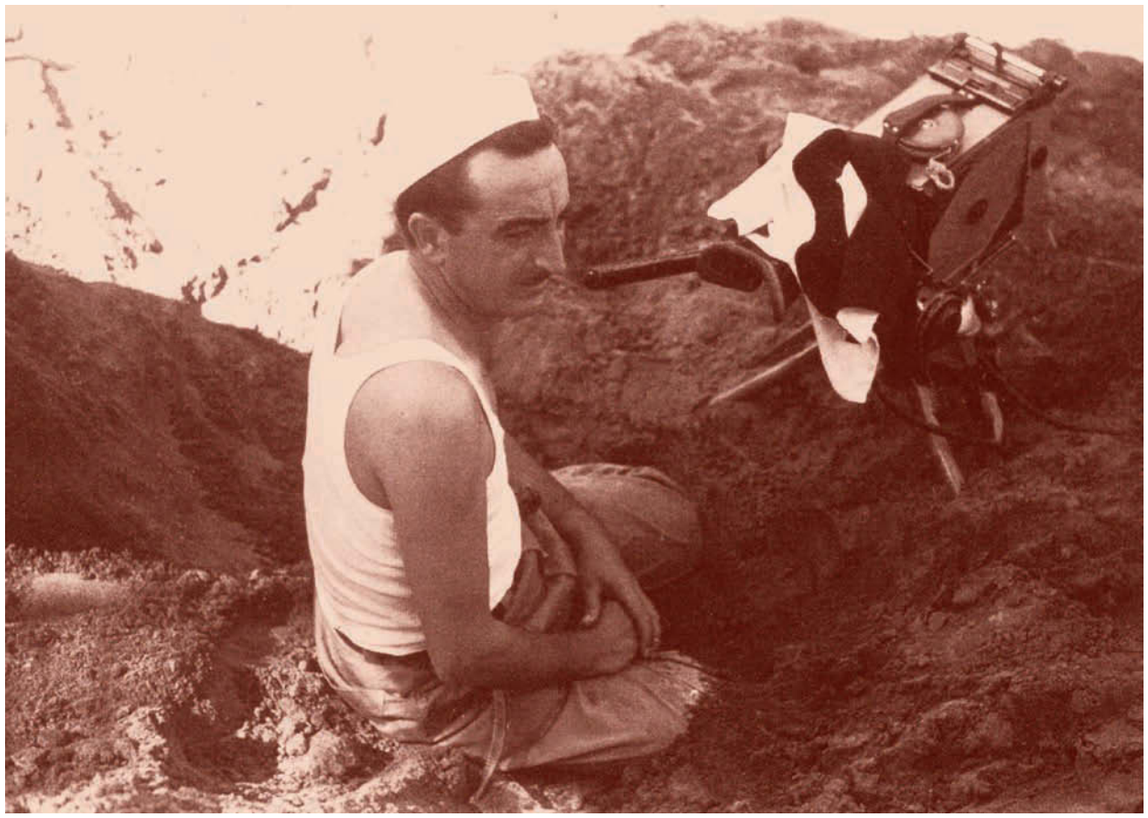


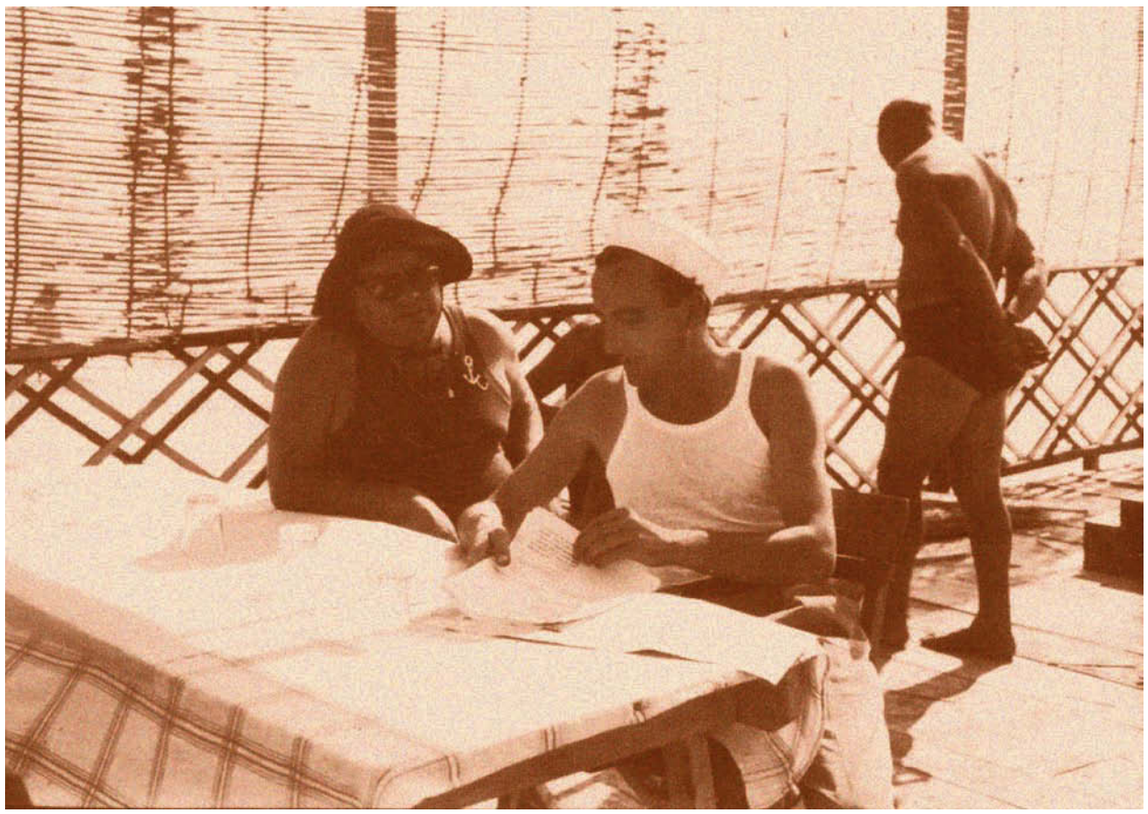
AVE NINCHI *turns her back as Aldo Fabrizi's day on the beach is complicated by a run-in with office co-worker Peppino De Filippo.*

Filmed in Fiumicino under the title *Un mare di guai* ("A Sea of Troubles"), the largely improvised production was completed in twenty-nine days—somewhat less than the standard six-week schedule of most Italian features. The violent chemistry between Fabrizi and Ninchi was a thing of beauty, and benefitted from their longterm working relationship; Fabrizi had been the star of Ninchi's first film, *Circo equestre Za-Bum* ("Za-Bum Equestrian Circus," 1946), and she had played his wife at least twice previously, in the Rome flashbacks of *Natale al Campo 119* and in Fabrizi's own directorial debut, *Emigrantes*. Audiences loved them together.

In *La famiglia Passaguai fa fortuna*, Valenzi (who now goes by the nickname Peppe) is recognized by old friend Giocondo Diotallevi (Erminio

13 Abruzzese.





MARIO BAVA *on location during the beachfront filming of LA FAMIGLIA PASSAGUAI: between takes, conferring with actor–director Aldo Fabrizi, twirling pasta.*

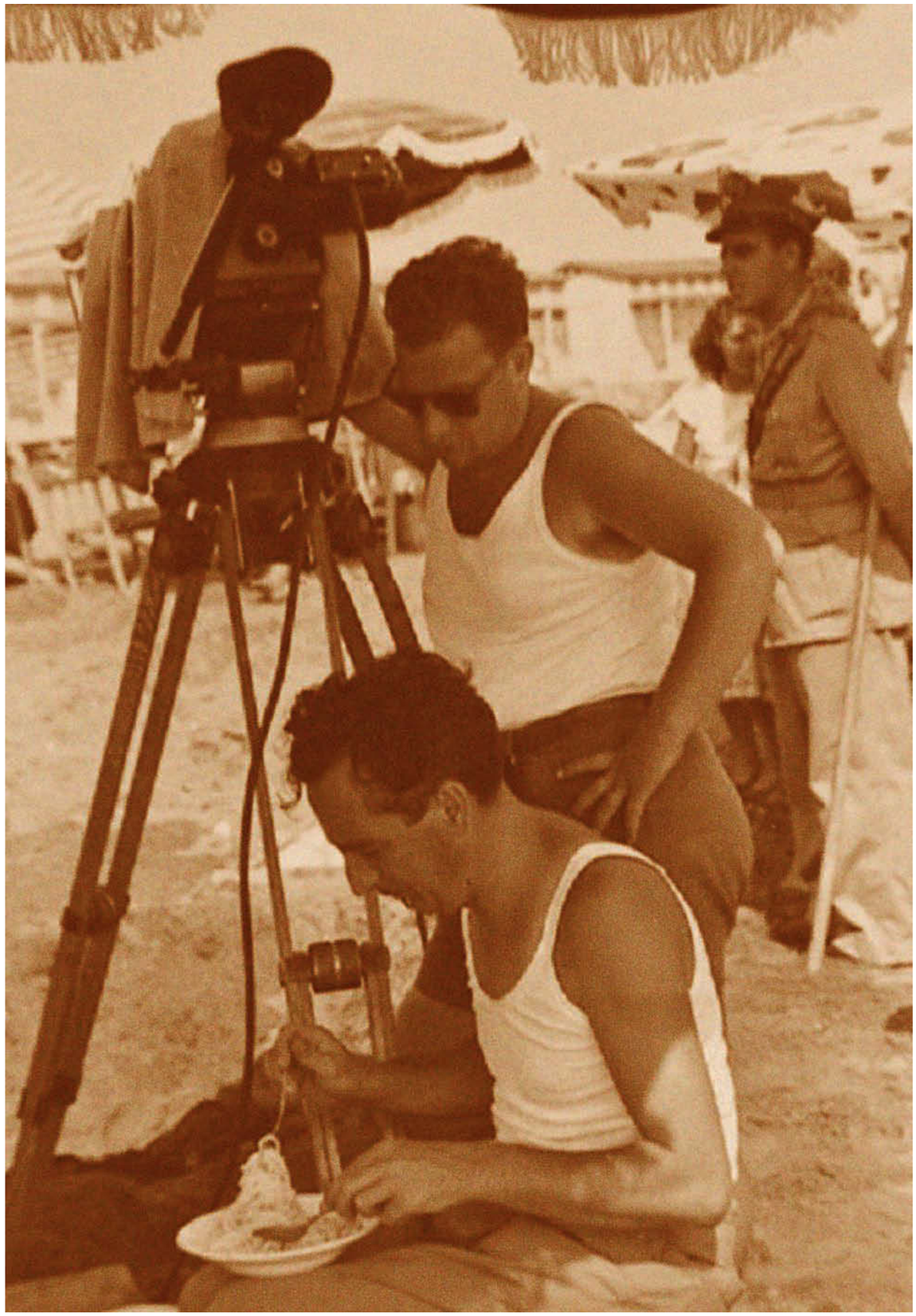
film's best moments are too highly strung with nervous tension, such as the sequence in which Peppe borrows Gardini's lavish apartment to misrepresent it as his own to Giocondo, his "Countess" wife (Marisa Merlini), and his colleagues. As Gardini plays the role of the Passaguai butler, the guests manhandle his irreplaceable valuables with Peppe's amiable indulgence; the humor of the sequence is overwhelmed by uncomfortable suspense over what will break first: the valuable antiques, or Gardini's façade, as he threatens to lose his patience with these fatuous intruders.

However, the film contains one great sequence of paramount interest to the story of Bava's own creative development: When Peppe is finally goaded by his associates into lending his worthless signature to a personal check for many millions, the scene cuts abruptly to an expressionistic nightmare sequence. Peppe is shown in a striped jail uniform, screaming behind bars. Outside, a tempest rages. His daughter, in tears, reproaches him from outside the barred window—and transforms into one of Giocondo's associates in a woman's wig! Apparitions of his son Pecorino, dressed in Napoleon garb, pop up and down like a jack-in-a-box from a hole in the ground. Faces viewed through bevelled prisms laugh. As Peppe wrenches his prison bars in panic, the camera pulls back to reveal them as part of a hanging grating that can easily be walked around to freedom! At this new vantage, even the roaring winds visible on the cyclorama outside the prison walls are revealed as occupying only half the sky . . . which is now obviously a stage cyclorama. As Peppe runs through the artificial tempest—the shadows of tree branches revolving on the studio sky behind him—Napoleon races after him and leaps onto his back! The shock awakens the guilt-stricken Peppe, who finds himself at home in bed.

This sequence is an early milestone in Bava's creative arc because—however amusing it was intended to be, and is—it represents his first attempt

at filming a sequence of a surreal, psychological, frightening nature. Predictably, the sequence reveals a definite knack for this kind of thing, but what is most startling is the extent to which it prophesies many shots and themes that would later resurface in Bava's own work as a director. The images of Pecorino popping out of the ground are very reminiscent of the reviving dead in the last reel of *Ercole al centro della terra/Hercules in the Haunted World*, and indeed the moment in which he hops onto Peppe's back and rides him like a devil indicates that Bava had already read Nikolai Gogol's story "Viy," which would later become the basis of his directorial debut, *La maschera del demonio/Black Sunday*. Most amazing of all is the way the sequence sets up shots only to rip away the illusions of cinema that produced them, often with only the slightest, slyest movement of the camera, making this the earliest example in Bava's work of perhaps the major theme of his directorial *oeuvre*: the wisdom of not trusting in what we can see with our own eyes. As such, the sequence is very much a dry run for the famous, Pirandello-like ending of his 1963 omnibus feature *I tre volti della paura/Black Sabbath*.

The series' third and final entry, *Papà diventa Mamma*, is more successful as comedy than its immediate predecessor, though still not up to the high standards of the original *La famiglia Passaguai*. Here, Peppe—now working as a clothier—returns home after a very hard day, only to be dragged by his family, against his will, to an evening performance by the great hypnotist Bhorma (Luigi Pavese again!). After Bhorma demonstrates his talent by transforming a tall, skinny man into a boxer, a radio announcer into a man with speech impediments, and a humorless fellow (Alfredo Rizzo, the future star of *L'ultima preda del vampiro/The Playgirls and the Vampire*, 1960) into a man with a chronic laugh, Margherita beseeches the turbanned entertainer to do something to change her husband. When Peppe can describe himself only as a "*padre de famiglia*" ("the father of a family"), Bhorma tells him that he will then become a "*madre di famiglia.*" After planting this suggestion in Peppe's subconscious, Bhoma falls off the stage and descends into a deep coma. What follows is a dramatic *tour de force* for





IN PAPÀ DIVENTA MAMMA, *a stage hypnotist chooses Peppe Passaguai as his subject, convincing him that he is the mother of his family.*

Fabrizi, who suddenly adopts feminine characteristics—wearing his wife's nightgown and bonnet to bed, stealing her facial cream, sewing loose buttons on his son's jacket, ironing and doing the laundry to the dismay of neighboring washer women. In the meantime, Margherita takes over Peppe's job at the clothing store, where she falls victim to the same jealous misunderstandings that formerly plagued her husband. When Bhorma recovers from his coma, the Passaguai family goes to his hospital bed to put an end to Peppe's spell, but the hypnotist's eyes are crossed and his command "You will no longer be a woman, but a man! A man! A man!" misses Peppe altogether and influences Margherita, who suddenly becomes very butch! A climactic rooftop chase sets everything right, and the trilogy ends with Peppe and Margherita in their kitchen, restored to their proper roles, sharing a laugh, a kiss and a cuddle—their only laugh, kiss or cuddle in the entire series. It is a sweet farewell to characters who, by now, had become quite beloved.

Bava's cinematography in these three films is characteristic of his work during this period. Static sets and backgrounds are enlivened and complicated with projected "fourth wall" shadows of baroque ironwork, lacework, latticework, venetian blinds, or simple cut-out frameworks, the latter suggesting incoming light from unseen windows. Foreground information is also used with painterly sensitivity: in the first film, an otherwise balmy-looking beachfront store is turned into a sweat shop by placing an overworked fan with ragged streamers in the foreground right; in the second, an interior view of an old woman's hovel shows a cat trying to find comfort on a cot in the foreground, making the woman seem not only poor, but lonely. Aside from the nightmare sequence, there are few outstanding visual effects, but one remembers the impressive shot in *La famiglia Passaguai* that begins as a close-up of Fabrizi's suffering face, deep inside the crowded shuttlebus bound for the beach, which then pulls away as the bus accelerates, disappearing down the



long road; a similar shot in *Papà diventa Mamma*, in which Bava's camera jolts from the stage to the back of the Teatro Orpheum as Bhorma sends hypnotic commands into his audience, also commands attention. The latter film also contains an amusing scene in which the rotund Peppe, dressed in his wife's pajamas, cowers at the sight of a mouse—a trick prop attached to two strings which, when pulled apart at the rear, propel the mouse forward. A similar gadget—perhaps the very same one—would later figure in Bava's *Schock/Beyond the Door II* (1977).

Bava's visual ingenuity can also be felt in the funniest moment of the entire trilogy—in *La famiglia Passaguai*, when Peppe is buried in the sand by his children, leaving only his face exposed. When the children resume swimming, Peppe asks Margherita to cover his face with a handkerchief as a precaution to sunburn. After dutifully covering him, Margherita stands up from her own handkerchief to mind their toddler, and the wind blows it away. A helpful neighbor retrieves it, but moves it to the wrong side of Peppe—so, when Margherita returns, she plants her considerable heft right on her husband's face! Immediately feeling something is wrong, she jumps to her feet and looks dreadfully under the handkerchief, only to find Peppe's fat face smashed flat! (Bava photographed Fabrizi with the actor's face smooshed against a pane of glass.) Hilariously, Fabrizi's next two scenes initially avert his face only to reveal that his features are still flattened to one side, the revelation postponed longer and longer for richer comic effect. These trick shots are filmed entirely without light reflection or any other telltale signs that could have destroyed the illusion.

Fabrizi was a perfectionist, and surely one of the reasons he worked so well with Bava is that—however comfortable they became with one another—Bava was careful never to trespass on any of Fabrizi's many provinces. This sometimes meant holding his tongue, when Fabrizi did not accord him the same consideration and made decisions about special photographic effects.

"At one point, Fabrizi prepared a maquette of the now-famous saloon with the roof of a church," Bava remembered. "He had a tiny, complex, little thing built, with exact proportions; it cost quite a bundle. For fifteen days, the set designers and a ten-man crew labored to finish this thing. Then the day of shooting came; the lighting had to be just right, so we shot a zillion tests. I knew that we could have achieved the same effect by getting a photograph, trimming it, and pasting it on a sheet of glass, but I didn't say anything. I wasn't a meddler." [14]



RAF VALLONE *as the soccer hero of GLI EROI DELLA DOMENICA.*

Gli eroi della domenica

First released: December 30, 1952
B&W, 1.66:1, 98 minutes

Production: Rizzoli Film. **Distributor**: Cineriz. **Finland**: 4/23/54. **Germany**: *Die Helden des Sonntags*, ZDF (German TV), 6/25/72. **Spain**: *Los Héros del Domingo*, Cipesa Films.

Bava next photographed *Gli eroi della domenica* ("Sunday's Heroes"), the story of a girl (Cosetta Greco) who determines to corrupt the star player of her local soccer team (Raf Vallone) on the eve of an important game. The film, which featured Marcello Mastroianni in a secondary role, was directed by Mario Camerini and scripted by four different men, including Dino Risi, Franco Brusati, Lionello De Felice (Blasetti's assistant director on *La corona di ferro* and *Fabiola*) and, significantly, Ennio De Concini.

Born December 9, 1923, in Rome, De Concini began his career in collaboration in 1947, as a contributor to the script of Goffredo Alessandrini's *L'ebreo errante/The Wandering Jew*. In 1949, he formed an important alliance with Riccardo Freda, with whom he co-authored the screenplays of the Freda films *Il tradimento/Double Cross* (1949), *La vendetta di Aquila Nera* and *Vedi Napoli e poi muori/See Naples Then Die* (both 1951). Though neither man could have foretold it at the time, De Concini was destined to become the screenwriter for most of Bava's important films of the 1950s, and also the primary author of his directorial debut, *La maschera del demonio/Black Sunday*. Most of De Concini's script credits are shared, and it has been said by some eyewitnesses of the period that he was principally an idea man; that he would sell producers on a concept or a treatment, and leave the actual screenwriting to others. But, as we will see, there are thematic consistencies in De Concini's work that define him as something more than this.

Another important new alliance formed on this production was with Camerini's assistant director Paolo Heusch, who would later become a director in his own right and collaborate with Bava on the first Italian science fiction film, *La morte viene dallo spazio/The Day the Sky Exploded* (1958).

Though *Gli eroi della domenica* was a story absolutely rooted in everyday realism, it nevertheless called for Bava to summon all his arts of visual deception. For example, the film's climactic match between Milan and Palermo, held in the San Siro Stadium in Milan, was shot entirely without any audience in attendance.

"No audience!" confirms Corrado Bartoloni. "Mario Bava and the director Camerini always were telling us camera operators not to get the audience seats in the picture—because they were all empty! We had a 'ground zero' camera shooting towards the sky, and also a high-angled camera shooting towards the field, and we tried like hell not to get in each other's way!"

Gli eroi della domenica opened to lukewarm reviews that did little more than compare it favorably to a similarly themed early talkie, Mario Bonnard's *Cinque à zero* ("Five to Zero," 1932). It failed at the boxoffice when it was released in early 1953, but today in Italy, where the interest in soccer is at an all-time high, the film plays so frequently on television it has become something of a national mainstay.

14 Ibid.





SPARTACO: *Sabina (Gianna Maria Canale) teaches Spartacus (Massimo Girotti) the meaning of temptation.*

Melodrama, Myth, and History

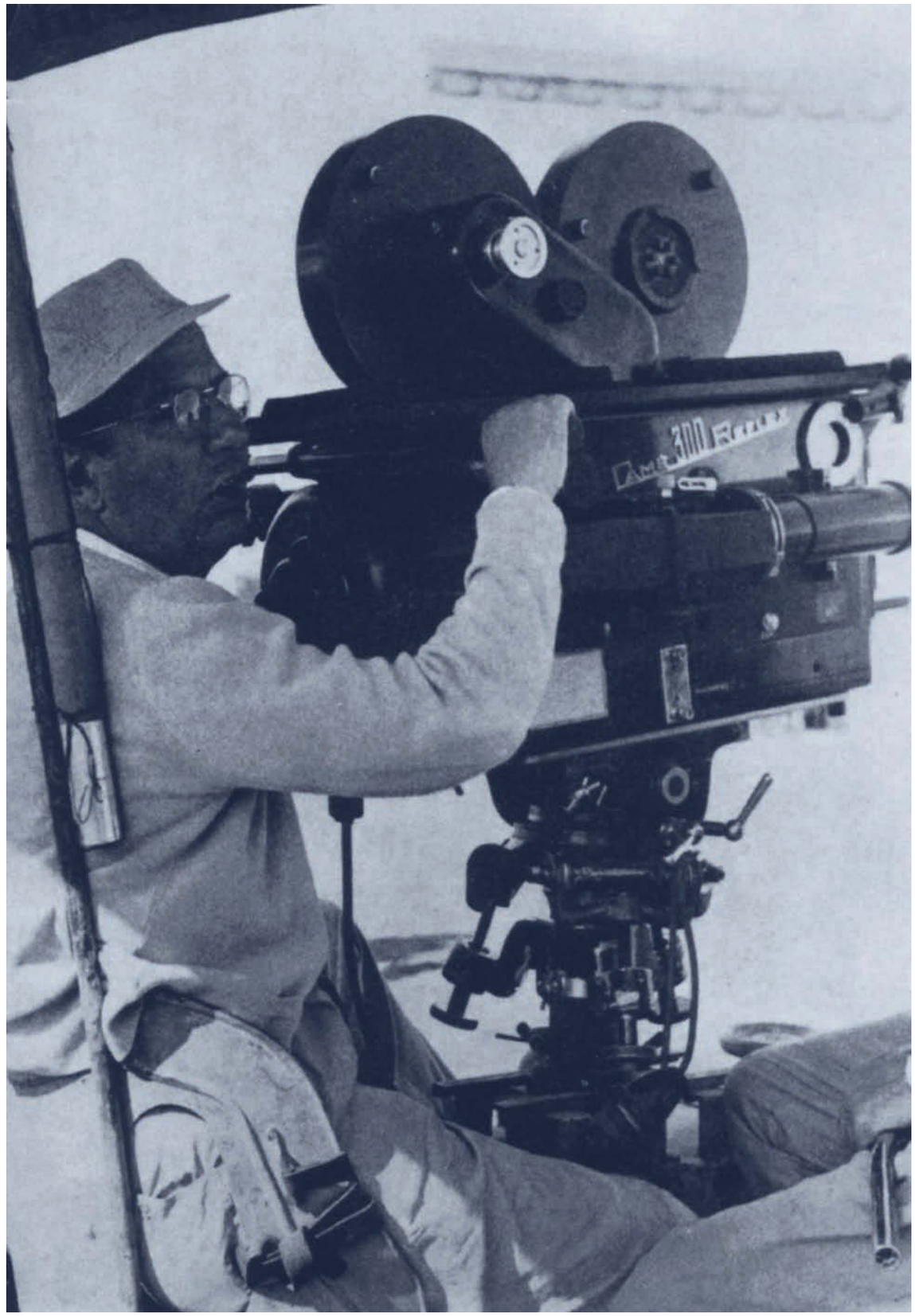
ANOTHER anonymous, but known, assignment of this period found Mario Bava lending a helping hand to Hungarian cameraman Gábor Pogány (1915–99), who was photographing an ambitious new screen version of the Spartacus legend. For reasons unknown, Pogány was unable to shoot the crucial arena sequence of this film and recommended Bava to his director—a man who would become his new mentor, and arguably the most important professional acquaintance of his entire career.

DIRECTOR *Riccardo Freda.*

Riccardo Freda was born to Neapolitan parents in Alexandria, Egypt, on February 24, 1909. He attended school in Italy as a child, completing secondary school in Milan after the first World War. He planned to study writing at University, but his interest in literature was soon eclipsed by his passion for sculpture. He consolidated his interests in writing and sculpture by working as an art critic, and his critical eye led him in turn to an increasing infatuation with the cinema. Freda entered Rome's film school, the Centro Sperimentale di Cinematografia, at the age of 24 and spent five years (1937–43) writing scripts for the likes of Gennaro Righelli, Giacomo Gentilomo, and Raffaello Matarazzo, before directing his first film, *Don Cesare di Bazan* (1942), at the age of 33. [1] He quickly established himself as an expert at crafting swashbuckling *romanzi* such as *Aquila nera/The Black Eagle* (1946, the screen debut of Gina Lollobrigida), *I miserabili/Les Miserables* (1947, the debut of Marcello Mastroianni), *Il cavaliere misterioso/The Gay Swordsman* (1947, starring Vittorio Gassman as Casanova), and *Il figlio di D'Artagnan/Son of D'Artagnan* (1950).

GIANNA MARIA CANALE, *promotional shot circa 1952.*

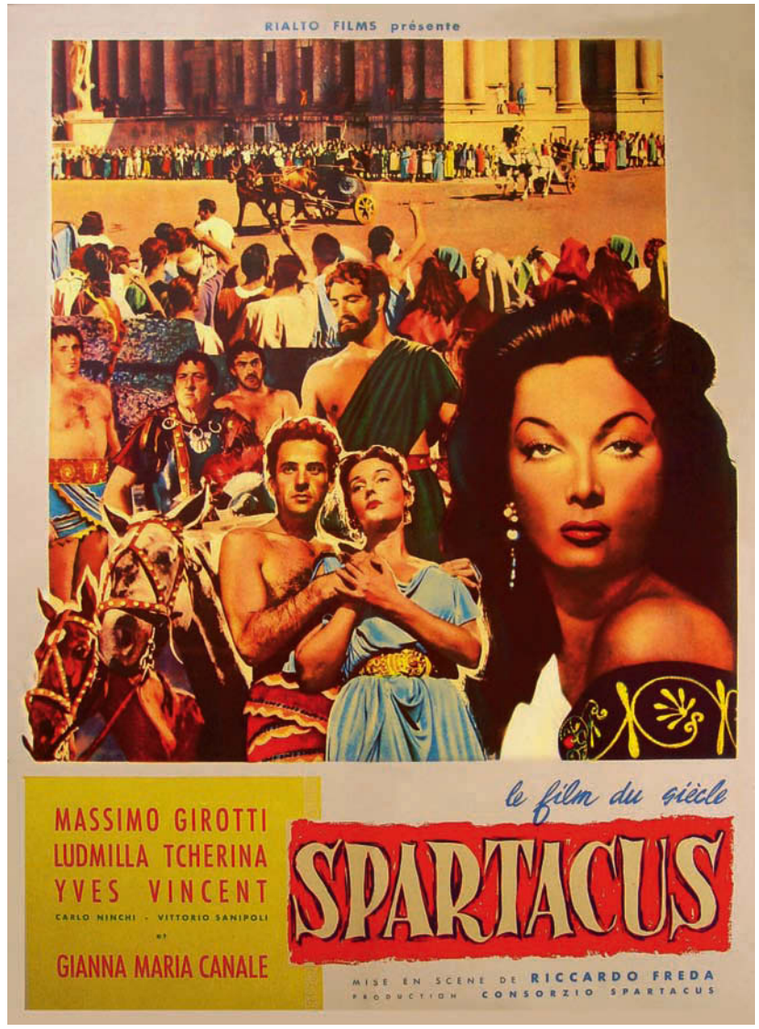




Another key player in this enterprise was the Calabrese actress Gianna Maria Canale (b. 1927), who had made her screen debut as an extra in Carmine Gallone's *Rigoletto* (1946), and met Freda while playing a small supporting role in *Aquila nera*. In 1947, she entered the Miss Italia competition at Stresa and won second place, losing to Lucia Bosé but winning out over third-placed Gina Lollobrigida. After this tempered victory, Canale embarked on a love affair with Freda and subsequently graduated to speaking roles in his movies, such as Contessa Lehmann in *Il cavaliere misterioso*. For the next couple of years, she worked almost exclusively for Freda and his cameraman Rodolfo Lombardi, but it was not until she appeared in Guido Brignone's *noir*-styled *Il bacio di una morta/Kiss of a Dead Woman* (1949) that she found a cameraman capable of making her look like a star. That cameraman was Gábor Pogány.

Pogány's stark technique became stately in a heightened, fantastic context, which had the residual effect of bringing out Canale's statuesque qualities—the very qualities which had attracted Freda to her. In Pogány's lens, Miss Italia's second-best stood on equal footing with queens, sibyls, and dusky-eyed immortals. After the release of *Il bacio di una morta*, Pogány replaced Rodolfo Lombardi as Freda's cameraman of choice, beginning with *Vedi Napoli e poi muori/See Naples Then Die* (1951). With Pogány's help, the down-to-earth Canale (who can be seen in a rare, humanistic performance in the 1951 American film *Go for Broke!*, as an Italian woman surviving the war years as a prostitute) became the mystifying Sphinx at the center of her Egyptian lover's filmography. Despite popular belief, Freda and Canale never married, but they stayed together through the end of the decade; Freda's partnership with Pogány, on the other hand, lasted twice as long. The cameraman worked for Freda, off and on, through *A doppia faccia/Double* Face (1969), while Freda's final film *Follia omicida/Murder Obsession* (1980) was photographed by Pogány's son, Cristiano.

1 Freda had previously co-directed (with Flavio Calzavara), co-authored, and acted in *Piccoli naufraghi* (1938).



FRENCH *affiche.*

Spartaco

First released: January 28, 1953
B&W, 1.66:1, 120 minutes

Production: Consorzio Spartacus, Api Film (Rome), Rialto Film (Paris). **Distributor**: Api Film. **Finland**: 9/2/55. **France**: *Spartacus*, Rialto Films, 1953. **Germany**: *Spartacus, der Rebell von Rom*, "Spartacus, the Rebel of Rome," 7/30/53. **Mexico:** *Espartaco, el Gladiador de Tracia*, Jorge M. Dada. **UK**: *Spartacus the Gladiator*, International Film Distributors Ltd., 9/53, 93m 55s, Certificate "A," passed with cuts. **US**: *The Sins of Rome*, RKO Radio Pictures, 6/54, 71m.

Gábor Pogány's second collaboration with Riccardo Freda was *Spartaco* ("Spartacus"), a pointed attempt to bring the gladiator film back home to Rome in the wake of MGM's *Quo Vadis*. This Italian/French co-production was the first Spartacus film of the sound era, preceded by two Italian silents, both also titled *Spartaco* (made respectively in 1915 and 1918). These movies were based on the exploits of a true historical figure, a Thracian warrior slave who led other Gaul and Thracian slaves to rebellion against Rome, circa 73 B.C., after organizing their escape from a gladiator training school in Capua. The revolution was the longest and bloodiest of its kind, lasting two years, until Marcus Licinius Crassus finally dealt death to Spartacus on the battlefield, crucifying his surviving forces as a gruesome example along the Via Appia. Prompting Freda into action was not only the worldwide boxoffice success of *Quo Vadis*, but also the publication in late 1951 of *Spartacus*, a best-selling novel by the American author, Howard Fast. As the story was based on actual history, it was unnecessary for Freda to acquire the screen rights to Fast's novel, but the existence of the book did prevent the film from carrying its original title when it was released abroad.

Knowing that the film's arena sequences would involve lions, and thus a certain amount of special effects photography, Pogány recommended Bava to Freda—and thus began the most significant creative alliance of the early days of Italian fantasy cinema. Though *Spartaco* is not "a Bava film" *per se*, it was one of his most pivotal assignments, in terms of establishing his working relationships with Freda and Canale, and the development of his craft. It is also a crucial chapter in the slowly unfolding renaissance of the *pepla*, so crucial to the "Golden Age" of Italian film production (1956–66).

Spartaco opens with Spartacus (Massimo Girotti), a Thracian enlisted as a Roman centurion after the invasion of his country in 73 B.C., being arrested for interfering with the punishment of Amytis (*The Tales of Hoffman*'s Ludmilla Tcherina), who objects when another centurion stabs her elderly father to death in cold blood. Shackled with other Thracian slaves, Spartacus is marched through the streets into Rome and taken to Crassus (Carlo Ninchi) for judgment. Crassus orders him to be made a slave, but an attempted escape proves Spartacus to be strong and resourceful—good gladiator material. He is therefore sent to be trained as a gladiator, but he doesn't respond favorably to being bullied; early in his stay, he lifts his instructor above his head and threatens to hurl him into a large, blazing brazier. To curb his temper, Spartacus is sent to a subterranean dungeon, where he is brutally whipped and left to stand in chains for many days. He is secretly visited by the sultry daughter of Crassus, Sabina (Canale), who has been smitten with him from the moment her father consigned him into slavery, and strokes



SABINA *pays a clandestine visit to the rebel camp of Spartacus.*

his scars while taunting him with her beauty.

Some time later, a guard finds Spartacus hanging deadweight in his bonds, frees him, and begins to carry him upstairs—but the hero has been feigning illness to break free. Dodging Roman patrols in the streets, he finds his way to his mother's bedside, where Amytis is watching over the delirious old woman. Spartacus arrives just in time to see her die, and both he and Amytis are arrested soon after. Amytis is made the centerpiece of the next arena event hosted by Crassus, where she dances an exotic ballet based on the episode of the Sirens from *The Odyssey*, flitting ethereally about another dancer cast as Ulysses, tied to the mast of an enormous ship pooled in the center of the arena. At the close of her performance, soldiers tie Amytis' wrists together and hungry lions are set loose into the arena. Scheduled to make his debut as a gladiator, Spartacus rushes to her rescue. The lions run amok, some managing to maul and kill the soldiers who tied Amytis, and are promptly repelled from the arena by Spartacus. He frees Amytis and raises her into his strong arms. Her eyes burning with jealous rage, Sabina turns her thumb down, but the satisfied crowd objects—and so does Crassus, who cheerfully offers Spartacus his freedom. Embracing Amytis, Spartacus proudly refuses his liberty until all his people are released.

Returning to the gladiator school, Spartacus is greeted by a salute and oaths of solidarity from his fellows. That night, guards arrive to take Spartacus to Crassus and the gladiators rebel, attacking and murdering the guards with torches and tridents, and jumping to freedom in the Tiber.

Spartacus and Amytis meet on the road to Naples and pledge their love to one another. Pursued by troops led by Rufus (Vittorio Sanipoli), Spartacus plummets over a cliff into the sea; injured, he finds his way to Sabina, who nurses him back to health and tries to make him forget his responsibilities. The sound of a flogged slave's cries of pain restores his senses, and he returns to his encampment—weakened by lack of water and suspicions aroused by his second-in-command, Octavius (Yves Vincent)—just in time to help them escape from Rufus' troops. Spartacus' return reinforces the stance of the revolt, and Sabina comes to the camp with an invitation to meet with Crassus. During the meeting, Octavius takes it upon himself to stage a surprise attack. Spartacus, though on the verge of negotiating a peaceful truce, walks out on Crassus to die among his people. After the battle, Amytis walks the battlefield and finds Spartacus dying. He hands her his dagger, saying, "Today it failed, but someday it will be victorious."

In some ways, *Spartaco* is the missing link between the Italian silent epics and the Italian *pepla*, or "sword and sandal" films of the 1950s and '60s. Whereas Blasetti's *La corona di ferro* and *Fabiola* were respectively nearer to fairy tale and historical drama traditions, *Spartaco* is a stylized flight of fancy rooted in dramatic historic events. As Derek Elley points out in his excellent book *The Epic Film*, the film (scripted by Jean Ferry) has almost nothing to do with recorded history, nor does it use its material to make a pro-Zionist statement, as Stanley Kubrick's (Dalton Trumbo-scripted) *Spartacus* would do in 1960. Instead, Freda's version can be seen as a bold reclamation of Italian cinema traditions in the wake of the fallen Fascist era, combining the settings of Italian silent epics like *Quo vadis?* and *Cabiria* with the trappings of a highly stylized, baroque elegance that feels equally indebted the decadent imagery of Cecil B. DeMille and the *telefoni bianchi* of the 1930s. It also introduces elements that move beyond history into the realm of mythology; the story's attention to the almost supernatural power of Spartacus' enslavement to Sabina's beauty seems indebted to Ulysses' long enslavement on the isle of Circe—and echoes of this theme would resonate throughout the *pepla* to come, notably the "waters of forgetfulness" in *Ercole e la regina di Lidia/Hercules Unchained*, whose taste cause Hercules (Steve Reeves) to forget his wife and become the love slave of Omphale (Sylvia Lopez).

As historical dramas go, *Spartaco* is closer to a psychologically rich dream of history than to a straightforward dramatization of historical events. As a director, Freda was uninterested in reality, preferring to chart the schism between the surface of events and their subterranean currents of emotion. The film's main titles depict various historic friezes pertinent to the story, and throughout the picture, Freda observes events with a sculptor's eye: he is fond of introducing new scenes with indulgent establishing shots of period architecture that bespeak an era of large and ennobling ideas. When Spartacus escapes from the dungeon on the night of his mother's death, his plight is observed several times from on high, the camera placed on the shoulder of various sculptures of the city's founding fathers, whose silent watchfulness in the face of close brushes with the Roman guard patrols seems to bestow their implicit favor on his mission. Likewise, the static positioning of the actors in most shots emphasizes their actions as the subjects of future sculptures and friezes. (This fascination with immobility echoes throughout most of Freda's later work, reaching its apotheosis in 1962's *L'orribile segreto del Dr. Hichcock/The Horrible*



HUNDREDS *assemble for the Verona arena sequence photographed by Mario Bava.*

Dr. Hichcock, about a respected British surgeon who indulges his necrophilia by injecting his wife with a chemical that renders her completely passive in the face of his sexual advances.) Despite such predilections, and possibly due in part to the tensions they create, Freda nevertheless acquits himself here as a gifted action director. To argue that the film is merely well-photographed or well-edited is to ignore the large number of camera set-ups in, for example, the sequence of Spartacus' rescue of Amytis in the arena; without the preplanning evident in these facets, the sequence would not play nearly so kinetically or heroically as it does. In praising the film's components, mention must also be made of the thrilling score by Renzo Rossellini, one of his finest works.

The interiors of *Spartaco* were filmed at the Centro Sperimentale di Cinematografia, while most of the exteriors were filmed in Verona's Arena. [Some years later, Richard Fleischer would direct Dino De Laurentiis' production of *Barabbas* in the same locations.] Despite Gábor Pogány's sole credit as photographer, Riccardo Freda confessed in the foreword he wrote for this book that Mario Bava photographed "all" of the film's arena scenes, which encompass Ludmilla Tcherina's splendid "Circe" dance (almost certainly the high point of all *peplum* choreography), as well as some spectacular effects shots involving the interaction of Girotti and the lions. Most of the latter were accomplished with split-screen set-ups and by replacing the helmeted star with a helmeted lion trainer, but in two startling shots, Bava captures the horror of a lion tearing a man to pieces. On location, he filmed a close shot of the lion rending a mannequin limb from limb, but masked the lower left portion of the frame, where the dummy's head was secured in position. Later, in the studio, Bava rewound the film in the camera and, masking the previously exposed frame area, photographed a live actor's head screaming in pain, completing the illusion.

The arena sequence is magnificent, revelling in the newfound dimensional freedoms afforded by the deep-focus 30 mm lens, composing in depth whenever possible and giving the picture the overall look of a mythological frieze, such as those shown under the opening titles. (As the son of a sculptor, Bava was surely attuned to the look Freda sought to achieve.) In this arena sequence, Bava uses deep focus to bond Spartacus with his excited audience, always clearly visible behind his heroic profile. The sequence is finally crowned with the magnificent shot of Spartacus embracing Amytis under a beautiful sky (with clouds accentuated by a red filter) as he announces that he can never be free so long as his people remain enslaved; it is the first truly iconic shot of Bava's career, and it was this image that heralded Freda's film in all of its advertising.



Photographing the close shots of the lions in this sequence required Mario and Freda to work inside a protective cage. Bava's longtime friend and colleague Goffredo "Freddy" Unger remembers an anecdote about the production that Bava was fond of repeating. "They were shooting without sound, so while Bava was photographing these wild beasts, he was describing to Freda what he was shooting. 'Ah, Freda,' Bava said, 'these lions are so beautiful! They look so hungry and deadly. Wait a minute—one of them is coming this way! This is fantastic! He's getting closer . . . closer . . . closer . . . Freda, you will love this footage! Wait a minute! Where'd that lion go?' A second later, Freda pulled him away from his camera just in time; the lion was on top of the cage and reaching down for Bava with its claws!"

SPARTACUS *rescues Amytis (Ludmilla Tcherina) from the dangers of the arena.*



FRENCH *grande affiche, art by René Bretonne.*

Bava had been an unknown quantity to Freda when they first met in Verona, but he impressed the director greatly with his efficient handling of the arena scenes, which were shot early in production. Being a sculptor, Freda himself had experimented with building maquettes and was fascinated by special effects, which gave him and Bava a great deal in common. The two men talked, and moved quickly past a mutual professional respect to a personal *simpatia* based in their shared backgrounds and interests.

"[Bava] was always of good humor and his character was in perfect accord with mine," Freda wrote in his autobiography. "Endowed with an extraordinary technical ability, it amused him to find solutions to the most arduous problems. I can remember a time when the film stock we were using didn't have the correct sensitivity; he filmed a sunset scene with the characters in close-up, surpassing the known limitations of the stock. He was a master of special effects, capable of solving any technical problem, regardless of its difficulty."[2]

As Freda explains in his Foreword to this book, he began to accompany Bava to his home after work during this production—and since Mario did not reside in Verona, Freda's words imply that Bava's services were retained even after the filming of *Spartaco* returned to Rome. Bava introduced Freda to his father Eugenio and shown his handiworks as a sculptor and inventor. Bava also screened 16 mm prints of his short films for Freda, who was particularly impressed by *L'orecchio* and its animated renderings of how sound was received and processed by the human ear. In the course of their conversations about special effects, Bava was likely encouraged to suggest some tricks that could work to the benefit of their current project; consequently, as the evidence of the film itself suggests, he was adopted by the production to supervise various trick shots.



AMYTIS *looks for her lost love amid speared bodies on the battlefields of defeat.*

When I interviewed Cameron Mitchell for this book, he surprised me by mentioning, "Did you know that Mario worked on *Ben-Hur*?" I certainly didn't, so he proceeded to volunteer: "Absolutely! As I understand it, Bava masterminded a scene in . . . *Ben-Hur*, I believe it was . . . where a torch was stuck in somebody's face. He could take a mold of your face and give your face to me, using nothing more than latex and sculpture." I made a point of watching William Wyler's *Ben-Hur* (1959) and there *is* a scene in which Charlton Heston, escaping the slave ship, pushes a flaming torch into someone's face—but the very same thing occurs in *Spartaco*, so it is possible that Mitchell was confusing *Ben-Hur* and *Spartaco* (or *Spartacus*). Nevertheless, Heston's *Ben-Hur* was also shot in Rome, so Bava may have freelanced on that production as well. We may never know for sure.

At the moment of rebellion and escape from the gladiator training school, Spartacus is shown blinding a bullying centurion by pushing a flaming torch into his face. The effect was shot from behind, so it's quite possible that it wasn't necessary for Bava to take a mold of the actor's face and create a perfect, fire-proofed likeness to be worn by a stunt man. Indeed, when the effect was staged in *Ben-Hur*, it was shot from the front, and it's an effective trick even when viewed frame-by-frame, so perhaps Bava did engineer both moments. Wherever special effects were involved, Bava insisted on being the cameraman for those shots, because camera placement was crucial to the success of the illusion.

The majority of *Spartaco* looks like Gábor Pogány's work, yet certain scenes—Rufus' visit to Sabina in her room, the gladiator school and dungeon scenes, Sabina's veiled visit to the rebels' encampment, Amytis walking through the spear-studded battlefield with a torch looking for her dead lover, and several glamorous close-ups of Gianna Maria Canale—more strongly resemble the work of Bava. Pogány's style (in the context of Freda's films, anyway) tends to be realistic, static, with sculptural Rembrandt lighting delineating the actors like the figures in a wax museum. The result is stark and cold, whereas the exceptions listed above reflect the ripened, sensual quality that was becoming Bava's trademark. They also showcase his fondness for "fourth wall" shadowplay with inspired uses of props and set dressing to introduce a sense of movement in otherwise static shots—for example, the sheer, billowing curtains in Sabina's chamber, or the scene of Spartacus' beating in the dungeon, which unfolds entirely in silhouette on another prisoner's screaming face, as a barred window beside him looks out onto an ancient Roman riverside street produced in miniature.

The scene of Rufus' visit to Sabina's chamber opens with a shot of two handmaidens busying themselves with humble tasks, viewed through an

2 Riccardo Freda, *Divoratori di celluloide—50 anni di memorie cinematografiche e non* (Milan, Italy: Emme Edizione–Il Formichiere, 1981), 80-130.

ovoid-patterned screen. The camera glides to the left, revealing the silhouettes of other handmaidens moving dutifully in the background, until it comes to rest on Sabina, reclining on a bed—one leg raised, her knee bent. This vision of exotic languor, of feminine luxury ("You may fasten my sandal," Sabina sighs to Amytis, now one of her slaves), has no correlation in what I've seen of Pogány's other work, but it abounds in Bava's catalogue. Later, when the disguised Sabina pays a clandestine visit to Spartacus' encampment, there is a long-shot of her standing in the entrance to Spartacus' tent; the lighting and positioning of the actors is pure Pogány, but for one aspect. The element of Sabina in the shot is piercingly Bavian: Sabina looks like one of the oracles from Bava's Hercules films, her nose and mouth covered by a veil as a key light illuminates her painted eyes, and thus her identity, to the viewer.

But why should the cameraman's duties be divided? Illness is certainly a possibility, but Freda's films were also notorious for running overschedule, and he sometimes utilized additional camera units to speed things along when a production began to run out of time or money. At least one scene indicates that *Spartaco* may have been running out of both: Spartacus' confession of fear to Artorigius (Carlo Giustini) on the night before the climactic battle. This was Massimo Girotti's big acting moment in the picture, and it was filmed in a single 2-minute take, without cutaways; one might expect that such an approach was deliberately chosen to enhance the scene's dramatic gravity, but in fact, the take used in the final cut is botched. As Girotti emotes in the foreground, in the background, a fly lands on his co-star's forehead, where it proceeds to take a long and very distracting walk. Watching the scene, you can see Giustini's torment, not wanting to swat the fly away and risk upstaging Girotti, who is upstaged anyway by this rude intrusion of nature. The only explanation for such a moment to be left in the picture is that retakes were, at this point, no longer possible.

Spartaco was a great success in Italy, earning close to half a billion



GIANNA MARIA CANALE *takes the reins of the chariot sequence of TEODORA IMPERATRICE DI BISANZIO, which featured special effects contributions by Bava.*

lire [$312,000]. When it was released in the United States as *The Sins of Rome*, over a quarter of its two-hour running time was cut by its distributor, RKO Pictures.[3] This version forfeits much of the original's scope and spectacle, jumping past the pomp and ceremony to get straight to the dialogue scenes, which themselves sound as though they were dubbed from a synopsis, without any attempt to translate the actual Italian dialogue. The British version—entitled *Spartacus the Gladiator*—evidently fared somewhat differently; whereas *The Sins of Rome* ends with the dying Spartacus handing his dagger to Amytis and saying, "Today it failed, but someday it will be victorious," Derek Elley describes *Spartacus the Gladiator* ending with Amytis' revelation that she is pregnant with the child of Spartacus, and that his dying gesture was meant as a bequest to his unborn son. There is no such inkling in the US release version, presumably because the couple are unmarried.[4] Freda later claimed that the American producers of Stanley Kubrick's 1960 version of *Spartacus* (that would be Kirk Douglas' company Bryna Productions) paid him $50,000 to keep his version out of circulation while their new version was playing.

Over the course of the next few years, with Bava's camerawork in great demand, Bava and Freda were unable to work together officially. But according to Freda, Bava performend small jobs on his next few pictures unofficially, providing them with trick shots, miniatures, and the occasional retake. For *Teodora imperatrice di Bisanzio/Theodora, Slave Empress* (1954, one of Freda's best films), Bava executed some glass matte shots seen prior to, and during, the exciting chariot race sequence, and I suspect on grounds of style that he also substituted for Rodolfo Lombardi for the shooting of the remarkably horrific climax, in which the empress Theodora (Gianna Maria Canale)—wrongly accused of betraying her husband, the emperor Justinian (Georges Marchal)—is surrounded by the spears of guards and exposed to the revenge of a man earlier blinded with hot pokers for inadvertently allowing her escape. We will see this image turn up again in Bava's later work. Freda also told me that Bava contributed to his comedy *Da qui all'eredità* (1955) and his fine historical drama *Beatrice Cenci* (1956), for which Bava built and photographed the exterior miniatures seen in establishing shots.



MEXICAN *lobby card.*

Perdonami!

First released: February 18, 1953
B&W, 1.66:1, 104 minutes

Production: Rizzoli Film, Royal Film. **Distributor**: Dear Film. **Germany**: *Verzeih mir*, Deutsche Cosmopol, 1954. **Mexico**: *Perdoname*, Mario J. Dada. **Spain**: *¡Perdoname!*

By far the most commercially successful film Bava photographed during this period was *Perdonami!* ("Forgive Me!"),[5] his final collaboration with director Mario Costa. Scripted by Costa, Anton Giulio Majano, Alessandro De Stefani, and Mario Monicelli, the film is a neorealist subject treated *à la* Hitchcock, with equal doses of romance, irony and suspense. It finds Bava taking decisive steps toward the visual style that would later achieve perfection in such Bava-directed films as *Sei donne per l'assassino*, a look fusing elements of *film noir* and fashion photography. *Perdonami!* also shares with that later film a modelling *milieu*, a beautiful woman who does ugly things, and an occasionally ominous score by Carlo Rustichelli, whose music accompanied Bava's images here for the first time. Paolo Heusch, who had assisted Mario Camerini on Bava's previous assignment, *Gli eroi della domenica*, assisted Costa on this production.

Perdonami! opens at night, as a group of thieves break into a stockyard to steal a waiting shipment of automobile tires. They are surprised in the act by Carlo, an armed security guard, who is shot dead by one of the thieves—we don't see by whom—before he can see them. Later that night, Anna (Antonella Lualdi) returns home from her job as a dressmaker to discover her older brother Nicola (Aldo Bufi Landi)—one of the thieves—hurriedly packing a suitcase to get out of town; he says only that he's in trouble, offering no further explanation. The next morning, Anna overhears some neighbors discussing the murder of Carlo, who lived in the apartment directly across from the flat she shares with her ailing mother and (now absent) brother. She puts two and two together, and becomes convinced that Nicola was responsible. Once Carlo is buried, she visits his grave to assuage her feelings of complicit guilt, and there she is observed from a distance by Carlo's brother Marco (Raf Vallone), who later sees her again from a window, while making a painful visit to the adjacent apartment. Needing to discuss his feelings with a friend, Marco crosses the courtyard and introduces himself to Anna. In time, they fall in love—but Anna harbors the terrible secret of her brother's involvement in Carlo's death, and when Marco seems to be nearing a proposal, she cuts off the relationship without explanation. Anna writes to Nicola, who writes back to admit his involvement in the theft but also to assure his sister that he was not the trigger man. Relieved, Anna rushes back into Marco's arms.

Unfortunately, by this time, Marco has found a night's solace in an empty fling with Vera (Tamara Lees), one of the models at the dressmaking shop where Anna works. After proposing to Anna, Marco tells the persistent Vera of his plans, and she does not take the rejection well. Some years later, after Anna's mother has died, and when Marco and Anna have been married long enough to have two young children, Vera reappears in the wake of her own divorce. She ingratiates herself back into Anna's life, as a former co-worker—this unsuspected relationship between his wife and ex-lover startles Marco, who coldly keeps his distance. One night, Anna is approached by an associate of her brother's, who offers her a chance to meet with him; Vera overhears the invitation and presumes that she is going to meet with a lover. Excited by the possibility of inheriting Anna's family, Vera informs Marco, who follows Anna and discovers her just as she is about to be raped by one of Nicola's cohorts. He misinterprets the attack as consensual and banishes her from their apartment, refusing to let her see their children, who are entrusted to Vera's craven care. Anna is given shelter by a family friend, Michele (Dante Maggio), but she descends into depression and delirium, eventually abducting her children and taking them to the edge of a precipice, where she plans a suicide solution to her problems. Fortunately, Marco discovers the errors of his ways in time, and catches Anna and their children as their lives hang in the balance. As Marco embraces them, he blurts out the film's title; it appears onscreen and the end titles roll.

F. Zannino, writing for *Rassegna del Film*, expressed a strong distaste for the film's stylized approach to a subject matter that seemed, to him, to call out for a more realistic (or neorealistic) treatment. "As can be easily deduced from the pathetic

3 *The Sins of Rome* runs 31 minutes shorter than the 120-minute *Spartaco*.

4 Derek Elley, *The Epic Film* (London, Boston, Melbourne and Henley: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1984), 112.

5 The title "*Perdonami!*" appears in quotation marks on most, but reportedly not all, prints.

exclamation of its title, Mario Costa's *Perdonami!* (the print we viewed was minus the exclamation point) belongs to the genre of the *fotoromanzo*," he wrote. "The young Calabrese [protagonist] is introduced . . . like a species from a working-class Eldorado."

Though Zannino was not receptive to the innovation, he was perceptive in tracing the methods of the film's presentation to the *fotoromanzi.* The "actors" in these stories were models, and some of them went on to future film acting careers as a result. What was interesting about the *fotoromanzi* is their ability to generate escapist fantasy from the starting-point of neorealism, which remained an all-but-standardized form of Italy's cinematic expression. The characters in the *fotoromanzi* were all working-class, and they were all beset by problems that were initially complicated, and ultimately resolved, by love. They were perhaps truer to life than intellectuals like Zannino cared to admit, but they were also stylized in a way that could make them look phony to unsympathetic onlookers. Knowing that Bava's future work would be informed by his personal interest in pulp fantasy, science fiction, and comic strips, *Perdonami!* asserts itself in importance as an early indication of Bava's interest in pop culture and its expression in his work.

While the *fotoromanzi* could be cloying and tacky, *Perdonami!* illustrates what the genre could be in the hands of two confident artists, working with actors of conviction. Made almost two years before Hitchcock's *Rear Window* (1954), Costa's film boldly prefigures it by predicating its story on the proximity of two apartment windows, facing one another across a courtyard. (Even the art direction of the two films is similar.) Anna first indulges her feelings of complicity in Carlo's murder by walking onto her balcony and staring into the void of his darkened apartment window; when Marco later visits the apartment and observes Anna from the opposite vantage, they are matched in action, and thus destined to meet, because they encounter one another while examining an emptiness in their lives. In a manner of speaking, Death introduces them.

While Anna's troubled spirit is reflected in softly mottled lighting schemes, Marco emerges—after sharing his own early scenes of mourning and confusion with her—into a world of light. The scenes at his place of work, a shipbuilding factory, are bright and functional and impressive, full of swinging machinery, scale, purpose, and motion. Shadows converge in the bar where he meets Vera, with darkness foregrounded and occasionally relieved by painterly puffs of luminous cigarette smoke in the background. The next morning, after Marco and Vera have spent the night together, Vera wakes alone; Marco is already out of bed and dressed, eager to remove himself physically from what has happened, and the setting of sin is slashed with horizontal bars of light and shadow, a visual metaphor for his feelings of guilt about an animal act conducted in secret between two whispering adults. As Anna sinks into despair and depression, the look of her scenes becomes more diffuse, almost submarine in quality, while the corresponding scenes of Marco grow more hard-edged, initially a reflection of his unforgiving rigidity, but ultimately an expression of his strength and resolve as he races to Anna's rescue.

There is an unstudied confidence and natural uniformity of style about *Perdonami!* that was new to Bava's work. His previous achievements, however fine, could be emulatory, inconsistent, uneven due to budgetary or material constraints, even technically predictable at times; but with *Perdonami!* he turned out a glossy, yet earthy, product that was wholly comparable to the best *film noir* and melodrama cinematography being done in Hollywood.

ITALIAN *locandina.*



Il viale della speranza

First released: April 10, 1953
B&W, 1.66:1, 100 minutes

Production: Cinematografica Mambretti. **Distributor**: ENIC (Ente Nazionale Industrie Cinematografich).

Bava's next assignment, Dino Risi's *Il viale della speranza* ("Avenue of Hopes"), is a film of particular importance as it was the first movie to mythologize the fantasy factory of Cinecittà. After decades of being filed among the films feared "probably lost," it recently resurfaced on Italian television, confirming its significance—not only for what it represented to Italian filmgoers, but for the ways in which it differs to films from other countries that took a similar approach. In some ways, it is a derivative film—essentially a remake of *Miss Italia,* which follows three women as they pursue their dream of becoming movie stars, rather than beauty contest winners—but it suspends its duties as a melodrama often enough to present what is, one feels, a fairly honest depiction of how things worked in the Italian film industry at that time.



MARCELLO MASTROIANNI *as a Cinecittà cameraman named Mario (!), consoling hopeful actress Luisa (Cosetta Greco) in* IL VIALE DELLA SPERANZA.

Three young women—brown-haired Luisa (Cosetta Greco), blonde Giuditta (Liliana Bonfatti), and brunette Franca (Piera Simoni)—meet in Rome while sharing quarters in a rooming house, all harboring dreams of breaking into the movies. The film opens with Luisa and Giuditta riding the train that stops outside the entrance to Cinecittà, two glamorous apparitions standing out like specters among the ogling, everyday working-class they hope to escape. Getting directions to a casting call from an actor dressed as a Roman centurion, they find work as extras in an historical costume picture, but while Giuditta eagerly swallows her pride and dons a horrid wig and helmet, Luisa feels demeaned and starts to storm off the lot. She is intercepted by, of all people, a cameraman named Mario (Marcello Mastroianni), who takes her to the commissary and calms her down, assuring her that—with her looks—she'll be recognized soon enough and win the parts she wants. Cheered, Luisa dons the wig and helmet and plays along. That night at the rooming house, they are joined by Franca, another hopeful, and during dinner they meet another roomer, Stefania (Bianca Maria Fusari), who has a beautiful curtain of hair like Veronica Lake—but in the next of the film's surprises, she reveals that the hairstyle has been improvised to conceal the bruises inflicted by an abusive boyfriend. The girls are saved from feeling too sorry for her by a sudden invitation, from Mario and his pal Tonino (Pietro De Vico), to attend a party at the home of an important producer. At the party, Franca steals the limelight from her roommates by crossing the room in a form-fitting bathing suit, winning a choice modelling assignment; she also makes a play for Mario and is caught kissing him by Luisa, who leaves the party in tears. She is intercepted by a friendly guest, who takes her to his apartment for a drink, which turns into several and causes her to pass out, preventing her host from taking advantage of the situation. Luisa's failure to return home that night arouses Mario's jealousy. As the story progresses, we see the three women pursuing stardom by different routes: Luisa's hard work, Giuditta's zeal (she poses as a stenographer to get into an elusive producer's office), and Franca's dating of various producers. In the end, Franca gets her big break first, but does not have the necessary talent to make a go of it (we see her muff line after line in a *faux* hospital drama, the inside joke being that she is wearing a surgical mask and they never shoot with live sound at Cinecittà anyway); Giuditta, who indecisively sleeps with a two-sided photo on her night table (Errol Flynn on one side, and a picture of her hometown boyfriend on the other), has actually come to Rome to forget the lover who wouldn't propose to her, but she readily surrenders her acting ambitions when he lowers himself on bended knee at Cinecittà; and Luisa, on Mario's recommendation, is recruited to replace Franca in the hospital picture—and is discovered to look positively luminous on camera.

Working once again with art director Flavio Mogherini and assistant director Paolo Heusch, Bava here transcended even his high level of quality on *Perdonami!*, the subject matter giving him the latitude to light scenes even more luxuriantly. As well as he accounts for himself, one is nevertheless troubled by the feeling that Bava may have been the wrong cameraman for this assignment. His style inverts the trappings of reality and illusion, so that the scenes taking place at Cinecittà have a straightforward, almost documentary appearance, while the actresses return home from work in cars driven in front of rear-projection screens and reside in a rooming house of caressing, velveteen shadows, where every wall is splashed with a different gobo pattern—venetian blinds, bevelled glass, ironwork, an embroidered lace curtain. Of course, this was the way melodrama was filmed at the time—in high style—and Bava was already a master of these techniques; yet, from a contemporary perspective, one expects a bit more (that is, less) from a film so supposedly steeped in reality, or at least a bouquet of irony about the inversion. As it is, the women's "real" story too often looks like scenes from a film they've been making together.

This isn't to say the photography isn't effective. The scene of the furtive coatroom kiss between Mario and Franca is painted in half-tones that leave only bands of pure light across their eyes, emphasizing at once their mutual attraction and Franca's deceptive manipulation of her photographer, the man she must entrust with all she has—her image. Another scene, of an acting class being conducted near a boxing arena, is enlivened by an expressionistically lit background of a single man in the ring, shadow-boxing, as the students in the foreground are asked by a crotchety old teacher to produce facial expressions on demand. Particularly wonderful are the



DINA D'ORSINI *comforts her terminally ill child (la piccola Patrizia Remiddi) in the melodrama* BALOCCHI E PROFUMI.

scenes of the activities at Cinecittà—Bava photographing his own place of work, his home away from home—especially when his camera tracks away from the action to reveal another, *faux* camera crew in place, supposedly filming the action, framed by the enticing mysteries of shadow-drenched set flats and catwalks. In the scene of Giuditta being pursued from active set to a procession of empty sets by her hometown boyfriend, Bava conveys a vivid sense of a place essentially dead that is given the occasional appearance of life by a small and dedicated crew of artisans.

The *Rassegna del Film* reviewer complimented *Il viale della speranza*, noting that it afforded the ideal "occasion for an Italian director to indict the world of motion picture production, but Risi has not done this . . . It's a humble, simple story . . . told to perfection." While the film had a certain value as a promotional tool for the rebuilt and soon-to-be-flourishing Cinecittà, it never confuses the illusions produced there with reality, and it confirms that the key to all success is talent and hard work. The difference between Risi's film (scripted by him, Ettore Margadonna, Gino De Santis, and Franco Cannarosso) and, say, William Wyler's *A Star Is Born* (1937) is that, regardless of how honest the Wyler film may be about the yearnings and failings of human beings, on a level most unusual for Hollywood at the time, it continues to perpetuate the image of Hollywood generated by all the movies that came before it. Risi's film, on the other hand, acknowledges that sex greases the gears of the industry, that sleeping one's way to the top can be an effective option for the right would-be actress, and that the business is really no more glamorous than sordid. Risi also doesn't demur from showing what the Italian cinema was sometimes up against, in terms of popular Italian acceptance. One memorable sequence depicts the travails of a small camera unit trying to capture a brief location shot of Luisa and Giuditta in the rain; it isn't raining, so they have to be rained upon by a hose (which seems to get everyone wet *except* them), and they are center-stage in a crowd of jeering onlookers, an apoplectic director, and policemen who want to see their non-existent permit.

Italian moviegoers did not support the opening of *Il viale della speranza,* and it became a commercial failure. Nevertheless, it is an important film: one of the most accessible of Bava's early years, a time capsule which affords some insight into the Italian film production of the early postwar era, and an important precursor to the far-more-sentimental tributes to Cinecittà made in later years by Federico Fellini.

Balocchi e profumi

First released: September 16, 1953
B&W, 1.66:1, 90 minutes

Production, Distributor: S.A.P.

Bava's next job came about as a result of a chance meeting with a man named Natale Montillo, who owned a large number of movie theaters in Naples. Much as Eugenio Bava had observed prior to the founding of San Remo Film, Montillo saw an abundance of theaters and too much shared product, and he thought it might be to his advantage to produce some films for his theaters himself. Thus was born *Balocchi e profumi* ("Toys and Perfumes"), co-directed by Montillo and F. M. De Bernardi, a romantic Neapolitan melodrama.

"We shot this movie in Castellammare di Stabia," Corrado Bartoloni remembers. "This guy always paid us, and . . . well, I must tell you, Bava and I were never paid with checks . . . and we were always paid regularly!"

Based on a popular song of 1929 written by E. A. Mario, *Balocchi e profumi* is the story of Clara Florani (Dina D'Orsini), a single Neapolitan woman who lives with her young daughter, Corallina (*la piccola* Patrizia Remiddi). To provide her child with a family, she consents to marry Lorenzo (Cesare Danova), a wealthy suitor. When Corallina succumbs to a fatal illness, the marriage falls apart and Lorenzo leaves the embittered Clara for another woman—but time passes and heals, allowing him to return into her arms in time for the final curtain.

Critics praised the film's "colorful Neapolitan scenery" (though *Balocchi e profumi* was shot in black-and-white) and considered it to be a "slightly progressive" film of the melodramatic type. It did not perform well commercially, perhaps equally due to Montillo's inexperience as a distributor outside his own chain of theaters, and to the resistance of competing exhibitors outside his region. His co-director, De Bernardi, never had another screen credit, and Montillo himself would helm only one more, meager effort—1952's *Rosalba, la fanciulla di Pompei.*

Villa Borghese

First released: December 18, 1953
B&W, 1.66:1, 98 minutes

Production: Astoria Film (Rome), Sigma Cinevog (Paris). **Distributor**: Diana Film. **Germany**: *Roemischer Reigen*, "Roman Round Dance," German TV, 3/19/61. **US**: *It Happened in the Park*, Ellis Films Inc., 8/12/57.

A film of only moderate interest in Bava's filmography is Gianni Franciolini's *Villa Borghese*, a collection of six stories that take place in the famous Italian park in the course of a single day. Originally built by the nephew of Pope Paul V, the Cardinal Scipio Borghese, Villa Borghese is located in the heart of Rome and consists of sprawling gardens, adorned with carvings of eagles and dragons, surrounding the nominal family home of the Borgheses, which is now a museum, as it was at the time this film was made.

The first segment, "*Serve e soldati*" ("Servants and Soldiers"), is about a group of pretty, young governesses supervising children in the park. Some visiting Marines seek to impress the women; when one of them (Giulia Rubini) shows no interest in a persistent soldier (Antonio Cifariello), he spreads the rumor that she is frigid.

In "*Pi-greco*," a group of students notice one of their professors (François Périer) in the park and persuade Anna Maria (Anna Maria Ferrero) to trick him into an embrace so they can photograph it for blackmail purposes. The girl has an unexpectedly compassionate encounter with her teacher, who reveals that he is losing his sight and learning to read Braille. One of the students is played by Mario Girotti, who would later work with Bava again on *Le meraviglie di Aladino/The Wonders of Aladdin* (1961)—and even later, would change his name to Terence Hill and become a major star of Italian Westerns.

The film's dark and discontented tone grows lighter with the comedic "*Incidente a Villa Borghese*" ("Incident at Villa Borghese") in which Arturo Cavazzuti (Vittorio De Sica), a prominent attorney, begs off a social engagement with his wife and friends to spend the afternoon with a young client (Giovanna Ralli, the pretty daughter of *La famiglia Passaguai*). As they drive through the park, Arturo's car is accosted by the girl's fiance (Maurizio Arena), who raises such a stink about seeing them together that everyone in the vicinity comes rushing to the scene of the misunderstanding, including the girl's mother and the police, much to the lawyer's embarrassment.



ITALIAN *locandina.*

In "*Il paraninfo*" ("The Marriage Broker"), an unmarried woman (Margherita Autuori) in her 20s is brought to the park by her parents (Eduardo De Filippo, Leda Gloria) to meet the eponymous character (Enzo Turco) and the young man (Dino Curcio) they have found for her. Meeting this similarly graceless fellow, she becomes flustered, but when she flees the table—revealing the man's shoes and socks that this poor, impoverished woman is forced to wear even in public—her match goes after her and shows a side of warmth and sensitivity that brings her back.

Micheline Presle and Gérard Phillipe star in "*Gli amanti*" ("The Lovers") about a woman who accompanies her two children and their governess to the park, only to send them off on a boat ride so that she can meet her younger lover. Unknown to her, he has agreed to meet her only to announce that he cannot see her again because he is going to marry. The woman is so devastated that she slaps the face of her own young son, as he rushes back from the boat into her arms.

The final story, "*Concorso di belezza*" ("Beauty Contest"), is the film's highlight, about two prostitutes—the blonde *romana* Antonietta (Franca Valeri) and the *bolognese* brunette Elviara (Eloisa Cianni)—who work the park by night. The two are jealous rivals, because the blonde gets all of the business, but they are thrown together when a police raid forces them to flee the park into a nearby nightclub where the "Miss Cinema" beauty contest is being staged. While hiding from the law in a backstage dressing room, the girls are absorbed into the proceedings—Antonietta as a contestant, and Elviara as a judge! Antonietta wins the competition and drives away with a famous movie producer, while Elviara exits the club into the waiting arms of the police.

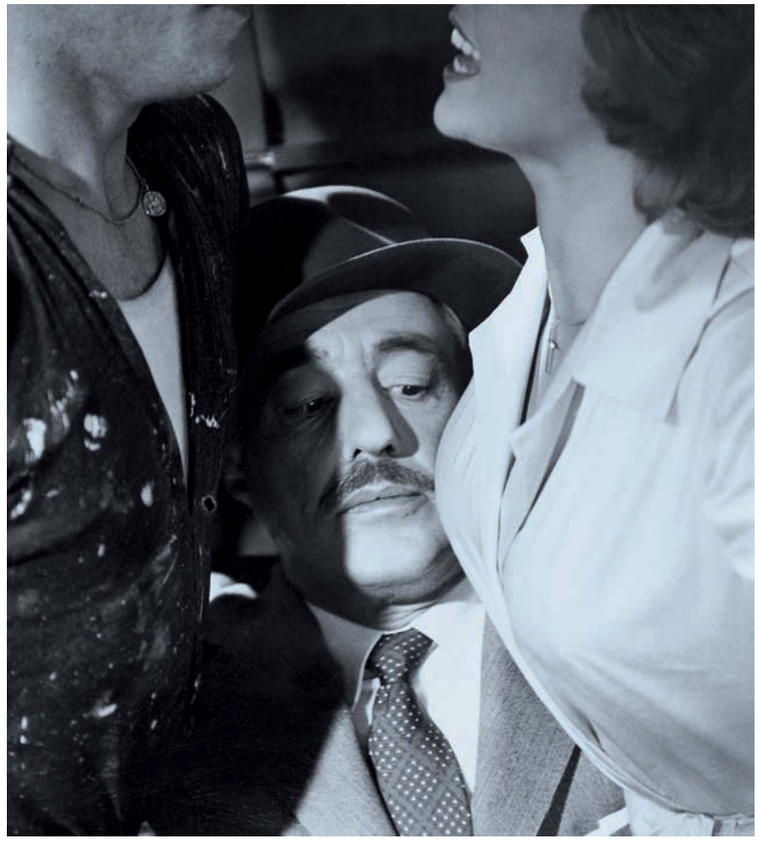
From the standpoint of Bava's cinematography, most of *Villa Borghese* is merely serviceable. The first five stories are shot on location, with natural daylight only subtly augmented with reflectors and such to accent the face of one actor over another. The compositions are seldom surprising, and the visual storytelling is limited throughout to the primary plane—counterpoint as opposed to contrast—a creative

decision antithetical to Bava's own guiding aesthetic. There are a few of the lovely, shadow-sculpted close-ups that had become Bava's trademark touch, but on the whole, there seems little for him to do, other than follow the increasingly sentimental situations, one by one, to their inevitable conclusions—although there is evidence that Bava enjoyed filming the segment with De Sica, one of the most charismatic of all Italian film personalities. (There's a very funny shot of him, caught seated between the standing. arguing couple, as the girl's bosom is thrust into his face.)

The final story, however, takes place at night and grants Bava with opportunities to assert his personality more fully. The night scenes in the park—where harsh contrasts rule as white light bombards the peripheries of the night, clinging to the boughs of trees and the ends of roads—are pregnant with moods of illicitness, clandestine excitement, and danger. One remarkable shot attends an assignation between Elviara and a client (who originally asked for Antonietta), and shows them in the night-cloaked front seat of a car with only their eyes illuminated—intensifying the air of anonymity and fantasy that exists between them. These scenes very much belong to the same universe of decadent glamor as the Tamara Lees thread in *Vita da cani* and of course, Bava's later *gialli La ragazza che sapeva troppo/Evil Eye* and *Sei donne per l'assassino/Blood and Black Lace*, though at the time this film was made, the atmosphere Bava had captured remained placeless—a flavor still awaiting its genre—unless this was the *fumettistico* quality which had caused the critic of *Perdonami!* to complain. The ironic tone of the story, in which "Miss Cinema" is revealed to be a whore, is also very typical of Bava, who had little reverence for the business in which he worked, where craft counted for little, and where success was sometimes predicated on who slept with whom.

This segment is amusing and intriguing to look at, but on the whole,





VITTORIO DE SICA *comes between discontented lovers Maurizio Arena and Giovanna Ralli in VILLA BORGHESE.*

Villa Borghese is a bittersweet melodrama that is not significantly better than the average, postwar "woman's picture." It is not surprising that Bava never worked again for director Franciolini, who specialized in this kind of film—*Siamo donne/We, the Women* (1953; Alida Valli segment only), *Racconti d'estate/Love on the Riviera* (1958)—until his early death on January 1, 1960, at the age of 49.

Villa Borghese was given a small, belated US release in 1957 as *It Happened in the Park*, courtesy of Ellis Films, Inc. This art and exploitation-minded company made a practice of importing various European films and parading them under such sleazy titles as *Wasted Lives*, *Gambling Hell*, *Inside a Girl's Dormitory*, and *The World's Most Beautiful Swindlers*.

Terza liceo

First released: March 18, 1954
B&W, 1.66:1, 104 minutes

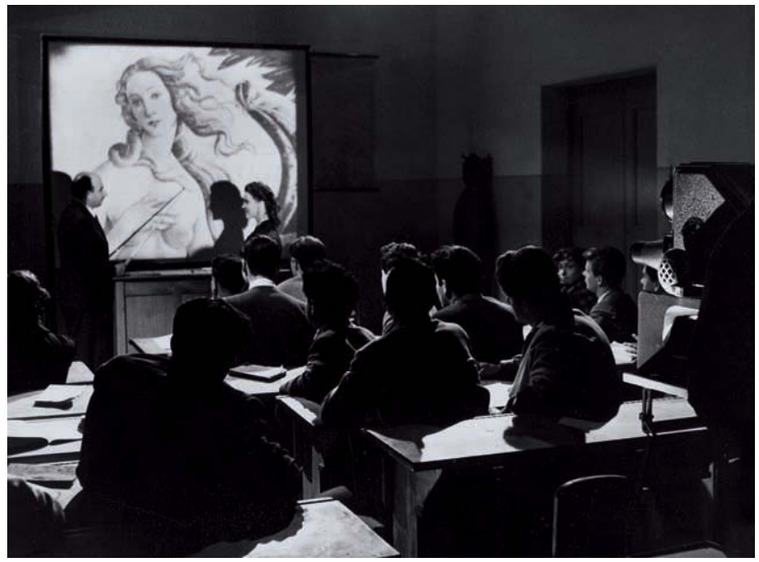
Production: INCIM (Industrie Cinematografiche Milanesi). **Distributor**: Diana Film. **Finland**: 11/23/56. **US**: *High School*.

A much more commercially successful assignment of this period was *Terza liceo* ("High School, Third Year"), the first feature film directed by Luciano Emmer, with whom Bava had collaborated on some earlier short films, including *Disastri della guerra* and *La festa di Sant'Isidoro*, both released in 1950. Primarily scripted by Sergio Amidei (the author of Rossellini's *Paisà* and *Roma città apertà*, also credited with the "idea" of *Villa Borghese*), *Terza liceo* chronicled the lives and loves of a group of high school students, from the first day of school to final exams.

Terza liceo performed well at the boxoffice because it was one of the earliest films from any country to specifically target a teenage audience. It did this by chronicling the situations of young adults, in and out of school, without the usual condescension. (Before this, teenagers were usually seen in Italian films only to lend the appearance of duration to marriages, or to provide established actors with a child they could conveniently slap without having the audience turn against them.)



ISABELLA REDI *as a young woman with too many responsibilities in TERZA LICEO.*



ITALIAN *teens are taught about love through exposure to the classics.*

Emmer's film is unmistakably a melodrama, a soap opera of sorts, but despite a prevalence of stereotypes and familiar situations (at least one of them dating back to Shakespeare), it succeeds in treating its young cast as real people, which was somewhat revolutionary for its time.

The story begins with the student body arriving for a new school year, and being promptly alienated from their studies by elderly professors incapable of making their lessons relevant. Things go a bit easier in philosophy class, which is instructed by Prof. Valenti (Bartolomeo Rossetti), a young teacher with a talent for involving his students; he rallies to their defense when the school board is enraged by an editorial in the school paper criticizing the old guard faculty. In the meantime, love blooms between various couples: a shy, serious boy falls for the most popular girl in class; another pair are forbidden to see each other by their parents (there is also a hint of possible, or brewing, sexual abuse in the girl's family, as her sculptor father is working on a nude statue that resembles her); and the most responsible of the girls (Isabella Redi)—who follows her school day with a part-time secretarial job and spends her evenings at home, caring for her widowed father and two younger siblings—finds love with a handsome young architect in her workplace. At one point, one of the girls plays a record of Nat King Cole's "Too Young," which too boldly underscores the film's thesis: that Italian youth of the post-war period had been forced to grow up quickly, and were deserving of their elders' respect and indulgence.



ITALIAN *due-foglia.*

Though innovative and well-meaning, *Terza liceo* is ultimately a failure. The script has the tone of a serious, neorealist work that wants to break new ground, but Emmer's direction (hamstrung by the severity of Italian film censorship) is too reticent and clinical. The young cast is attractive and occasionally talented, but they come across unnaturally, like models in a catalogue, sapped of all vitality by the film's insistent sense of poise. This is a teenage world, but nowhere is there any sense of youthful energy or enthusiasm—not in the awkward kissing scenes, nor in the "action" scenes of the characters getting around Rome on Vespa scooters, winning basketball games, or going off on skiing trips. Such sequences were obviously included to provide the film with some sparkle, some exuberance, but the camera (and thus, the audience) remains firmly sidelined throughout, eavesdropping on these lives without ever crossing the proscenium and becoming truly involved in them. As the authors of the *Dizionario del cinema italiano* report in their entry on the picture: "It is interesting to point out (to better

understand the climate in which filmmakers were obliged to participate in the early '50s) that even an innocent, wholesome film like this one had troubles with the censors—because the members of a girl's basketball team were shown playing in shorts!"[6]

The film is a particular disappointment for Bava watchers, because—though all of his (by now) trademark touches are present and accounted-for (the "fourth wall" shadowplay, the madonna lighting on the girls' faces, the moments of intimacy filmed in silhouette, and so on)—there is no sense of spontaneity or creative involvement. There is a sense of a master stylist, miscast and bored to tears, coasting through the production by imitating himself.

According to Corrado Bartoloni, Bava's lack of involvement in the material became literal, for about one-third of the shoot: "Once, we were making a movie called *Terza liceo* with Luciano Emmer, and [Bava] left me alone for the last fifteen days, because he was busy on another set. He left me alone to shoot the movie with Emmer, who was a very strong director, and . . . I began to feel confident. In fact, sometimes, if Mario wasn't feeling well, he would go to the director and say, 'This will be Bartoloni's day.'" On these occasions, Ubaldo Terzano was temporarily promoted to camera operator, and the job of camera assistant was filled by Enrico Umetelli.

Bartoloni's story helps to explain why the film looks the way it does. He did what any competent cameraman would have done in such a situation—reproduce, as best he could, the style of the cameraman he was replacing, to ensure that the picture would be visually consistent throughout. Unfortunately, the studied nature of the cinematography adds to the overall staleness of the piece, which despite the absence of a name cast, nevertheless went on to earn four times as much money as Risi's *Viale della speranza* and only slightly less than *Perdonami!*

For all its faults, *Terza liceo* is worthy of note for its anticipation of the teen picture that would become a popular facet of American film production in the years ahead. It was reportedly acquired for US distribution and released under the title *High School*, but additional details have proven elusive.



ITALIAN *due-foglia.*

Bava's reputation as a fast, efficient cameraman now preceded him, and it was during this period that he also began to garner a reputation as a film doctor, filming pickup shots for other cameramen who found themselves out of their depth in action sequences, advising fellow filmmakers on the art of trick photography, and even taking over the reins from other directors—"as they took their siesta," he once described, perhaps with less humor than it seems. Consequently, from this point on, the full scope of Mario Bava's professional activities becomes impossible to chart definitively.

For example, some filmographies credit Bava with photographing the Tullio Covaz film *Una croce senza nome* ("A Gravestone Without a Name," 1952),[7] but the cameraman of credit is Carlo Carlini. Did Bava lend a hand to the production? It's possible, but filmographies seldom state the sources of their information. Confirmation certainly didn't came from Bava, who never took credit for assisting his fellow cameramen—partly because it might have appeared a backward step for a director of photography to be seen accepting work in secondary capacities, and partly because of the anonymous work ethic instilled in him by his father.

Cose da pazzi

First released: March 20, 1954
B&W, 1.66:1, 90 minutes
Production: Kronos Film.
Distributor: Regionale.

Mario Bava's earlier assistance to Gábor Pogány during the production of Riccardo Freda's *Spartaco* had been much appreciated, and this positive experience led to another sort of collaboration on one of Bava's most distinguished early projects: *Cose da pazzi* ("Things Go Crazy," 1954), a bizarre psychological comedy directed by the great Viennese filmmaker Georg Wilhelm Pabst (1885–1967).

Best-known for his darkly erotic, silent collaborations with the striking American actress Louise Brooks—*Die buchse der Pandora/Pandora's Box* (1928) and *Das tagebuch einer Verlorenen/Diary of a Lost Girl* (1929)—G. W. Pabst had spent the past few years pursuing a dream project of bringing Homer's *The Odyssey* to the screen. In 1950, he had completed a script which he hoped to shoot in America, with Gregory Peck as Ulysses (the names of Clark Gable and Orson Welles were also bandied about). Most intriguingly, Pabst hoped to tempt Greta Garbo out of retirement with a dual role as Ulysses' wife Penelope and as his supernatural temptress, Circe. He presented the script to Garbo in New York, but the only response he received was no response at all. Not knowing what to do, he accepted the next offer that came along—to direct a series of staged operas in Florence and Verona. In Italy, he was able to get a new film off the ground—*La voce del silenzio* ("The Voice of Silence," 1953), which was signed by no fewer than thirteen screenwriters, including Jean Cocteau, and featured Aldo Fabrizi, Jean Marais, and Ettore Manni. The cameraman was Gábor Pogány, who was initially carried over

(along with Fabrizi) to *Cose da pazzi*, Pabst's first picture for his new production company, Kronos Film.

Never released in America, *Cose da pazzi* is a dark comedy about Dalia Rossi (Carla Del Poggio, the wife of Italian director Alberto Lattuada), who lives in the same apartment building as a mentally ill woman. One night, after the crazy woman wakes her entire neighborhood by standing on her balcony, ranting and throwing breakable objects into the street, an ambulance arrives to take her into protective custody—but the attendants mistakenly arrest Dalia, whose apartment occupies the same balcony. Dalia is committed to Villa Felicità, a mental hospital, where she has difficulty proving her sanity—and equal difficulty telling the doctors from the patients! When Dalia awakens from her sedative, she finds herself attended by Prof. Gnauli (Fabrizi, brilliant as always), who appears to be the head of the asylum until his examination of her culminates in the mad tickling of her bare feet! The true director of Villa Felicità is Prof. Ruíz (Enrico Viarisio), a manic-depressive with a dictatorial complex who decides to keep an eye on his patients by replacing the artwork on the walls of their rooms with enlarged photographs of himself—staring at the ones who need constant vigilance, and laughing maniacally at the ones who suffer from depression. As Ruíz and Gnauli continually overthrow one another, each taking over the asylum periodically to equally crazed effect, the truly calm and sane Dr. Forzi (Enrico Luzi) becomes convinced of Dalia's sanity and falls in love with her. Dalia manages to place an outside call to her fiance Enrico (Piero Palermini) and best friend Silvia (Rita Giannuzzi), who make plans to free her, but fall in love during their endeavor—no problem, as it leaves Dalia free to marry Dr. Forzi.

For some reason, Gábor Pogány worked only a short time on the picture; Mario Bava was brought in to complete the assignment—one presumes, on the joint recommendation of Pogány and Fabrizi. Indeed, Fabrizi may have suggested Bava on the basis of the special aptitude he showed for dark, surreal subjects during the filming of the nightmare sequence from *La familiglia Passaguai fa fortuna.* It seems reasonable to further speculate, on the basis of Pogány's own stark visual style (the best known example being Vittorio De Sica's *La ciociara/Two Women*, 1960), that his technique did not extend at that time to the range of paranoid illusion and optical effects that Bava could deliver in spades. Many Italian sources credit Bava and Pogány jointly with the



CARLA DEL POGGIO *nestled amid trademark Bava lighting in COSE DA PAZZI.*

DRS. GNAULI AND RUIZ *(Aldo Fabrizi and Enrico Viarisio) in conference, representing the inmates and staff of the asylum.*



6 R. Citti and R. Poppi, *Dizionario del cinema italiano, I Film* 2 (Rome, Italy: Gremese Editore, 1991), 360.

7 I have not seen *Una croce senza nome*, so, in the event Bava's participation is confirmed someday, it should be noted here that the film was produced by Produzione Cinematografica Mario Prodan e Cesare Torri and first released in Rome on November 21, 1952. Its only other known continental release was in Germany, where it appeared much later on German television under the title *Ein Kreuz ohne Namen* ("A Cross Without a Name") on November 15, 1963.

film's cinematography, but only Bava is credited onscreen.

Regardless of its quality, *Cose da pazzi* was a crushing commercial failure, earning roughly one-tenth as much as *Spartaco;* it ruined Pabst financially. His health also deteriorated, his diabetes trumped with Parkinson's Disease, and after many painful years of physical decline and professional inactivity, he died from a liver infection in 1967. Because he owned the property himself and so few prints were struck, *Cose da pazzi* was considered a lost film for decades, and is described as such even in fairly recent books devoted to Pabst. Fortunately, a print in excellent condition was rediscovered in the 1990s and acquired for distribution by Ripley's Films. It has since played on Italian television and been released on DVD.

Seen today, it is easy to understand why *Cose da pazzi* met with popular resistance at the time of its release; it was very much ahead of its time. A forerunner of films like Samuel Fuller's *Shock Corridor* (1963, which also told the story of a sane patient in a madhouse whose other inmates were used to venture socio-political commentary) and Phillipe De Broca's *Le Roi de Coeur/King of Hearts* (1966, which also tells a love story while questioning who is mad and who is sane), *Cose da pazzi* was perhaps the first film since Robert Wiene's *Das Kabinett des Dr. Caligari/The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari* (1919) to use a sanitarium for macabre/satirical purposes, as a mirror held up to society. Produced at a time when normalcy was prized by most people above all other traits, Pabst's film had the audacity to declare that craziness can be very attractive, to point out that everybody is crazy in one way or another—crazy to believe the things we believe, crazy to follow the leaders we elect—and to probe the craziness that underlies our everyday interests and even the craziness of falling in love.

Bava's photography is an elaborate exercise in shadowplay, bordering at times on German Expressionism, as befits the Wiene connection. Villa Felicità is a forbidding place of deep, gleaming white corridors, where the shadows cast by barred windows are visible everywhere: erect, angled, distorted. He also lights the objects of madness—one patient's strange bicycle contraption, the dress and mannequin collection of another—in such a way that they are given pride of place, not in terms of composition, but in terms of illumination; he makes them look prized and special, cut off from their surrounding reality. The inescapable delirium of the place extends to the presence of a revolving door that always brings one back to the same spot, foreshadowing the Escher-like dislocations of time and space that would proliferate in Bava's *Operazione paura/Kill, Baby . . . Kill!*. Prof. Ruíz interrogates his patients *a la* Dr. Mabuse, seated behind a desk while blazing a spotlight in their direction, blinding them to all but his imperious shadow. As disturbing as all of this seems to be, it's actually quite innocent and not nearly as dangerous a place as the real world. At one point, Dalia is helped to escape by a man claiming to be a visiting journalist, who leads her to a nearby abandoned shack, produces a toy airplane, and tells her that it cannot fly them away until it has been fuelled . . . *with her blood*. She is rescued in the nick of time by Dr. Forzi, but in context, this encounter with madness outside the madhouse is so shocking that her subsequent return to Villa Felicità feels quite calming and sheltering in its whimsy and stylish abstraction. Bava's complex, angular lighting in *Cose da pazzi* is, in some ways, an antecedent of Vittorio Storaro's memorable cinematography in Bernardo Bertolucci's *Il conformista/The Conformist* (1970).

Bava's camera operator on this film, Corrado Bartoloni, reflected on a recent Italian TV broadcast of *Cose da pazzi*: "I saw this movie again yesterday and I said to myself, 'I can't believe how great Bava was!' You know, seeing those black-and-white movies nowadays, it's incredible. He had this style of photography—we used to call it 'French photography'—and I am still amazed, watching it today. I can remember watching the dailies in the screening room, and whenever I saw Mario's work after a reel of anyone else's, I had to turn to him and say, 'You're the best! How can anyone deny it? You're the best!'"



MARIA FIORE *as Graziella, the tragic heroine of Giorgio Bianchi's haunting romanza.*

Graziella

First released: October 28, 1954
B&W, 1.66:1, 95 minutes

Production: Trionfalcine.
Distributor: Cei–Incom.

Bava's second job for director Giorgio Bianchi (*Amor non ho! . . . però, però . . .*) was *Graziella*, based on an "homonymous" tale by Alphonse de Lamartine. This late 17th/early 18th century romantic melodrama addresses the potential for disaster when attraction occurs between the working and upper classes. It therefore covers much the same ground as Bava's debut as a cameraman, *L'avventura di Annabella*, though in tragic rather than comic terms.

The film's complicated plot defies attempts to compress it. The author Alphonse de Lamartine (Jean-Pierre Mocky) arrives in Naples late one evening, needing to reach the Neapolitan isle of Procida, home to his brother Gerard (Michele Sakara). Despite threatening weather, he tempts old Andrea (Francesco Tomolillo) with money to get him to his destination; the boat barely makes it to Procida intact, and the old man offers sanctuary to Alphonse till the storm blows over. In the boatman's humble cottage, the writer is introduced to Andrea's wife Assunta (Tina Pica) and granddaughter Graziella (Maria Fiore), who pays him special attention.

The next day, Andrea's boat is found destroyed by the tides. Feeling at fault, Alfonse agrees to finance the building of a larger, more resilient vessel. Alfonse and Graziella break away from a religious procession in the village to gambol in the hills, where she confidentially shows him the abandoned shelter where she spends time by herself. As the procession passes by in the distance, Graziella veils herself and they kneel together—like a couple about to be married. That night, at a town festivity, Ceccho (Franco Nicotra)—Graziella's boyfriend since childhood—sees her obvious affection for the newcomer and leaves in a jealous huff, but the new couple are too happy to notice. As a writer, Alfonse is staggered by the discovery that no one in Graziella's family knows how to read. After dinner, he reads them a chapter from a cheap romance novel they happen to own, always a source of mystery for them, and the reading moves Graziella to tears.

Alfonse is summoned back to his family's vacation home on the mainland, and Graziella carves a keepsake for him: a paperweight bearing the



MARIA FIORE*'s mood darkens as she breaks the keepsake made for her lover.*

likeness of her secret sanctum. She sends her grandfather to deliver it, but the old peasant is automatically turned away by the condescending servant at the door. Graziella receives her gift back with wounded pride, and hides it guiltily behind the legs of Jesus on the crucifix above her bedroom door.

When Alfonse returns to the island, he learns that Graziella has been missing for days. Her family is distraught, but he knows exactly where to find her: she is in her hilltop sanctuary, where she has been praying for his return to a self-made shrine of the Virgin Mary. She has cut her long, beautiful hair as a sacrifice to the Holy Mother. They kiss and Alphonse promises never to leave her again. A few days later, when Graziella asks Alfonse about his life in Paris, he responds elaborately, going so far as to describe the beautiful clothes that Parisian women wear. Graziella decides to surprise him by having a special dress and bonnet made, but when he stumbles into her dressmaking session and tells her, eyes agog, that she's bound to win First Prize at the masquerade, her heart is broken. He dries her tears by confessing that he loves her.

Alfonse is summoned back to Paris by the French consul. He promises Graziella that he will return as quickly as he can, and as she fetches her paperweight to accompany him, it falls and breaks—a bad omen, but Alfonse puts a good light on it by suggesting that each of them carry half. As he and the consul are rowed out to a large ship, Graziella runs out to a windy precipice and watches him leave through tearful eyes. She calls out her own declaration of love to him, but he doesn't hear, and she collapses in despair.

Detained in Paris, Alfonse is miserable. Weeks pass, and he sends a letter to Graziella reaffirming his love and vow to return. Unbeknownst to him, Graziella has fallen ill after her prolonged exposure to the high winds, but when the letter arrives after a doctor's housecall, she becomes reanimated with curiosity and chases her doctor, begging him to read it to her. She is overjoyed by its contents, but going outside in an already vulnerable state worsens her condition and she becomes consumptive.

In Paris, Alfonse's parents throw a party in the hopes of attracting him to a more suitable match. When he realizes their goal and their callous indifference to his stated intention to marry Graziella, he defies them by departing once again for Procida. He arrives in time to see his beloved's funeral procession—a visual rhyme to the religious procession which he and Graziella witnessed the day they fell in love. As he stands where she stood the last time she saw him, he watches with tearful eyes as her white coffin is rowed out to sea.

Graziella is an intriguing and picturesque romance, effectively interwoven with its faraway time and place, reminiscent in several ways of Michael Powell and Emeric Pressburger's *I Know Where I'm Going!* (1945)—another story about two people from different cultures and backgrounds who find love when they are thrown together by fate on a strange island on a stormy night. But whereas the Powell and Pressburger film encompasses the whimsical, magical, passionate, and gnostic all at once, Bianchi's film is grave and baleful, overcast by dark fate and superstition. Though the film hasn't any humor, it evinces tremendous compassion for its characters; the sequence in which Graziella coerces Alfonse into reading to her family the first pages of what is apparently a low brow, romantic novel (called *Paolo e Virginie*)—with Graziella shedding real tears over the fictional clichés and her grandmother responding to the descriptions of their actions with complete belief in these ciphers as real people—is profoundly affecting, and makes one appreciate, with Alfonse, the magic of everyday things that educated people take for granted and learn to view with condescension, if not derision.

Viewers who approach *Graziella* with a knowledge of Bava's later directorial efforts will be surprised to find a number of affinities with them. The beachfront and other exterior settings are evocative of *La frusta e il corpo*, and Mocky's period wardrobe is nearly identical to that worn by Christopher Lee in the later film. The two films also seem to occupy the same Brontëan universe, in which forbidden love stands in stark contrast to the repressive structure of family. Likewise, some of the settings in Procida—particularly the net-strewn rooms of Andrea's cottage—are nearly identical to those of Gorka's family in *I tre volti della paura* or, closer still, to the village tavern in *Operazione paura*. In fact, the interiors of *Graziella* were shot, like some of Bava's later horror films, at Titanus Studios, so they may well have shared set components and actual sound stage area. The climactic funeral procession and burial at sea look ahead to *Gli invasori/Erik the Conqueror* (1961), as well.

Bava's contribution to *Graziella* is difficult to overestimate, because its appeal is largely visual and atmospheric. Maria Fiore—born Jolanda di Fiore in 1935—was only 19 at the time

ALFONSE *(Jean-Pierre Mocky) returns to claim his beloved but finds her already permanently, morbidly distracted.*



of filming; she emotes well, but she is a fairly plain young woman, and even when her face is angelically haloed with Bava's velvety madonna lighting, one can't help wondering how much more striking the movie would have been with a more compelling actress in the role. Bava's lighting lends a specific commentary to Fiore's performance throughout: he highlights her eyes when tears are about to flow, enshrines her face with light when she adores or is adored, mottles her sickbed with shadows that she rises above by sitting erect as Alphonse's letter is handed to her, and she dies offscreen, her passing indicated only by the exclamation of her grandmother. Always attentive to the eyes of actors, Bava also pays special attention to a wrinkle under Mocky's left eye, highlighting it selectively at moments when Alphonse feels tenderly toward Graziella.

Bava's mastery of lighting and composition were, by now, now fully matured and benefitted from the atmospheric settings of art director Veniero Colasanti—who would continue to work with Bava on his next few assignments. Bava makes this familiar tragedy compelling with an exacting attention to environments and their emotional resonance. The story takes us to religious processions and elaborately choreographed parties replete with smoke and fireworks and crane shots, but nothing is quite as dazzling as the simplicity of Andrea's cottage in Procida, especially the fireplace where Graziella dries Alphonse's feet when he comes in from the storm. There is a small fire, and some wisps of smoke, but pouring forth from the hearth is so much light that the viewer feels its heat, and the illusion is sold a bit more by someone's offscreen hand flickering the light cast onto the wall at the right. In this cottage, it's what we don't see that makes the deepest impression: the crucifix where Graziella later hides her carved memento, for instance, is first introduced as a silhouette cast on the wall outside her door. In the scene of the party in Paris, however, Bava takes the extreme opposite approach and so overwhelms every set-up with baroque content—antique furniture, rococo wall moldings, chandeliers, opulent clothing, women's hats with extraordinary plumage—that the eye overloads and retains nothing but a (desired) hollow impression. The distance between these two worlds is further emphasized by Bava's continued use of deep focus photography, which allows some of the film's conversations (notably one between Graziella and her estranged boyfriend Ceccho) to be conducted literally in depth.

Ulisse

First released: October 6, 1954
Technicolor, 1.66:1, 108 minutes

Production: Lux Film. **Distributor**: Lux Film. **Austria**: 2/55. **Finland**: 9/23/55. **Germany**: *Fahrten des Odysseus*, "The Adventures of Ulysses," 2/8/55, 113m. **UK**: *Ulysses*, Archway Film Distribution Ltd., 6/55, 108m 32s, Certificate "U," passed with cuts. **US**: *Ulysses*, Paramount Pictures, 10/55, 104m.

When production on *Cose di pazzi* ended, G. W. Pabst turned his attentions once again to filming *The Odyssey*, now in partnership with Dino De Laurentiis as producer. Surprisingly, this bedrock of all adventure stories had never been filmed in its entirety; all previous adaptations had been one- or two-reelers, beginning with Georges Méliès' *Ile de Calypso: Ulysse e le Géant Polyphème* (1905), Pathé Cinema's *La retour de Ulysse* (1908, co-directed by Charles De Bargy and André Calmettes, running only 925 feet) and, the longest of the few, the Milan-made *Odissea* (1911), directed by Giuseppe de Liguoro (1869–1944).

Because the epic that came to be known as *Ulisse* was ultimately financed by Lux Film, co-produced by Carlo Ponti and Dino De Laurentiis, designed by Flavio Mogherini on the sound stages at the new Ponti–De Laurentiis Studio, and entered preproduction with Pabst at the helm—and because so much special effects photography was required by the material—it is inconceivable that Mario Bava was not also invited to be part of this "old home week" production, at least in its early phases. However, as the project matured in pre-production, Lux joined forces with Paramount in America, Kirk Douglas was cast as Ulysses, and Pabst—whose last two films had been boxoffice failures—was replaced as director by Mario Camerini. Camerini's signing would not in itself be enough to knock Bava off the roster, because Camerini's recent film *Gli eroi della domenica* had also been shot by Bava. But Paramount (and probably Kirk Douglas as well) would have insisted on protecting their investment by using an American director of photography, and this is the likeliest reason why cameraman Harold "Hal" Rosson (1895–1988) was brought over to Rome. Production began on May 18, 1953, in Porto Ercole.

Though it is grandly entertaining and contains some of the most poignant moments found in any mythological film, *Ulisse* is awkwardly constructed; it begins in the middle of the story, as the amnesiac Ulysses struggles to recall his memory on the eve of his wedding to Nausicaa (Rosanna Podestà, a carry-over from Pabst's *La voce del silenzio*), and thus looks back on a few prior adventures before he recovers himself and sails home to his wife Penelope (Silvana Mangano, the wife of Dino De Laurentiis) in Ithaca, where he must overcome the arrogant suitors who would claim his bride and throne. This odd, inside-out construction may be due to too many cooks in the kitchen, or perhaps it is evidence of an editor (in this case, Leo Catozzo) struggling to combine the conflicting visions of two different directors into a coherent story. (In this respect, *Ulisse* is very much like 1940's *The Thief of Bagdad*, which was signed by three directors, including Michael Powell.) In his autobiography *The Ragman's Son*, Kirk Douglas admits that he and "the director" (whose name he evidently didn't recall) were "on the outs" during the production, and didn't come to a truce until the wrap party, where the actor kneeled and serenaded Camerini. Their adversarial relationship may also have contributed to a failure to get everything needed into the can.

Looking at *Ulisse*, made in the last year that Technicolor's three-strip camera was used, it is obvious to the trained eye that Rosson was the principal cameraman. The brother of noted director Robert Rosson, he had supervised some extremely inventive color photography in Hollywood, including several cornerstones of the Technicolor process, such as *The Wizard of Oz* (1939), *Duel in the Sun* (1946), and the Esther Williams swim pageant *Dangerous When Wet* (1953), and *Ulisse* shares the visual character of those films: a bright, colorful look shot through with undercurrents of darkness. Despite Rosson's outstanding credentials, It is questionable that anyone but Mario Bava was responsible for lighting the scenes involving Circe (also played by Mangano, whose dual role was one of several ideas retained from Pabst's 1950 screenplay). These scenes are so remarkably different in approach and texture to everything else in the picture, including other fantastic scenes such as the encounter with the cyclops Polyphemus—and so true to Bava's own aesthetics, Rosson's involvement in them becomes dubious.

Throughout her scenes as Circe, Mangano is bathed in an uncanny aqua-green light that imbues her with a supernatural presence, and the weeping walls of her cave are similarly illuminated with painterly daubs of irrational, saturated gel lighting—giving it the feel of the proverbial cake left out in the rain. These sequences, complimented by Flavio Mogherini's magnificent set design, are identical to the photographic effects Bava would later achieve in *Ercole e la regina di Lidia*/*Hercules Unchained*, and the bizarre attendance of Circe's handmaidens in their anachronistic Belle Epoque gowns and black scarves likewise distinctly foreshadows the Hesperides in Bava's *Ercole al centro della terra*/*Hercules in the Haunted World*. The sequence continues with Circe conjuring various spirits from the Beyond to persuade Ulysses to stay with her, full of typical Bavian smoke to "animate" an otherwise inanimate sequence, and ends with a clincher: as Circe looks into the camera and says, "Go then, if that is your choice—the sea is waiting!" Mangano's close-up is curdled with a "water glass," a camera prop from Mario Bava's personal arsenal. This pane of partially clear, partially rippled glass was a present given to Mario by his father Eugenio, who had manufactured it for his own use in the days of the silent cinema. In his later films as a director, Bava was fond of using the "water glass" to illustrate hallucinations and



ITALIAN *fotobusta.*

moments of derangement; here, it draws the curtain on Ulysses' protracted enchantment, and provides a bridge to a shot of the rolling sea. The presence of this unique camera prop in the sequence would seem to clinch Bava's presence on the set. Mangano's dual role as the witch Circe and as Ulysses' faithfully chaste wife Penelope can also be seen as a seminal influence on a recurring theme in Bava's later horror pictures: the way that Good and Evil can harmonize in the face of a beautiful woman. (One of the seven credited screenwriters on *Ulisse* was Ennio De Concini, who would later script *La maschera del demonio/ Black Sunday*.)

The main titles of the English-language version credit "director of photography" Rosson and "cameraman" Mario Parapetti with the film's cinematography. Parapetti—who later photographed *Le sette fatiche di Ali Babà* (1961) and *Il mostro di Venezia/The Embalmer* (1966), among other undistinguished features, without ever becoming a member of AIC—was a Lux contract camera operator at the time, and his prominent screen credit here betrays Paramount's lack of understanding about his professional provinces, and a curious determination to share Rosson's credit with an Italian cameraman. We get an idea of how imprecise Italian screen credits can be when we compare those of *Ulisse* to the Italian print of another Lux production shot at roughly the same time: Pietro Francisci's *Attila* (1954). Here, the cinematography is credited to Aldo Tonti, AIC, while listed among his four (!) credited camera operators is the legendary American cinematographer, Karl Struss! This is one of the most preposterous examples of Italian quota juggling, because Struss (who actually photographed all of Anthony Quinn's scenes) had literally been a leading Hollywood cameraman since Tonti was 10 years old! (Tonti must have been profoundly embarrassed to see Struss relegated to the onscreen status of his dogsbody, but at least the film had the official appearance of having an Italian cameraman—which helped it to procure Italian funding.)

If Hal Rosson was responsible for shooting every scene in *Ulisse,* it would be the first and only time an American cameraman ever took complete charge of an Italian picture; when cameramen were imported, the scenes involving primarily Italian talent were usually handled separately, regarded as second unit shooting, in a manner of speaking. For the scenes involving Mangano, Kirk Douglas may well have bowed to his co-star's greater need to communicate with her director of photography. In such

instances, Rosson would not have been replaced by his camera operator, as the main titles suggest, but by another AIC cameraman brought in to supplement his work without credit. Given his prior working experience with literally all of the film's principal crew, Mario Bava would have been at the top of a list of such men. If true, Bava's involvement in the Circe scenes would mean that he had already conceptualized some of his most advanced lighting ideas at a time when his own career had not yet presented him with the opportunity to shoot a film in color.

While I feel fairly confident of Bava's covert involvement in this portion of the film's cinematography, I am similarly convinced he had nothing whatever to do with its special effects unit. *Ulisse*'s "special photographic effects" are credited to Eugen Schüfftan ("Shuftan" onscreen), the optical effects technician who had built his reputation on the special matte and miniature effects shots he contributed to Fritz Lang's *Metropolis* (1926), an elaboration on principles first presented onscreen by Eugenio Bava a decade earlier. Like Rosson, Schüfftan was a known quantity in Hollywood; a successful cameraman in Germany since 1930, he had relocated to France in 1936 and finally moved to America in the early 1940s, where he assisted his old friend Edgar G. Ulmer by anonymously photographing such low-budget cheapies as *Bluebeard* (1944), *Club Havana* (1945) and *The Wife of Monte Cristo* (1946). At the time of *Ulisse*, Schüfftan had moved back to France and was working steadily. To have his name on a feature brought it international prestige, and it's possible that his signing was responsible for displacing Bava from the picture officially. The film's special effects—which are basically limited to miniature shots of Ulysses' ship being tossed about in a turbulent seastorm, and the sequence with Polyphemus—have neither the look nor personality of Bava's work, and especially in the Polyphemus sequence, they commit several basic errors that work against their effectiveness.

For example, when the cyclops Polyphemus (played by Oscar Andriani, a cast alumnus of Pabst's *Cose da pazzi*) is introduced by having his shadow cast gigantically on the wall of the cave visible behind Ulysses and his men, it is obviously not the shadow of a giant, but that of a normal man cast at a distance to make it look larger than normal. Likewise, Schüfftan neglected to photograph the monster's movements with an overcranked camera, which would have had the desired effect of slowing onscreen movement to give him a more believable aspect of volume and gravity; consequently, when Polyphemus spills wine on his chest, the trickles seem to race down at least twice as fast as a normal flow should, spoiling the illusion. Surprisingly, there are no forced perspective shots to lend a false sense of scale to the giant, who is instead represented in many shots by awkward, "life size" hands and legs that are false- and rigid-looking. Even the blinding of Polyphemus is miscalculated by having the monster lying on his back while Ulysses and his men apparently thrust the red-hot poker from somewhere under the monster's chin! The mishandling of the sequence must have been especially painful to Bava, who could have done it so much better—and would, in the 1968 TV miniseries *Odissea.*





SILVANA MANGANO *as Circe, tempting Ulysses (Kirk Douglas) in an eerily baroque sequence representative of Bava's color lighting style.*

Attila, il flagello di dio

First released: December 27, 1954
Technicolor, 1.66:1, 100 minutes

Production: Lux Film (Rome), Lux de France (Paris). **Distributor**: Lux Film. **France**: *Attila, Fléau de Dieu*, "Attila, the Blight of God," Lux Compagnie de France, 12/30/55. **Germany**: *Attila, die Geissel Gottes*, 4/1/55, 80m. **UK**: *Attila the Hun*, Archway Film Distribution Ltd., 2/57, 79m 23s, Certificate "A," passed with cuts. **US**: *Attila*, Embassy Pictures Corporation, 5/17/58, 83m.

Another reason to suspect Mario Bava's involvement in *Ulisse* is that, during this same period, he was already present at the Ponti–De Laurentiis Studio, devising (again, uncredited) optical effects for *Attila, il flagello di Dio*/*Attila*, directed by Pietro Francisci.[8] This was another Ponti–De Laurentiis production for Lux, this time starring Anthony Quinn (who had come to Rome to play the role of Antinus in *Ulisse*, and stayed long enough to play Attila and then Zampanò in Federico Fellini's *La strada*) and, in one of her earliest lead roles, Sophia Loren. Curiously, another adaptation of this story was being filmed almost simultaneously: Douglas Sirk's *Sign of the Pagan* (1954), with Jack Palance as Attila.

Set in 450 A.D., *Attila* chronicles the teetering balance of power between the dying Roman empire and the barbarian hordes of Attila, warlord of the Huns, whose previous assaults on Roman territories have been rewarded with literal pay-offs for peace. In Francisci's version (again scripted by Ennio De Concini), Attila wants desperately to take advantage of the empire's political weakness and conquer it, but his wishes are held in check by the pacifism of his brother Bleda (Ettore Manni) and the visions of doom foretold by his wife Grune (Irene Papas). When the leader of the Western empire, Valentiniano/Valentinian III (Claude Laydu), sends his emissary Ezio/Aetius (Henri Vidal) to the Huns' encampment high in the Alps with a proposal for peace, the Huns rally and attack his company from the rear on their return. Soon arriving at

Attila's tent is Valentiniano's beautiful sister Onoria/Honoria (Loren), who seduces the warlord in her quest for personal survival. Later, while hiding in a coach on the battlefield where Rome and Hun forces clash in mortal combat, she is stabbed to death by a Roman soldier (unaware of her identity) between the very breasts she used to tempt Attila. Later, Attila rides with his young son (Fabio Bellisario) through the blood-strewn field of Roman corpses. "These are the proud Romans," he tells the boy, "sons of Caesar and Augustus, conquerors of Gaul and Carthage . . . Look at them now! Nothing but bones and blood . . ." (De Concini's dialogue here parallels the words he would later put in the mouth of *La maschera del demonio*'s Dr. Kruvajan, who remarks upon entering a dilapidated family chapel that "nothing remains of the Princes of Vajda but the shadows of their former glory.") The Huns invade a town, rape and pillage, but are ultimately barred from entering Rome by a theological procession led by Pope Leone I. As Attila's cowed hordes turn and ride away, a shining, celestial cross forms in the heavens—courtesy of Mario Bava.

Bava had been working off and (mostly) on as Pietro Francisci's cameraman for the past eight years, and according to actor–screenwriter Fiorenzo Fiorentini, he had also made uncredited contributions to several Francisci films made over the intervening years between *Antonio da Padova* and this one: *Il leone di Amalfi* (1950), *Le meravigliose avventure di Guerrin Meschino* (1951), and *La regina di Saba/The Queen of Sheba* (1952). Bava was not the credited cinematographer of any of these films, but Francisci summoned him—as did increasing numbers of his colleagues—to provide trick shots, to build maquettes of castles, to execute glass mattes.

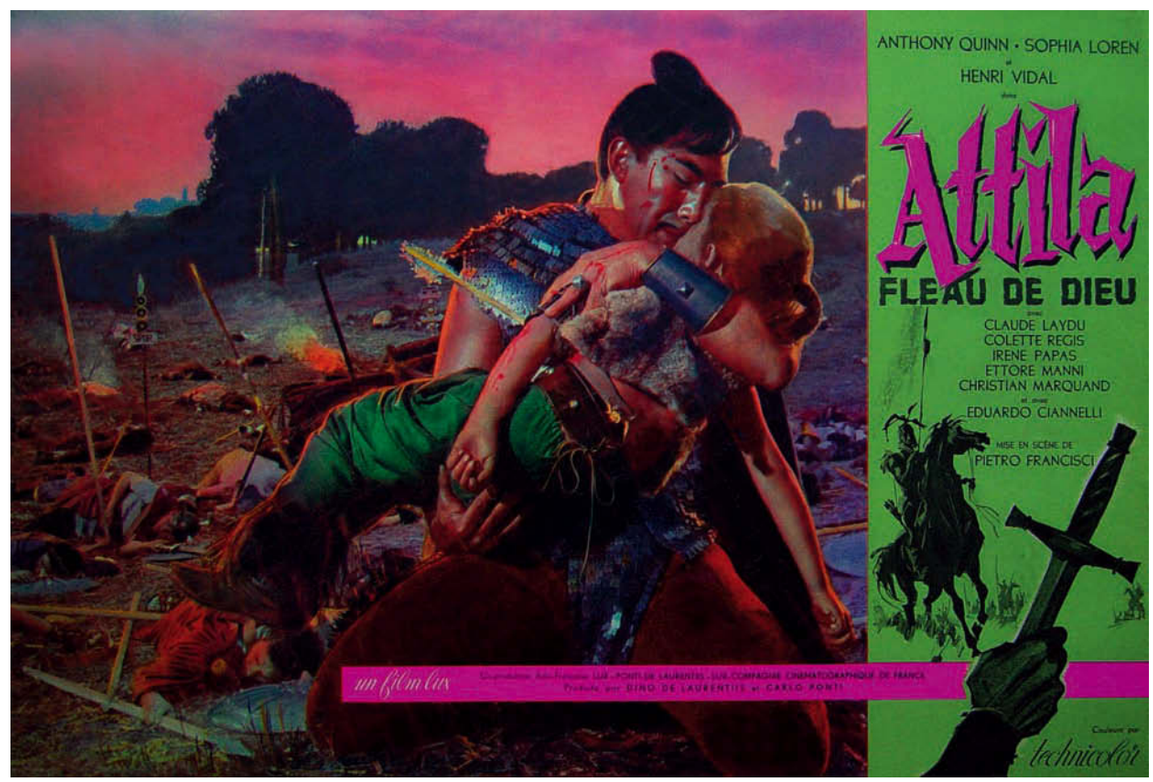
"They were well-crafted productions, but made with very little capital," Fiorentini revealed. "Francisci could always finish a picture spending only one-tenth of what other directors would spend. *Guerrin Meschino*, for example, was a swashbuckler shot with only six horses, that were somehow made to seem like *six* hundred . . . It was Francisci and Bava who created all of these things; both of them had a love of cinema and a gift for cutting costs. The whole of Italian cinema was rebuilt on their shoulders. And I have no doubt that our industry could flourish again, even today, if we better followed their examples."[9]

Given their history of collaboration, which would continue through the remaining years of the decade, it seems certain that Francisci would have invited Bava to photograph *Attila* . . . who would only have turned down such an offer owing to a previous commitment—for example, working with Pabst on *Ulisse*. At any rate, Bava must have *become* available later in the production (for example, when Hal Rosson was brought in) because *Attila*'s uncredited optical trickery and beautiful matte paintings bear all of his unique signature touches.

In addition to executing a number of striking glass matte paintings—the establishing shot of a Roman street with its vista of boxy houses (positioned to blend in with the foregrounded street set in the studio), the Huns' encampment in a green valley nestled below a rolling hillside (the actors and set visible through a clearing in the center of the painting), a background of majestic snow-capped mountain peaks (positioned above a path used as a crossing for Attila and his men on horseback), and another which added dozens of tents in the distance of a view of the Roman encampment—Bava also used his ingenuity to multiply the number of available extras. Francisci had at his disposal no more than twenty-five extras for the film's respective armies, and Bava was able to turn them into hundreds by photographing them through a sheet of glass covered in pre-cut sections of black paper. By exposing one area at a time and arranging the extras in a pre-defined space, Bava was able to photograph their choreographed movements, stop, cover the exposed area, expose a new area, rewind the film and thus continue shooting until an entire encampment was seemingly populated. He would use this technique on later pictures, but never again at the same level of success seen here.

Bava never spoke in interviews about working with Karl Struss. If the great Hollywood cameraman's work was limited to working in the studio with Quinn and Loren, there was no reason their paths would cross; nevertheless, *Attila* could have provided Bava with the opportunity to quiz Struss directly about the means by which he had transformed Fredric March's Dr. Jekyll into Mr. Hyde in Rouben Mamoulian's 1931 film—a top secret lighting trick which Bava would later surpass and simplify for the aging and rejuvenation effects of *I vampiri* (1957).

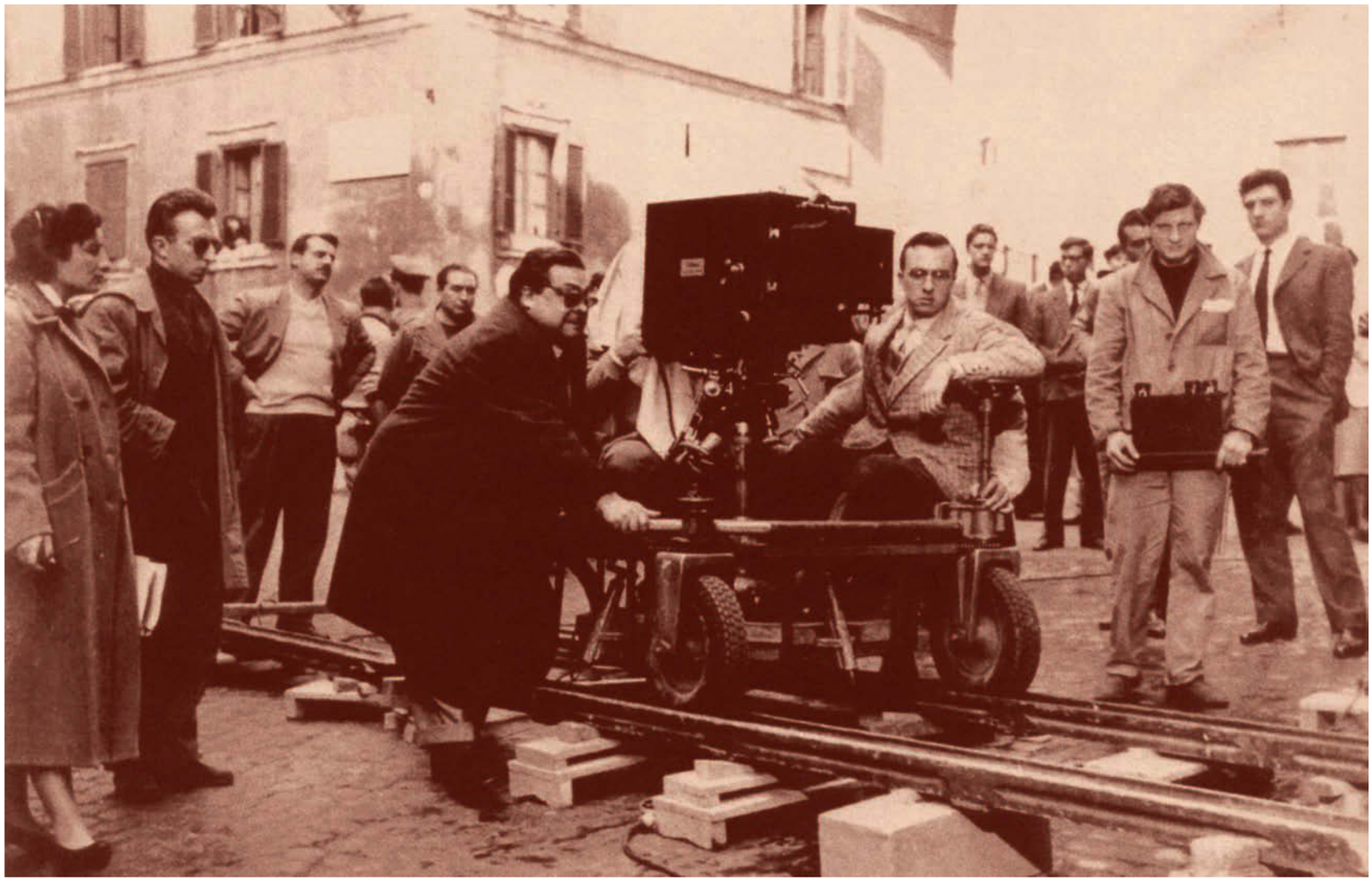
In *Attila*, we can see the Italian cinema moving farther away from traditional historical adventure to embrace those aspects that would later characterize the *peplum*, as well



ATTILA *(Anthony Quinn) mourns the death of his son in this French lobby card.*

8 Franca Faldini and Goffredo Fofi, "The Fofi Papers," *Spaghetti Cinema* 72, July 2000, 2–12. *Dizionario del cinema italiano* credits "Steffen Grimes" with the film's special effects. The odd spelling arouses suspicion, as does the fact that no other screen credits exist for such a person.

9 Ibid.



MARIO BAVA *(behind camera) photographs a dolly shot for HANNO RUBATO UN TRAM with director Aldo Fabrizi helping to push. The man in the sunglasses at left is assistant director Sergio Leone.*

as the Viking films that were made in Italy in the wake of Richard Fleischer's 1958 film *The Vikings*. In chronicling the conflict between Roman forces and Attila's Huns, the movie plays both sides in definitive fashion. Everything about the Hun sequences—Quinn's lusty swagger, his fur vest, the shocking twists of the violence on the battlefield and, finally, the flaming Viking-like funeral of Bleda—foreshadows such later films as Giacomo Gentilomo's *L'ultimo dei vichinghi/Last of the Vikings* (which Bava co-directed) and Bava's own *Gli invasori/Erik the Conqueror* (both 1961). Loren's Onoria is the archetypal *peplum* slut/Queen, surviving on the ripe, pink pelt of her sexuality, and eroticism is also summoned by one of those choreographed dance sequences which would become an obligatory feature of the *pepla*. Here, Francisci stages a truly bizarre sequence that begins with female dancers in *Flash Gordon* headgear feigning battle with fishing nets and tridents, and culminates in the faked decapitation of one of the dancers, her wax head crushed between the hands of her victor, thus revealing the status of the illusion. (It's a very convincing wax head, too, possibly supplied by a moonlighting Eugenio Bava, who would perform similar tasks on his son's future films.)

Certain aspects of *Attila*—such as the decapitation, and particularly a later scene in which a priest is attacked in his church and nailed through his palms to an ornamental cross—were considered so extreme that the film was subjected to much cutting before it could be released in America. To this end, American director Richard C. Sarafian [10] was hired to write and direct some replacement footage in New York, which he did with actors Richard Bakalyan, Dickie Jones and Scott Marlowe (all of whom specialized in "juvenile delinquent" roles at the time) made up as Huns. This version has become exceedingly rare since its theatrical release. Despite its great cast, and enduring sense of scope and spectacle, Francisci's *Attila* has all but disappeared from general circulation in America.

Hanno rubato un tram

First released: December 30, 1954
B&W, 1.66:1, 90 minutes

Production: Imperial Film. **Distributor**: Columbia–Ceiad. **Germany**: *Geliebte Tram*, "Beloved Streetcar," German TV, 2/27/60. **Spain**: *Han Robado un Tranva*, AS Films, S.A.

Bava's next assignment was a contemporary comedy, *Hanno rubato un tram* ("They've Stolen a Streetcar"), starring Aldo Fabrizi. Filmed at Cinecittà and on location in Bologna, it is the hectic but light-hearted story of two bickering streetcar drivers—Cesare (Fabrizi) and Bernasconi (Carlo Campanini)—who must join forces to recover a missing streetcar or lose their jobs. The feature went into production under the direction of Mario Bonnard (who later

directed the Steve Reeves version of *Gli ultimi giorni di Pompei/The Last Days of Pompeii*, 1959), but he was soon replaced by Fabrizi himself.

Hanno rubato un tram marked yet another collaboration between Bava and art director Flavio Mogherini, who was now flanked by a remarkable young assistant, Giorgio Giovannini, who would later rise to prominence and design many of Bava's best-known films as a director. The film was also scored by Carlo Rustichelli, and it marks the only known occasion when Bava worked side-by-side with Sergio Leone, the future father of the Spaghetti Western, who at the time was Mario Bonnard's assistant director and continued to assist Fabrizi after Bonnard's leave-taking.

In the wake of this collaboration, Bava's successful and mutually friendly working relationship with Aldo Fabrizi curiously came to an end. There was no apparent reason for this termination—no known argument or betrayal—but a possible clue may be found in one of Bava's rare interviews. "I have a knack for making friends," he confessed to Ornella Volta, "but not for keeping them. I once had a very good friend who was, in my opinion, the greatest of all actors. For three years, we saw each other every day—morning, noon, and night. Then one day, he decided to give me a present. He sent to my house a pair of antique, sterling silver candelabra—a matched set of the sort which could only be found in the castle of Count Dracula! I didn't know how to thank him, certainly not by telephone . . . so, suddenly, he heard no further sign of life from me! I felt I had to do something spectacular to match his generosity, but I couldn't think of anything, so I simply withdrew and disappeared." [11]

Though Bava did not reveal the name of his actor friend, what he does say only helps to support the theory that it was Aldo Fabrizi. A shy and retiring man, and his father's son, Mario found that the narcissism endemic to the acting profession went against his grain, so he almost never socialized with actors. Fabrizi was the only exception to this rule in Bava's life up to this time, and the only actor with whom Bava worked over a period as long as four years; true to his words, the bulk of their collaboration took place during the three-year period between 1949 and 1952. Fabrizi and Bava would work together again on only one more known collaboration (1961's *Le meraviglie di Aladino*), but it could not hold a candle to their remarkably fertile, frantic, and funny collaborations of the postwar era.



ITALIAN *locandina.*

Buonanotte . . . avvocato!

First released: March 16, 1955
B&W, 1.66:1, 84 minutes
Production: Fortunia Film.
Distributor: Dear Film.

Another collaboration with director Giorgio Bianchi, *Buonanotte . . . avvocato!* ("Goodnight . . . Lawyer!") is an interesting Alberto Sordi comedy that shares much in common with Billy Wilder's classic *The Seven Year Itch*, with which it was concurrently produced. It is easily mistaken as an imitation, but its release actually preceded that of *The Seven Year Itch* by several months.

Sordi plays Alberto Santi, a young, self-absorbed attorney who is paid 50,000,000 *lira* by a man to clear his son of a charge of robbery. His courtroom summation, full of strutting peacockery, is more incriminating than helpful to the (doubtless) guilty party, but he pockets the money all the same and leaves the court with no more than an indifferent shrug of his shoulders. Alberto is happily married to Clara (Giulietta Masina), but she has driven him crazy with sexual frustration with a period of chastity prior to her annual trip to Rome to participate in a Catholic procession; she will not even kiss him on the lips at the train station. When Clara leaves for Rome, Alberto arranges with his womanizing colleague Vittorio (Vittorio Caprioli, whose oft-repeated line is "My name is Vittorio . . . but *you* can call me 'Baby'") to spend the evening at a nightclub, where they live as bachelors for one night. On the point of leaving his apartment, Alberto is startled by a voluptuous blonde in a low-cut gown—Bianca Maria (Mara Berni)—who rushes into his rooms, begging sanctuary from her jealous husband Franco (Andrea Checchi). Franco follows, suspiciously searching each room in the apartment without invitation, and somehow never catching sight of his wife. He leaves, and Alberto tries his damnedest to seduce Bianca Maria, who eventually locks herself in the bedroom and—in a visual joke that screams "Mario Bava"—positions a photo of Clara on the other side of the keyhole, to admonish the Peeping Tom.

10 Born in New York City in 1925, Sarafian worked primarily as a television director from 1955–1968, at which time he began to make feature films. Among his best-known works are *Run Wild, Run Free* (1969), *Fragment of Fear* (1970), and the cult classic *Vanishing Point* (1971).

11 Ornella Volta, "Conversation avec Mario Bava," *Positif* 138, May 1972, 44–48.

Alberto awakens to find Bianca Maria gone, with the 50 million *lire* he brought home missing from his study. He assumes that the woman used her feminine wiles to steal the money, and he traces her to her parents' home (where a rhumba party hosted by her younger sister is in progress), demanding that the cash be returned. All is chaos until Clara returns and points out that she secreted the money herself in one of Alberto's desk drawers for safekeeping. Realizing his mistake, Alberto secretly returns to Bianca Maria to apologize, and is followed by both Clara and Franco, who suspect that their respective spouses are having an affair. The two couples converge, and Alberto clears his own good name in a grand parody of a courtroom summation. All is well afterwards, but the next time Clara goes out of town, Alberto walks repentently in the devotional procession beside her.

Buonanotte . . . avvocato! is a very amusing comic diversion, but it does not offer Bava the wealth of opportunities for memorable cinematography that earlier Bianchi films, such as *Graziella*, did. There is an eye-catching nightclub sequence, in which a voluptuous Amazon sings and dances in a costume that one deep breath might completely vaporize, and her performance is ornamented with effervescent pinwheels of light—but this vivacious highlight is the exception to the rule. Shot in only four weeks, the film is primarily an illustration of Bava's experimentation with long, uninterrupted takes, which allowed Sordi (whose mock-vain style of comedy recalls the characters and manner of American writer–director Carl Reiner) to move freely about the large apartment set, the courtroom set, the party set, without undue editing restrictions on his effusive comic performance. For example, one scene—in which Alberto celebrates his first night of freedom by meticulously following all of his wife's written directions about how to prepare and serve an already-made dinner, only to unceremoniously dump the end result into a trash



ITALIAN *due-foglia.*

can, then accidentally frees a pet parakeet from its cage and attempts to catch it—consists of a single, 4-minute-plus take; one senses that it was cut only because the movements of the bird, once outside its cage, were not exactly as planned. As a result, Bava's lighting had to cover a lot of ground and provide a steady, sedate, and moderately stylish backdrop to Sordi's antics; Bava—not the bird—was kept in a creative cage.

At times, Bava's lighting appears almost jarringly somber for such a frivolous, silly movie; the exterior night shots of Bianca Maria's house, for example, are bedecked with low-angled cross-lighting, making it look more like the scene of a murder than a party. The shot may have been lighted this way to underscore Alberto's misguided suspicion that Bianca Maria plans to blackmail him to his wife with overheated lies about their night together; but elsewhere, the movie's atmosphere is also culpable—projecting, and thus reinforcing, Alberto's worries—which ultimately works against the light, soufflé-like handling it needed.

There are some clever visual jokes—especially the aforementioned moment when Bianca Maria, knowing that she is being spied upon as she disrobes for bed, places a finger-wagging photo of Clara in line of the keyhole Alberto is using—and also a glass matte effect of a luminous, clouded moon, to which Alberto sings a lament after watching other lovers from his balcony. It is not Bava's most accomplished glass matte, being wholly stationary and unlayered (as similar, later shots would never be), and is glimpsed only in a single, brief cutaway.

The movie's unapologetic lechery has not dated well; Alberto actually makes a grab for Bianca Maria's breasts at one point, and later, when his binoculars observe a struggle between a man and a neighboring woman that looks like attempted rape, he is inspired not to call the police or rush to his neighbor's rescue, but to take another crack at the blonde who's locked herself in his bedroom! Ultimately, it is not Sordi's overblown buffoonery that leaves a lingering impression, at least not a favorable one; instead, it is Masina's prim, minxish presence that strikes a true comedic counterpoint, and there is also a first-rate supporting performance by Tina Pica (from *Graziella*) as Antonia, the Santis' elderly housekeeper.

If *Buonanotte . . . avvocato!* has any ultimate relevance to the Bava canon, it is for establishing his professional collaboration with actor Andrea Checchi, the second actor (after Aldo Fabrizi) with whom Bava would form a lasting personal friendship. Bava's family remember Checchi as one of Mario's best friends; he would later be featured in several of Bava's Galatea productions, most famously as Dr. Kruvajan in *La maschera del demonio*.

Non c'è amore più grande

First released: August 7, 1955
B&W, 1.66:1, 91 minutes

Production: Serena Film. **Distributor**: Dear Film. **Germany**: *Erkauftes Glueck* ("Luck For Sale"), German TV, 1/22/62. **Spain**: *No hay Amor mas grande*, Procines.

Bava's fourth collaboration with director Giorgio Bianchi, *Non c'è amore più grande* ("Nowhere a Greater Love") was another love story about the rich and the poor, and how money has the power to corrupt even a sincere relationship. Franco Interlenghi starred as Mario, a university student of prosperous background who meets and—against the advice of his father—becomes attached to an impoverished young woman named Luisa (Antonella Lualdi). As he comes to know Luisa better, he falls in love with her—and discovers that she is pregnant. This is no obstacle to the enamored young idealist; though he must leave Rome on an extended voyage with his family, Mario proposes to Luisa, leaving her with enough money to see her through the pregnancy. Shortly thereafter, Luisa suffers a fall and loses the baby; she becomes terrified that, without a baby, she will lose Mario's sympathetic affection and have no right to the money he gave her to survive. In desperation, she arranges to "buy" another child—Andreino (*il piccolo* Massimo Kurz)—from Ines (Teresa Pellati), another woman in dire economic straits, whose husband is in jail. Upon his return, Mario and Luisa marry, but happiness cannot be founded on such a deception. When Romolo (Arnoldo Foà), the true father of Andreino, is released from jail and discovers that his son has been sold to the wife of a wealthy man, he sets out to blackmail Luisa. In the end, the matter is taken to the courts, where the judge demonstrates understanding and allows Mario and his wife to legally adopt the child.

In the 1955 edition of *Segnalazioni Cinematografiche*, an anonymous critic opined: "The [film's] argument is not without points of interest . . . Noteworthy are the verisimilitude of settings, and the dialogue is delivered well by some of the actors." Not exactly a passionate endorsement, but whatever its qualities might have been, *Non c'è amore grande* was the kind of soap opera that scored well with mainstream Italian audiences, grossing nearly half a billion *lire* at the boxoffice—in fact, of all the films Mario Bava had photographed to date, only *Guardie e ladri* and the *Famiglia Passaguai* films proved more commercial. In terms of what had been proven possible by the recovering Italian cinema up to now, this was almost an unbelievable achievement. Nevertheless, it would be trumped by the historic success that immediately followed.



ITALIAN *locandina.*

Le avventure di Giacomo Casanova

First released:
May 6, 1955 (Germany)
Eastmancolor, 1.66:1, 95 minutes

Production: Orso Film, Iris Film (Rome), CFPC (Comptoir Français de Productions Cinématographiques, Paris). **Distributor**: Cei–Incom. **France**: *Casanova*, 8/5/55. **Germany**: *Casanova—seine Liebe und Abenteuer*, "Casanova—His Loves and Adventures," 5/6/55, 90m. **Italy**: 12/22/55. **Mexico:** *Las Aventuras de Casanova*, Mario J. Dada. **US**: *The Sins of Casanova*, Times Film Corporation, 10/6/57.

A milestone in Mario Bava's career as a cinematographer came with *Le avventure di Giacomo Casanova* ("The Adventures of Giacomo Casanova"), a romantic historical romp directed and co-written by Steno. It was Bava's first feature-length work to be filmed in color—Eastmancolor, to be precise. It may seem strange, considering his pre-eminence in his field and his liking for color, that Bava did not photograph the first Italian film in color. *Le avventure di Giacomo Casanova* was shot almost three years after the film boasting that particular claim, *Totò a colori* ("Totò in Color" 1952), also directed by Steno but photographed by Tonino Delli Colli. In fact, Bava had been the first cameraman offered the opportunity by Steno, but he turned the job down, finding the conditions unacceptable. Accepting the feature would have obliged Bava to work in Ferraniacolor, a monopack color process with an ASA [exposure setting] of six—meaning that it required a tremendous amount of onset lighting. He had other objections to the stock as well that will be discussed later.

Tonino Delli Colli remembered his difficulties on the assignment in a 2003 www.Kodak.com online interview: "No one else wanted to do it . . . They chose me, saying 'You're under contract so you'll do what we tell you.' All we had available was the lights for shooting with black-and-white film, because color lamps didn't exist yet. The lighting became extremely complicated. I said 'Are you all crazy?' In short, what they wanted was an avalanche of light. And poor Totò was subjected to these showers of light.

Poor little guy. Among other things, he was already prone to eye problems. As soon as Steno, the director, called 'Stop,' Totò was off. He wanted to get out of that inferno as soon as he could."

Delli Colli told Kodak.com that the arrival of color revolutionized not only the craft but the essential tools of cinematography—the film, the exposure, the lamps, the lab equipment, as well as the processing. "Like everyone else," he said, "I had to study the new product, with help from Kodak and from the laboratories. I got furious with Kodak whenever a new negative came out because I had always wanted to use the same film. With each new product, I had to start again from scratch.

"The shooting technique was more or less the same," he continued. "There was a substantial change in the concept of things that had originally been considered secondary, such as set design, set decoration, and costumes. Everything took on a different importance and a different value. There's no question that cinema has gained something through the advent of color, but I also think it has lost a lot. Black-and-white made it possible to create unique and [impossible to duplicate] atmospheres."

By biding his time, Bava was able to make his own official color debut in Eastmancolor, which at the time was offering their 5248 filmstock (25 ASA tungsten), which had greater light sensitivity and allowed him to light the sets and actors basically as he had always photographed them in black-and-white.

Released the year after Norman Z. McLeod's American farce *Casanova's Big Night* (starring Bob Hope and an unbilled Vincent Price as the eponymous *amator*), *Le avventure di Giacomo Casanova* starred 29-year-old Gabriele Ferzetti as the irrepressible ladies' man, Giovanni Giacomo Casanova de Seingalt (1725–98), a man of 35 as the film opens in 1760. While seated inside a coach, Casanova's eye is delighted by the physical attributes of Dolores (Irene Galter), a shapely young woman employed at an inn, as she climbs atop the coach to fetch down some baggage from its upper rack. Inspired to spend the night, he finagles his way into her *boudoir* but is caught by her fiance, José Ramirez, the leader of the royal guard, who arrests him. The prison guards, a slovenly bunch, decide to pass the evening by reading haltingly aloud from a book of handwritten memoirs confiscated from the prisoner. As they read, Casanova rests in his cell, reminiscing . . .



ITALIAN *locandina.*

Born to a showgirl, Giacomo recalls his earliest memory of lying in a backstage crib while being admired by a flock of exotic dancers. After being expelled from school in Venice on grounds of immorality, he grew into a young man who made his living by tutoring the son of the consul of Weimar. One night, he succeeded in persuading the maid, Bettina (Fulvia Franco), to have an assignation with him, but the consul's daughter Lucrezia (Lia De Leo), overhearing their plan, had the servant sidetracked and kept the date on her behalf, under cover of a darkened room. The next day, upon learning from Bettina that she didn't keep the date, Casanova imagined that the responsive woman in the dark must have been the consul's wife, Barbara (Mara Lane). He proceeded to make subtle overtures to her, but she, being the wrong choice, took offense . . . before deciding that she was interested after all! That night, as Giacomo took his leave from Barbara's room, he was intercepted in the corridor by her wanton daughter, and after that, by the still-needy Bettina . . .

Years later, after returning to Venice, Casanova became smitten with Louise de Chatillon (Corinne Calvet), a member of the French aristocracy who bested him at cards. Determined to conquer her in other ways, Giacomo commenced to woo her, taking her on gondola rides, wining and dining her, and when all else failed, lowering himself on bended knee to propose marriage. At this vulnerable moment, Louise turned the tables on him, opening a curtain to reveal an audience of eavesdroppers. An inveterate gambler, she has won another bet: that she could make the great Casanova forsake all other women and propose marriage! Mortally embarrassed, Casanova scrambled across the rooftops with the authorities once again on his trail.

Later, having escaped into the countryside and acquired a personal valet (Carlo Campanini), Casanova stumbled upon a wedding and became immediately infatuated by the young bride. Wanting desperately to possess this girl, he introduced himself as her long-lost cousin, kissed her warmly, and was invited to accompany the wedding party to a local inn. Once there, it was discovered that there was no room for the cousin and his manservant, so he and his valet were promptly invited to share the bridal chamber, where the groom spent the entire night snoring and tightly hugging a small wooden chest as his beautiful bride lay awake and neglected. Casanova caught the sleepless bride's eyes in the dark and communicated silently with her by writing on a mirror: "Why did you marry him?" (She carefully removed a gold coin from the wooden chest to explain.) And finally, after several other progressively

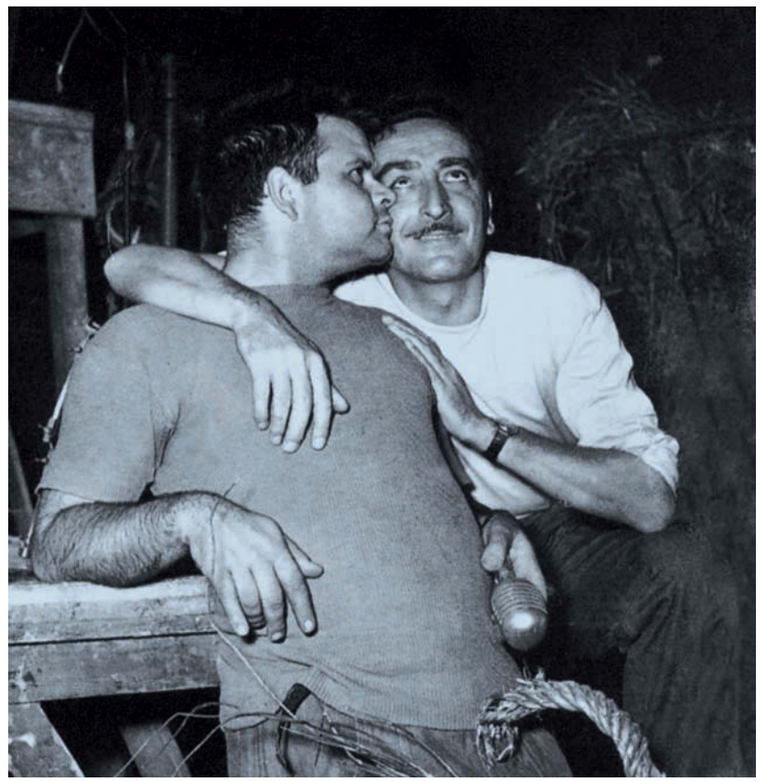
probing questions, came the ultimate one: "Do you really believe I'm your cousin?" (She smiled warmly, obliquely, conspiratorially.) Casanova woke his groggy manservant and ordered him to feign sleepwalking, wake the husband by bumping into him, and lead the poor cuckold out of the room while passion had its sway. The husband woke according to plan, dropped his treasure chest, and followed the sleepwalking valet onto the roof. A scene of comic precariousness followed, ending when the two men turned a sharp corner and bumped into a real sleepwalker marching along the same scenic route, who nearly knocks them off the ledge! The shaken husband returned to his bride, whom he found alone, sated and smiling, waiting to embrace him most gratefully . . .

We return to present tense as the prison guards listening to this tale sit around with mouths agape, aroused, perspiring, and stroking each other's heads in sweet fraternal misery. Casanova receives an unexpected visitor at his cell, who arrives in *bal masque* disguise; it is none other than the Cardinal de Richelieu, who has come to retrieve a document incriminating her highness Marie-Thérèse, the Margrave de Richebourg (Marina Vlady), as one of Casanova's lovers. He reiterates the tale to Richelieu, about how his royal adversary was one night forced into his arms by a thunderstorm, a wet dress, and a candlelit room blown dark by an errant wind . . . After telling the story, Casanova clouts his Excellency on the head and steals his mask and costume to effect an escape from prison. He is met by soldiers who greet him as Richelieu and escort him back to his room at the inn, where the bed is inhabited by none other than . . . Dolores! Ignoring the desperate urgings of his valet, Casanova lingers to make love to Dolores and remains in her arms until the recovered Cardinal and his soldiers—led once again by José Ramirez—are literally shouldering down the door. As they burst into the room, they find Dolores alone, and very, very happy. Astride two horses on the open road, Casanova and his valet decide to set out for France. After galloping a short distance, they are stopped by a coach, whose lovely passenger (a brunette Ursula Andress, in her first screen role) asks the directions to Spain. They point in the direction opposite to that which they are taking, and as the coach trundles away, Casanova cannot hold the reins of his own nature, and turns his horse in pursuit of his next lover . . .

The screenplay and dialogue of *Le avventure di Giacomo Casanova* were written by more than a half-dozen people, including Steno's burly young assistant director Lucio Fulci (1927–96), who became a long-standing personal friend of Bava and would succeed him, after Bava's death, as Italy's



CASANOVA *(Gabriele Ferzetti) creeps into the marital bed of willing newlywed Marina Vlady, as husband Giacomo Furia snores on.*



FUTURE MASTERS *of Italian horror, Mario Bava and assistant director Lucio Fulci, photographed on-set during the production of LE AVVENTURE DI GIACOMO CASANOVA.*



MEXICAN *lobby card which inadvertently misidentifies Ursula Andress—who is not pictured!*

leading director of supernatural horror. Though the film is an important title in Bava's early filmography, *Le avventure di Giacomo Casanova* was not an easy or always enjoyable experience for the 41-year-old cameraman. Corrado Bartoloni recalls that Mario clashed repeatedly with the film's producer, Dario Sabatello, "because [Sabatello] insisted that color had to be lighted 'flat . . .' However, Bava insisted on lighting the scenes in the same way he would have lighted them in black-and-white—and it was possible!"

Bava had been pressured by Sabatello to shoot the film in Ferraniacolor, but he refused. Eastmancolor was a more expensive stock but, in the short time since its introduction, Bava had determined through personal experimentation that Ferraniacolor was unstable, doomed to premature fading. Bava's quality control did not end with the selection of Eastmancolor stock; he took the additional precaution of entrusting his negative to Boschi (then Italy's best printing-developing company), despite their higher-than-usual costs. Bava clearly pursued his end result with extreme care. He did everything possible to ensure that his images would look as good as they possibly could for as long as they possibly could, even if it involved more work, more expense, and greater discomfort for the actors on the set.

Almost immediately, the look of the film's cinematography sets *Le avventure di Giacomo Casanova* apart from other Italian color films of the period, which tend to look as bright and flat as Dario Sabatello felt that all such films had to look. Bava invests his compositions with mottled key lighting and soft, caressing shadows, which give the film and its characters an inviting sense of sly intrigue. He introduces his first really daring lighting effect during the scene of Casanova romancing Dolores at the inn; there is a close two-shot, cloaked in shadows and intimately framed as they hesitate over a kiss, while the background wall is given animation by a flickering latticework of shadow, like the reflection of a candle's flame seen through the netted weave of its container. As he and his valet prepare to depart, we see them standing, poised for escape, before a much larger and wider wall shaken with still more complex, trembling latticework. In these early scenes, Bava offers no unusual emphases of color; he is not yet following in the footsteps of Ray Rennahan's work on Rouben Mamoulian's *Becky Sharp* (1935)—the film often cited as the starting point of "psychological color" in cinematography—but doing exactly as Bartoloni said, and photographing a color film with lighting techniques traditionally seen in black-and-white movies. The art direction would seem to have left Bava little recourse in the matter, as it is very busy and baroque, presenting more opportunities for shadow than color.

And yet, as the film hits its delightful stride, the viewer can sense Bava gradually awakening to the untapped possibilities of color. Candlelight suffuses the evening interiors with pink and orange, and when those candles are doused, the night scenes turn extremely, deeply blue—as blue as a line crossed, as blue as a dare accepted. In the film's most memorable and erotic scene—the silent conversation between Casanova and his newlywed "cousin"—the blue of night becomes a palpable third presence in their clandestine flirtation, and it returns in important later scenes, particularly the beautifully choreographed storm sequence, which employs backlit cycloramas and flashing lights and looks ahead to the thrilling, perversely romantic moment in Bava's *La frusta e il corpo/The Whip and the Body* when the ghost of Kurt (Christopher Lee) first appears to Nevenka (Daliah Lavi) at the height of a storm. Bava introduces some interesting camera tricks too, undercranking a shot of Ferzetti's gloved hand making an entry in his journal, and faking an overhead shot of Corinne Calvet as she reclines in bed, without the use of a crane, by recreating her bed on the back of a chair. Furthermore, Bava devised some superb maquettes of the exterior of Louise de Chatillon's *palais* and also the clock tower seen during the sleepwalking sequence. Another shot, more impressive in its execution than in its cleverness, shows Ferzetti and Valvet riding in a gondola through the canals of Venice; although the actors did take an actual gondola ride for long-shots and still photographs, it was impossible for Bava to fit his camera into the watercraft, so the actual shots within the gondola were faked in the studio with the actors positioned in front of a rear-screen projection plate of a rowing gondolier. The elements are so perfectly executed that the effect is actually convincing.

Because it was a French/Italian coproduction, *Le avventure di Giacomo Casanova* was able to include some shots that were more explicitly erotic than had been permitted in Italy since the end of the war. Consequently, in the months prior to its release, Steno's film gained considerable notoriety from newspaper reports of how much footage was being snipped by the chief minister of Italy's censor board.

Corrado Bartoloni: "There was nothing really too scandalous about it—just

Ferzetti looking at a bare-breasted woman, and a sequence of Marina Vlady with a camera movement along her body, but nothing really so daring." The scene with Ferzetti actually shows him kissing a woman's neck while pulling down the shoulders of her blouse, allowing her breasts to tumble free; never shown in Italy, it was retained in the French edition. Bare-breasted women had actually been a part of the Italian cinema since the silent days—such nudity is evident in production photos from the set of *Quo vadis?* (1913) and in surviving Italian prints of *Fabiola*—but the climate in regard to such matters had grown more conservative in the postwar years.

As a result of last-minute cuts, the Italian version turned out to be far more mild than advance publicity had led the public to expect. Consequently, though it made almost three times as much money as some of the black-and-white films Bava photographed during this period, it generated less than half the money earned by crowd pleasers like *Totò a colori* and was counted a disappointment. The French version, on the other hand, was released intact and became something of a *cause celèbre.*

An anonymous reviewer for the highbrow magazine *Cinema nuovo* expressed mixed feelings about the picture: "[The film is] a rare one, perhaps the only truly amorous film ever produced in Italy, because of its discreet and happy interplay of humor and eroticism. Unfortunately, the direction is not up to the level of its screenwriting, as it too often resorts to the cheap eloquence of a plunging neckline or other transparent devices for its sense of spectacle; it fails to provide Casanova with a setting worthy of this personage, one of the greats of our 17th century literature."

When that critic used the word "rare" in reference to *Le avventure di Giacomo Casanova,* he was being more prophetic than he realized. The film was never released in America, and only one print (of the French edition) is known to still exist today. The surviving print is mildly color-faded and heavily scratched, but seemingly intact; Bava's use of secondary colors, like green and orange, is more muted now than he likely intended them to be, but his primary colors remain sexily accentuated. Seen today, *Le avventure di Giacomo Casanova* is a startling picture to an American sensibility because, in the 1950s, every comparable American film—that is to say, any American film of this period that dared to be sexually conscious (*Baby Doll, Splendor in the Grass, Picnic*)—was obliged to simultaneously counter any suggestion of promiscuity with violence or shame. Steno's film manages to tell its story, without leering prurience, while at the same time being charged throughout with a sense of healthy sexual urgency. There is never any hint of inequality between the sexes, nor is it ever implied that Casanova is doing anything but being absolutely true to his nature and celebrating his profound appreciation of the fair sex, who give as good as they get. Thus, as the *Cinema Nuovo* reviewer suggests, it was a unique film in Italy when it was first released, and even when viewed today, it is still remarkable for the uncanny wholesomeness of its sexual candor.



GINA LOLLOBRIGIDA *as Lina Cavalieri.*

By reading between the lines of the *Cinema nuovo* review, we can see that *Le avventure di Giacomo Casanova* was being reprimanded not because it failed to entertain, but because it did not treat its historical figures with overt respect or authenticity. Yet it is this very characteristic that brings *Le avventure di Giacomo Casanova* into line with Bava's other historical canvasses of this period and, in some ways, provides a foundation for the later historical romps of Ken Russell. It was the very nature of the struggling Italian cinema to make do (and make new) with wardrobe, props, and set dressings left behind by earlier pictures, and to organize these disparate elements—often from films set in a variety of periods—into unusual new worlds. This synthesis of composites resulted in a strain of filmmaking, peculiar to Italy, that developed apace with neorealism. If we were to coin a word for this strain, it might well be "pseudo-realism," because even when the scripts dealt with characters and episodes of recorded history, they were often dressed in fashions and set decor that cobbled together an acceptable alternative to reality—a baroque impression of reality, rather than realism itself; a playground of the imagination.

La donna più bella del mondo

First released: November 1955
Eastmancolor, CinemaScope,
2.35:1, 107 minutes

Production: GE.S.I. (Gestione Studios Internazionale). **Distributor**: GE.S.I. **Denmark**: 10/1/56. **Finland**: 4/3/59. **France**: *La Belle des Belles,* 3/16/56. **Germany**: *Die schönste Frau der Welt,* Bavaria- Schorcht, 8/3/56, 102m. **Spain**: *La Mujer mas Guapa del Mundo*, Mercurio Films, S.A. **US**: *Beautiful but Dangerous,* 20th Century-Fox, 2/5/58. **UK**: *Beautiful but Dangerous,* Border Films, 4/56, 102m 26s, Certificate "A," passed with no cuts.

By 1955, only five years after her motion picture debut, Gina Lollobrigida had ascended to a lofty position of celebrity never before known by an Italian actress.

Upon returning to Rome after being unsuccessfully courted by producer Howard Hughes, Lollobrigida went back to work in Italian movies, acting for Vittorio De Sica in *Altri tempi* and scoring popular successes at the Cannes and Venice Film Festivals. In 1953, Sam Spiegel hired her to co-star with Humphrey Bogart, Jennifer Jones, Peter Lorre, and Robert Morley in *Beat the Devil*—in which she commanded more than her fair share of attention. Thereafter, La Lollo appeared opposite Errol Flynn in *Crossed Swords*, played the coveted title role in Luigi Zampa's film of Alberto Moravia's novel, *La Romana/The Woman of Rome* (1954), and could be said to have truly



LINA *is about to meet her future maestro while working in a sheet music store.*



LINA *after becoming the toast of the town.*

"arrived" when—on August 16, 1954—her portrait appeared on the cover of *Time* magazine. This tribute was quickly followed on November 15, 1954, with Gina on the cover of *Life*. After these epochal triumphs, Gina found herself in the position of not only being able to pick and choose the films she wanted to make, but being able to conceive and execute the material that she felt would best suit her talents.

The production of Lollobrigida's greatest commercial success, *La donna più bella del mondo* ("The Most Beautiful Woman in the World"), is credited to Maleno Malenotti of Gestione Studios Internazionali (the film's Italian distributor), but its true producer was the actress herself. A canny, streetwise businesswoman, Lollobrigida chose the subject matter and hand-picked the screenwriters; she chose the songs best-suited to her own vocal range (arias from *Tosca*); she selected her co-stars (including Tamara Lees, with whom she had shared many scenes in *Vita da cani*); she imported a prestigious Hollywood director with experience in staging movie musicals (Robert Z. Leonard); and—leaving absolutely nothing to chance—she hired Mario Bava (who knew better than anyone how to honor her beauty on film) to photograph the Eastmancolor spectacle.

In his long Hollywood career—which began as an actor in 1914—Robert Zigler Leonard (1889–1968) had produced and directed dozens of successful entertainments, and had shown himself particularly adept at melodramas involving stage performers: *Broadway Rose* (1922), *Jazzmania* (1923), *Dance Madness* (1926), *Dancing Lady* (1933), *The Great Ziegfeld* (1936), *Broadway Serenade* (1939), *Ziegfeld Girl* (1941) and *In the Good Old Summertime* (1949), to name several. *La donna più bella del mondo* was Leonard's penultimate work; it was followed by one last film, *Kelly and Me* (1957), starring Van Johnson and Piper Laurie—a comedy about a 1920s vaudevillian who finds a talented dog that helps him make the leap into talking pictures.

There is some controversy about how much of Leonard's participation in the actual filming was mere window-dressing. Not only was the final word on each scene left to its star, but because it was later reported that the Italian actors and crew were given on-set direction by one of the film's screenwriters, Piero Pierotti (1912–70)—who had previously scripted *Enrico Caruso, leggenda di una voce/The Young Caruso* (1951, also starring Lollobrigida) and *Giuseppe Verdi/The Life and Music of Giuseppe Verdi* (1953). [12] Regardless, the fact remains that *La donna più bella del mondo*—apart from its narrative clichés—is an extraordinarily accomplished film from a production standpoint. Any number of its scenes look every bit as polished and inventive as an MGM musical of the same (or slightly earlier) period, and Bava's pastel, color-sensitive camerawork recalls the look of Vincente Minnelli's musicals on many levels. This could hardly be accidental, or the work of a director without experience.

The film purports to be a biography of the legendary Italian soprano, Lina Cavalieri (1874–1944). Cavalieri had started her singing career at the Foliés-Bergère and in Paris cafés. With the financial support of her first husband, Russian Prince Sergei Bariatinsky, she was able to take singing lessons from the best teachers in Europe, and her talent grew to the point where she could star in opera productions. Among her crowning achievements: she was the first L'Ensoleillade in Massenet's *Cherubin*; the first Adriana Lecouvreur of *Manon Lescaut* at New York's Metropolitan Opera, and the first US *Fedora*. Though the film ends with Cavalieri walking into the Siberian sunset (so to speak) with Prince Sergei, their real-life marriage was actually short-lived; in all, she was married four times, once to the French tenor Lucien Muratore. She died during an air raid on Florence, Italy, on February 7, 1944. Greta Garbo had played a version of Ms. Cavalieri in her 1930 film *Romance*, directed by Clarence Brown, and this film may have played an important role in the inspiration for *La donna più bella del mondo*—and Lollobrigida's hiring of director Robert Z. Leonard, who had once directed Garbo (and the young Clark Gable) in *Susan Lenox: Her Fall and Rise* (1931).



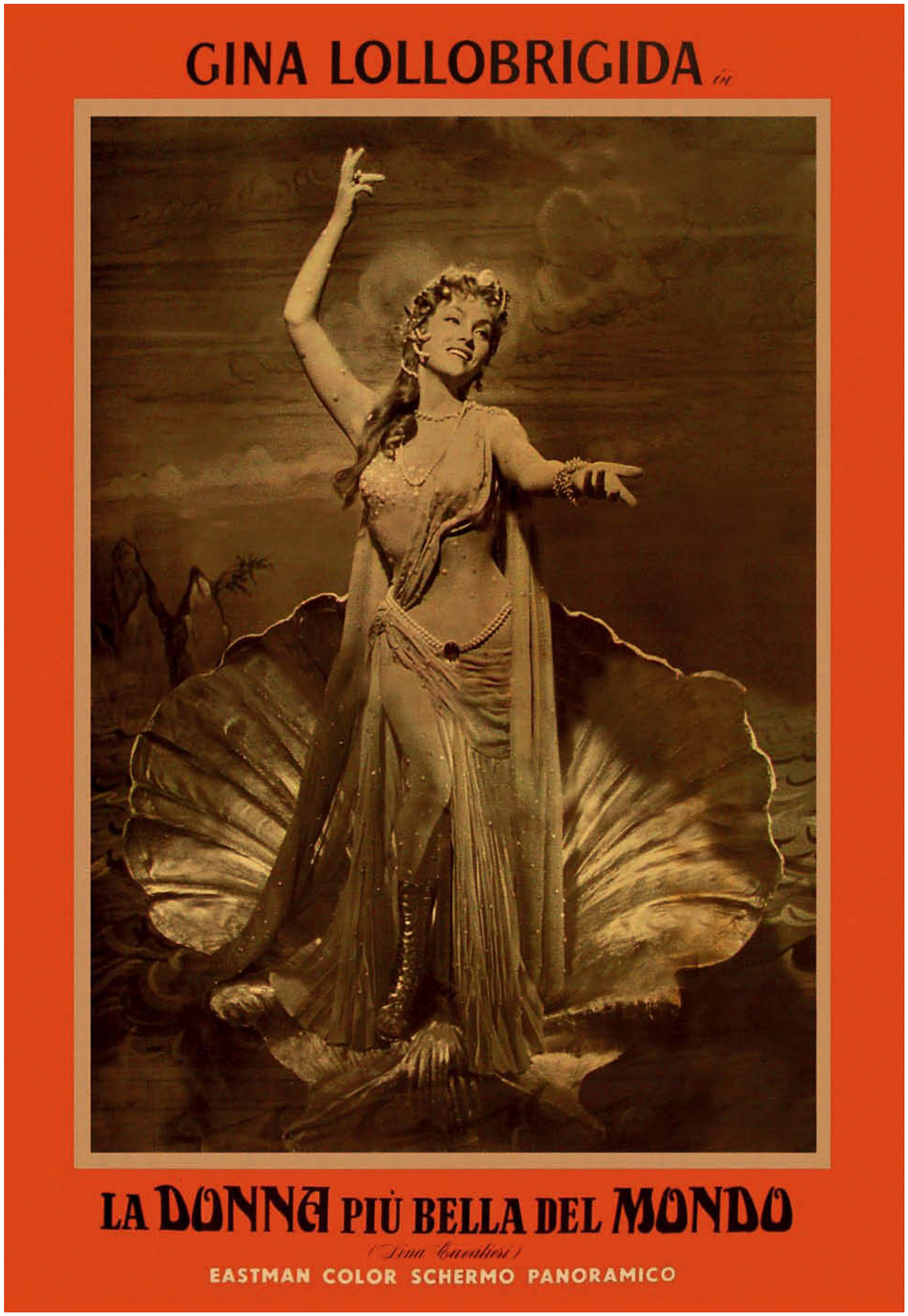
LINA CAVALIERI *in the arms of her great love, Prince Sergei Bariatine (Vittorio Gassman).*

By the time its generous roster of screenwriters—Giuseppe Cavagna, Liana Ferri, Frank Gervasi, Maleno Malenotti, Luciano Martino, Mario Monicelli, Piero Pierotti, and Giovanna Soria—finished with it, *La donna più bella del mondo* bore little resemblance to the true story of Cavalieri's charmed life and career. The movie opens with young Lina going to a cheap Roman music hall, where her adoptive mother Olimpia (Nanda Primavera) is struggling through a musical performance after suffering a mild heart attack, and being heckled by an uncharitable crowd. A bold Trastevere girl, Lina yells at the abusers and slaps one jeering woman's face. She is not facing the friendliest crowd, then, when she must take her mother's place on stage. The crowd is lying in wait, but a gallant, visiting nobleman, Prince Sergei Bariatine (Vittorio Gassman)—in town for a champion riding competition—physically ejects the two principal hecklers from the front row, allowing the remaining audience to respond enthusiastically to Lina's beautiful voice and vivacious delivery. Afterwards, Lina learns that Olimpia was sent to the hospital after suffering a second attack. The gallant prince accompanies her to the hospital, where they find that Olimpia has already died; as Lina is distracted in shock, Sergei slips some money and a jewelled ring inside her purse undetected and quietly exits.

Dressed in black, Lina attends the riding competition to return the money and ring to Prince Sergei, who wins the contest and advises her to keep the gifts and put them to good use. He foresees a day when she will be a great success, and they will meet again in Paris. Lina uses his kind charity toward singing lessons, and her voice attracts the attention of Rome's greatest voice instructor, *Maestro* Doria (Robert Alda). After some time, Doria invites Lina to accompany him to Paris, where he will introduce her to some influential people—but once there, he allows his infatuation for her to show too fiercely, and teacher and student part ways, unpleasantly. Doria promises that she will never succeed without him; true enough, Lina tries to find a singing engagement in Paris without success—until she meets and teams up with a guitarist, Carmela (Anne Vernon). Lina and Carmela are promptly hired to perform at the Eldorado, where they attract an enthusiastic following. The scowling Doria witnesses a standing ovation for them from the back of the theater and leaves in anger. Lina is also the object of jealousy for the Eldorado's headline performer, Manolita (Tamara Lees), who secrets a needle in her makeup stick; Carmela nearly disfigures herself for life when she borrows it and Lina launches into a furious catfight with the singer. The Eldorado management suggest that the two women settle their differences in a duel—"It will be great publicity!"

Lina and Manolita come together for a well-attended swordfight—ostensibly for the title of "Most Beautiful

12 Pierotti would later script one of Bava's early directorial ventures, *Gli invasori/Erik the Conqueror* (1961).



Woman in the World"—which Lina wins with style and alacrity, embarrassing her adversary further in the bargain. She is promptly awarded with a contract to headline at the Foliés Plastiques, which she accepts. Once she is established at the Foliés, Prince Sergei attends one of her performances with a group of roguish friends, one of whom bets his entire stable of horses against the Prince's prize race horse that Sergei cannot add Lina to his list of conquests. Recognizing Lina, but not letting on, Sergei accepts the bet. The men extend an invitation to Lina to be the guest of honor at a private party, which—recognizing the Prince, with whom she has always been in love—she accepts. Lina and Sergei dance into a private room and consummate their love, after which the Prince proposes marriage. Their intimacy is interrupted by the drunken row of his friends downstairs, and Sergei rushes downstairs to call off the bet . . . but it's too late. Lina overhears the details of the gamble and storms out of the Prince's life, heartbroken.

Lina throws herself into her work, with no thoughts of romance. One of Rome's leading tenors, Sylvani (Gino Sinimberghi), befriends her and expresses his affection for her, but is content to leave their future in her hands. It is decided that Lina's voice is now ready to make the leap from popular music to classical opera, and *Maestro* Doria is engaged to conduct her in a performance of Puccini's latest opera, *Tosca*. Disobeying the edicts of the Tsar, Sergei leaves a train in Paris to meet with Lina at the opera house; he finds her still upset, and to discourage him permanently, she agrees to become Sylvani's wife. In anger, Sergei threatens the tenor's life, and goes back to his train. Doria has overheard the announcement and arranges for a criminal marksman to fire a real bullet into Sylvani as he faces the firing squad at the end of *Tosca*'s third act. Her hands covered in blood, Lina believes that Prince Sergei has made good on his threat. (This dramatic crescendo

ITALIAN *quattro-foglia depicting Lina's appearance as Botticelli's Venus on stage at the Foliès Plastiques—a great early showcase of Bavian fantasy.*

strongly recalls the apocalyptic climax of *I pagliacci (amore tragico)*, in which Lollobrigida's character is strangled to death in a paraphrase of grand opera, and is a significant early example in the long—and distinctly Bavian—tradition of depicting the "reality" of death in color-drenched, theatrical settings.)

Lina Cavalieri goes on to become the most popular singer of her day, but she refuses ever to sing *Tosca* again, due to its tragic associations. In the course of a world tour, she is invited to Russia to sing for the King and Queen. Doria's increasingly erratic behavior begins to unmask him as the true architect of Sylvani's death, and Lina insists on performing *Tosca* during the royal performance to bait him. At the pivotal moment of Act III, Doria breaks down, shouting "Don't shoot!" and Lina rushes into the arms of Prince Sergei—all forgiven, all forgotten.

Though more a work of outlandish invention than biography, *La donna più bella del mondo* became Italy's top boxoffice hit of the 1955–56 season; in fact, its domestic commercial take (1,85 billion *lire*—nearly equal to 1.2 million US dollars) would remain unchallenged even by the vast boxoffice success of 1958's *Le fatiche di Ercole/Hercules*, the film that Bava would later credit with saving the Italian cinema. But while *Hercules* had an international appeal that would rack up huge numbers around the globe, Lollobrigida's parade float of a movie did not; it was given the tribute of an American release through 20th Century-Fox (under the intriguing but misleading title *Beautiful but Dangerous*), and it had an American director's name attached, but the subject matter was obscure to American audiences, few of whom could understand why Lollobrigida was playing someone less famous (and possibly less beautiful) than herself.

Even in Italy, the film received a less-than-warm critical reception. Tuilio Kezich, writing for *Sipario*, was particularly unsparing: "It is a monument to mediocrity." Giuseppe Marotta of *L'Europeo* admonished Lollobrigida by saying, "Stop being a beautiful statue and become a beautiful, living creature . . . Really, Gina, this is little more than a comic strip story." However, earlier in his perceptive review, Marotta held up the special values of Bava's cinematography for particular acclaim: "Not that I don't like [Lollobrigida] here: on the contrary, that shadow of corruption, that perfidious shadow as it seeks and touches her, on the one hand distorts, and on the other refines, spiritualizes and exalts her."

Lollobrigida herself had reservations about how the film turned out, but was proud of the fact that she had done some of her own singing in the picture, notably the aria from *Tosca*. "When the film was released in France," she told biographer Maurizio Ponzi, "it received some enthusiastic reviews from *Le Figaro*, but they added, 'What a pity it is not Lollobrigida's real voice!' *The New York Times* wrote the same thing. Nobody could believe that I had such a good singing voice." [13] In truth, Lollobrigida is credited only with the *Tosca* performance, but as Lina Cavalieri, she sings many other popular turn-of-the-century songs for which she is not credited. As a promotional salvo, a soundtrack EP recording of Lollobrigida's vocal performances was issued in Italy.

La donna più bella del mondo was Bava's second film in color and his first effort in anamorphic widescreen (2.35:1). It would mark a quantum advance in his approach to lighting for color and controlling its effects. As Lamberto Bava remarks, "When there was the transition to color, the cameramen who had worked until then with black-and-white weren't called upon anymore. There were people coming from [Technicolor] or Ferrania, who [insisted the cameramen] use a battery of ten 'brutes,' those enormous white heat lamps [to light each set-up], and the actors would just melt away. My father, who loved doing things the easy way, went to a photo shop one day and saw some Kodak pictures, shot by everyday people. He thought, 'Wow, these are beautiful—and they weren't shot with all that light! Why are they making us use ten brutes?' He was shooting *La donna più bella del mondo* at the Royal Palace of Caserta. He went to the set one morning, and found all the stairs completely lit [in the designated way, by his assistant] . . . and he said, 'I want only one brute, for back-lighting, at the top of the stairs, and another one over here . . .' Everybody looked at him, like 'What the fuck are you saying? Are you crazy?' . . . but, when they saw the dailies, they realized the result was superb." [14]

Furthermore, Bava had reasoned out the perfect way of maximizing color effect economically: he used Eastmancolor stock and arranged for his negatives to be processed at Technicolor Roma. This was only now a possibility, as Technicolor Roma had reversed their long-standing policy of refusing stocks manufactured by other companies. Eastmancolor was not as expensive as Technicolor stock, easier to work with, but prone to premature fading; by having his Eastmancolor prints developed at Technicolor, Bava was ensuring that their color printing would stand up to the most aggressive projector lamps Roman cinemas could throw at them. Remember that, at this moment in history, Bava had no reason to suspect any of his work would have a shelf life of more than a few years, and a future of television broadcasts was even less likely for features shot in anamorphic widescreen. The only reason for Bava to have concerned himself with any of this was that he took an artisan's pride in his work.

Anamorphic photography—simply put, a process by which films are shot through a distorted "squeezed" lens and later projected through a translation (or "anamorphic") lens to "stretch" the image across a screen nearly twice as wide as the conventional cinema screen—was at this time in its infancy, having been introduced only three years earlier with 20th Century-Fox's CinemaScope production *The Robe* (1953). So popular was the process that Paramount had released George Stevens' classic Western *Shane*—which was shot in the standard American "Academy ratio" of 1.37:1—with its frame matted in the projector to an approximation of 2.35:1 "scope." (Film critic Pauline Kael felt that cinematographer Loyal Griggs must have counted it as a "black joke" when his "mutilated" compositions won the Academy Award for Best Cinematography.) In 1954 and 1955, projection matting—or "soft-matting"—became a more common practice, as the exact proportions of screen matting became standardized by individual studios, but it was no better controlled; to soft-matte a feature film was to consign the final artistic decision of how it should look to each individual projectionist at each individual theater. For Mario Bava (who was meticulous in his framing), soft-matting was unacceptable, so after adopting the 1.85:1 ratio in the 1960s, he began "hard-matting" his work in the camera by pre-masking the frame with a special matte card that fit over his lens. In the remaining years of his career as a cameraman, and as a director, Bava dabbled in many different screen dimensions, but 1.85:1 (the widest of the non-anamorphic gauges) seems to have been his preferred ratio, perhaps because it best approximated the dimensions of a landscape canvas. And yet, for the remainder of the 1950s, when CinemaScope and other anamorphic processes were at their peak of popularity, Bava was called on time and again to film in anamorphic widescreen, and he continually proved himself a master of the format.

From the very first scene in *La donne più bella del mondo*, Bava shows himself to be extraordinarily adept at furnishing the entire frame with atmospheric business. With his department given fuller financial support than usual, his approach to lighting here continues its ongoing experiments in depth. Some striking shots—such as the moment when Doria is shown eavesdropping behind the curtain outside Lina's dressing room, as she leaves arm-in-arm with Sylvani—feature diffuse lighting in the extreme background, and more sharply defined, bold-stroke lighting in the middle- and foreground. Here, the intensity of lighting informs one about the character, the soft dressing room door redolent of his love and vulnerability, while the sharper lighting angles he inhabits bespeak of his mental unbalance. Bava later inverts this scheme, as Lina overhears the details of Sergei's bet with his gambling buddies: Lina, in the foreground and pushed to far screen left, is softened with velvety shadows and diffused focus, while the men occupy the center of frame, in sharp focus and bold, primary colors.

Bava's knowledge of the psychological values of color—worked out in advance with art director Alberto Boccianti and wardrobe designer

13 Maurizio Ponzi, *The Films of Gina Lollobrigida* (Secaucus NJ: Citadel Press, 1982), 19.

14 Manlio Gomarasca and Davide Pulici, "Il Talento di Mr. Bava," *Nocturno Dossier* 24, July 2004, 6–32.



TITLE CARD *of the US lobby card set.*

Vittorio Nino Novarese [15]—is advanced and impressive. Throughout the film, the color red is used sparingly, initially merely as an accent to offset the redundancy of blues and grays in the audience heckling Lina's adoptive mother. Its uses advance when Lina arrives for her duel with Manolita; unlike her adversary, who arrives in a heavy dress and hat of black feathers (already a symbol of defeat, if not death), Lina glides to her appointment on a bicycle sporting a red-feathered hat, a black leotard, a white bustier, tan boots, and red gloves—a dazzling vision of Musketeer-like panache. Red is then suppressed in the film's palette until Dorio is shown stalking behind red velvet curtains, as a prelude to the assassination of Sylvani, after which his blood is seen on Lina's white hands as she raises them over her face in shock. Later, the color is slyly used to suggest Lina's defloration by Sergei, who seduces her in a white jacket, which he exchanges in the following scene of their intimate cuddling with a red silken cossack's shirt. Likewise, blue is used throughout as the color of love—it is worn by virtually every man who comes into contact with Ms. Cavalieri, and it suffuses the scenes of Lina's private moments with Sergei—and yellow is given as a backdrop to scenes indicative of caution, such as their first reunion dance together, when neither Lina nor Sergei is sure whether they are remembered by the other. When Lina receives her voice lessons from Doria, she wears a blouse of strong, thick, black-and-white stripes—and the camera comes to rest on her after an introductory shot of Doria's hands gently playing the black-and-white keys of his piano; the indications are plain, that Doria secretly yearns to have his hands on his student, who in turn is aware at that moment only of her music. Bava's consistent use of pastel colors, used in concert with the film's turn-of-the-century wardrobe and music hall settings, evokes a Toulouse-Lautrec flavor throughout—an association which becomes especially pointed during the backstage introduction of Manolita, in which the side of Tamara Lees' face is limned in blue by a nearby stage lamp.

The movie's showstopper is Lina's first performance at the Foliès Plastiques, where a glimpse at Sergei's program promises a performance entitled "The Most Beautiful Woman in the World," consisting of three vignettes:

the Birth of Venus, Cleopatra (the most beautiful woman of ancient times), and Lina Cavalieri (the most beautiful woman of the modern world). The second vignette, sadly, was not retained in any of the versions I have seen, but the first may well be Lollobrigida's most breathtaking moment on film. Dancers in pastel leotards cavort around the stage, lifting and bending one another in postures evoking a sense of swimming and frolic. Behind them, several tiers of painted ocean saw back and forth with the illusion of movement, before an airbrushed vista of paradisiacal clouds. A shell rises upright from amidst the zigzagging waves, occupied by the kneeling form of Venus—Lina Cavalieri, adorned in a fabulous, form-fitting gown of sequins and seashells, which also spangle her hair. Having taken in the full picture of the performance up to now, Bava cuts to a close-up of Lollobrigida, who says nothing—who needs to say nothing. She simply glows like gold at her adoring audience. It's a scene worthy of Georges Méliès, and a potent indication of the visual genius yet to come in Bava's later, fantastic reimaginings of beloved mythic stories and images.

Bava also supervised the film's special effects, which include some arresting glass matte shots that extend the sumptuous stage settings to the top of the frame, as well as a briefly shown, and not particularly convincing, miniature Siberian wilderness through which a toy train is pulled. The naïveté of the shot provides most of its charm, as in the following, Ophuls-like shot of Lollobrigida and Anne Vernon sitting in a train compartment set, as a crude cyclorama is scrolled outside their window.

La donna più bella del mondo was the seventh and last of Bava's collaborations with Gina Lollobrigida, and it represents the apex of their alliance—a collaboration between actress and cameraman nearly as significant as that between Garbo and William Daniels. It's hard to imagine La Lollo seeing the "Birth of Venus" sequence projected for the first time and not rewarding her cameraman with a kiss. Though she failed to respond to my invitations to be interviewed for this book, Gina Lollobrigida could not have overlooked Bava's important contribution to the cultivation of her screen persona. Captured in the eyes of other cinematographers, Lollobrigida could be an Earth Mother, an overdone exotic, or a glacial cipher, but it took Bava's special sensibility, his unique appreciation of her as a woman, to "exalt" her (to use Marotta's perceptive word)—that is, to light and frame this earthy, attractive, ambitious businesswoman so that her features radiated a glow of divinity. It is unlikely that Lollobrigida was oblivious to the pains Bava took with his craft, as photography was to become her own ultimate vocation. She officially retired from acting in 1971, at which time she published her first, well-received book of photographs—*Italia Mia*, with a foreword by Italy's premier novelist, Alberto Moravia—which was subsequently followed by *The Wonder of Innocence* in 1994.

Mio figlio Nerone

First released: September 1956
Eastmancolor, CinemaScope,
2.35:1, 105 minutes

Production: Vides Cinematografica, Titanus (Rome), Les Films Marceau (Paris). **Distributor**: Titanus. **Belgium**: *Les Plaisirs de Neron/De Genoegans van Nero.* **Finland**: 1/15/60. **France**: *Les Week-ends de Néron.* **Germany**: *Neros tolle Naechte,* "Nero's Awesome Nights," Union, 1957. **UK**: *Nero's Weekend*, Gala Film Distribution Ltd., 9/57, 90m 24s, Certificate "A," passed with cuts. **US**: *Nero's Mistress,* Manhattan Films International, 11/62, 104m.

1956 was to be a pivotal year in the cinema, as it would be in all categories of the arts. In the world of music, it was the year when the young Sun Records recording artist Elvis Presley signed his contract with RCA Records and made his only "from the waist down" appearance on *The Ed Sullivan Show*; likewise, it was the year when Miles Davis left the small Prestige label in order to record for Columbia, and when "soul music" innovator James Brown recorded his first single, "Please Please Please," for King Records of Cincinnati. On the immediate horizon, a young Texan named Buddy Holly was about to record his first album, and in Liverpool, England, two teenagers—John Lennon and Paul McCartney—were soon destined to meet. In the world of literature, it was the year when the first Olympia paperbacks of Vladimir Nabokov's controversial *Lolita* were being smuggled into the country; when Günter Grass and Philip K. Dick published their first novels, and when William S. Burroughs successfully weaned himself from heroin, making it possible to apply himself to the writing of his first important novel, *Naked Lunch*.

Just as signs of a new cultural landscape were becoming apparent in these fields, so was the face of cinema undergoing a significant change. After the tremendous success of *Rebel Without A Cause* and *The Blackboard Jungle* (both 1955), the film industry responded with more and more product targeting the burgeoning youth culture. 1956 was the year when 20th Century-Fox produced *The Girl Can't Help It* with Jayne Mansfield and an exciting roster of rock 'n' roll acts, all photographed in CinemaScope and "Color by DeLuxe." It was also the year when James H. Nicholson and Samuel Z. Arkoff's American Releasing Corporation reinvented itself as American International Pictures, a company largely fuelled by low-budget science fiction/monster films, most of which were produced and directed by a 29-year-old independent named Roger Corman; and it was the year when Britain's Hammer Film Productions would announce the first Frankenstein film made in color, *The Curse of Frankenstein* (1957). A new generation of the arts was poised to make itself known.

1956 was also to be the most decisive year of Mario Bava's career, though it probably did not seem so at the time, from Bava's own perspective. For one thing, 1956 marked the end of his moonlighting career in short-form documentaries. Now gainfully employed with an average of three or four features per year, he no longer needed them; in fact, he is not known to have dabbled in this area since 1952. Nevertheless, in 1956, he somehow found time to photograph his two final contributions to the genre: Fernando Pisani's *Alto Lazio pittoresco* ("Pictorial North Latium") and Viviana Pasqualini's *Copiando la natura* ("Copying Nature").

Significantly, it was in 1956 that Mario Bava truly came into his own as a cameraman. This pivotal year commenced with his work on the prestigious historical comedy *Mio figlio Nerone*, which reteamed Bava with Steno and the star of *Buonanotte . . . avvocato!*, Alberto Sordi. Produced by Franco Cristaldi,[16] this satire of domestic warfare in ancient Rome was a major co-production between Titanus and Vides of Rome and Les Films Marceau of Paris, and played host to an uncommonly impressive international cast: Sordi as the demented Nero, Vittorio De Sica as his speechwriter and advisor Seneca, Brigitte Bardot as his pert and pouty mistress Poppea and, as Nero's mother Agrippina, the legendary American star Gloria Swanson. Only five years after her powerful, Oscar-nominated return to the screen in Billy Wilder's *Sunset Blvd.* (1950), the silent screen siren had more or less retired from the screen once again, after appearing in one other, ill-received feature and two Broadway plays in 1951. Away from the screen a successful writer and entrepreneur, Swanson had accepted the role of Agrippina from Cristaldi while working as a reporter for United Press International in Italy. Unknown at the time, but clearly visible now among the supporting cast, are Giorgia Moll as the handmaiden Lidia and future Hammer star Barbara Shelley as one of the emperor's adoring audience.

Presented as a legend from the annals of Tacitus, *Mio figlio Nerone* is the story of a mother's difficulty in raising a responsible, all-powerful son. Having reached the age of 21, the emperor Nero is quite mad and has no interests in governing or conquering new frontiers; he wants only to sing, to play his lyre, to conduct his orchestra of farm animals, and to subject all of Rome to regular performances of

15 Novarese was the father of actress Leticia Roman, who starred in Bava's 1963 film *La ragazza che sapeva troppo/Evil Eye/The Girl Who Knew Too Much*.

16 Born in Turin, Italy on October 3, 1924, Cristaldi became one of his country's most distinguished producers. *Mio figlio Nerone* was only his second film as producer, launching a career whose highlights included *I soliti ignoti/Big Deal on Madonna Street* (1958), *Divorzio all'italiana/Divorce, Italian Style* (1961), *Gli indifferenti/Time of Indifference* (1964), *Lady Caroline Lamb* (1972), *Amarcord* (1974), *E la nave va/And the Ship Sails On* (1983), and *Il nome della rosa/The Name of the Rose* (1986). He died in 1992.

his intolerable songs. His mother, Agrippina, returns to Rome after a long voyage to finds its former military muscle grown lax and flaccid; the soldiers supposedly guarding its shores against invasion are lolling about with women, drinking wine. Agrippina finds Nero doing the same, with the nubile Poppea, of whom she disapproves. She determines at once to wrest her son's attention away from music and love, and apply it to a plan for the conquest of the British isles concocted by the captain of Rome's army, but the impressive suit of arms designed especially for him—a lion-breasted chestplate adorned with numerous menacing spikes—only frightens the neurotic leader. With the help of his speechwriter Seneca, Nero initiates a plan to do away with his mother with poison, unaware that she is simultaneously planning to do away with Poppea by having vipers secreted in her bed. Both murder plans fail, and mother and son laugh about this later . . . and Seneca and Poppea are respectively given official blame and consigned to prison. But Nero's schemes do not abate. He arranges to have the ceiling above his mother's bed collapse (instead, it collapses on the army captain standing guard over her), and then by sinking a ship bearing her abroad (she swims back to the palace, looking like a bedraggled ghost, and bringing her son's celebratory orgy to a dead stop). Nero flees to his room and bolts the door, believing her to be a reproachful phantom come back from a watery grave, but when he marshals the courage to peek outside, he spies Agrippina calmly negotiating with Seneca and Poppea to have their freedom restored if the emperor is committed to an asylum, and sneaks away. In an ironic coda, Nero is shown singing, playing his lyre and conducting his little barnyard orchestra from a short distance away, as Rome (and the rest of the cast) burns in the distance. He has become the son his mother wanted, the conqueror of the world's most powerful nation.

Bava's own recollections of the production were typically deflating. "We were supposed to start in September, but [Rodolfo] Sonego's script wasn't ready on time," he recalled. "I went to Cristaldi and told him that, in the meantime, I couldn't just wait around,



ITALIAN *locandina, art by Arnaldo Putzu.*

I had to take another job—because at that time, if I stopped working for a single hour, I would receive forty invitations to shoot something else. But no, he said, I had to stand by. By the second month [October], I was feeling like a dog, ashamed to be on his payroll while doing absolutely nothing. Then he said that, since it was being shot by Romans, we'd be done with it by the time we finished shooting the screen tests. We went to Punta Ala, shot some screen tests, and assembled the film from those! I could see, however, that I had nothing to lose when this came out. I used a Color Ferrania, at 50 ASA, that was all banged-up. This is how I filmed *Mio figlio Nerone* and *Nel segno di Roma.*"[17]

Bava's comments about the CinemaScope equipment he inherited for this production says a lot about the state of camera equipment available to the slowly rebounding Italian film industry of the mid-1950s, and the circumstances under which he was sometimes obliged to work—even after photographing films that had grossed over a billion *lire*. His reference to the camera being "banged-up" implies that it was an orphaned piece of CinemaScope equipment left behind in Rome after suffering some misfortune on the set of a visiting 20th Century-Fox or Warner Bros. production. "50 ASA" refers to the light sensitivity rating of the film stock used by the camera; this was extremely slow stock compared to today's standard film stock speeds of 200–500 ASA, meaning that it would have required a great deal of lighting to produce a nice, colorful, readable image, and even more lighting to serve the individual needs of Technicolor and CinemaScope, whose 2.35:1 anamorphic lenses needed to import more light through the camera gate than standard lenses. Even more additional lighting would have been required for outdoor shooting. The upshot of all this is that Bava's camera rig on this production involved much more than his standard equipment, more camera and grip assistants, and more preparatory time before each new set-up than was usual for him. It also meant that the sets would have been extraordinarily hot and uncomfortable for the cast and crew, who—thankfully—were shooting in late autumn and winter.

Very little of this circumstantial misery is visible in the film itself, but the haphazard nature of the production was enough to send Gloria Swanson back into retirement from motion pictures, which lasted until Curtis Harrington's 1973 made-for-television movie *Killer Bees*. Accustomed to working under a strict code of mutual courtesy that was regarded as archaically conservative even within the Hollywood system—for example, she insisted on being addressed by every

member of the crew, including her director, as "Miss Swanson"—the silent screen legend must have been shocked at the rampant discord that was the norm of the Italian system, where the hammering of the art department or the barking of the cameraman's dog was not expected to stop during a take, because the dialogue was always looped in post-production.

In her autobiography *Swanson on Swanson*, the actress recalled: ". . . *Nero's Mistress* . . . had a stellar international cast including Brigitte Bardot, Vittorio De Sica, and Alberto Sordi, but it was so bad that six years elapsed between the shooting in Italy and the picture's release in the United States in 1962. Nevertheless, it gave me an opportunity to be near [my daughter] Michelle, who had a brief acting career of her own in pictures in Europe until she gave it up to marry and settle down in Paris. In fact, it seemed so good to be in Europe again that I stayed for several years: in Spain, in France and in Italy." [18]

Elsewhere in her book, Swanson remarked that she was so disapproving of her own appearance in the film that she later had cosmetic surgery done on her eyes. She is a remarkable presence in the movie, giving by far its finest performance, but she does not look well at ease being manhandled by Sordi's overly affectionate *Mamma*'s boy.

Regardless of the unfortunate circumstances under which it was made, or how unhappy its cast and crew may have been, *Mio figlio Nerone* is an important film in terms of its influence on the future course of popular Italian cinema. It was the native industry's first attempt to do something unusual with remote Italian history, in the wake of MGM's *Quo Vadis* (1951) and 20th Century-Fox's *The Robe* (1953)—to tweak it into something baroque, ironic, and fanciful. In this way, *Mio figlio Nerone* is a much more direct antecedent to the Hercules films of Pietro Francisci than Riccardo Freda's *Spartaco*, which was strictly serious business. The scenes in *Spartaco* where Bava's uncredited involvement is most keenly felt—the sultry Sabina (Gianna Maria Canale) lounging in her scarf-strewn aviary, for example—are almost too decorative and artificial in the context of Freda's stoic historical waxworks, but as staged here, in the context of a Steno satire, Bava's heightened sense of style seems buoyant and perfectly at home.

Furthermore, *Mio figlio Nerone* is a critical film in the arc of Bava's career because, in retrospect, it is the film in which he first fully discovered his own voice (or eye) as a cameraman. Earlier examples of his work—notably *I pagliacci* and *La donna più bella del mondo*—have genius in them, but it is a modelled genius, inspired by a close study of the works of other cameramen (like Karl Struss, Massimo Terzano, John Alton, Sol Polito and, indeed, Eugenio Bava) whose techniques Mario had admired and assimilated. One important reason for this sense of arrival was Bava's choice of view: the beach at Tor Caldara, a nature preserve near the Cap d'Anzio—roughly, the mid-shin of the Italian boot. Over the next twenty years, his camera would return to this location with such regularity that it became the heart and hearth of Mario Bava's filmography; his characters come here to ponder life and death, to peer into the future by gazing into the tides whence we came.

"Tor Caldara, near Marino, became a virtual open-air studio," he later said. "I first discovered it in 1948, when I took my daughter there to have her acne treated with a sulphur water cure. Later, we began to shoot everything there, even Westerns, though we could never set up camp there for any length of time." [19]

Tor Caldara benefitted from its proximity to Lake Albano, a broad waterfront formed by the ancient fusion of two volcanic craters, which could be easily transformed into an oceanfront bedecked with castles, moored Viking vessels, or whatever else was required of Bava's bag of camera tricks. It would be the meeting place of Hercules and Iole in *Le fatiche di Ercole/Hercules*, the primary setting of *La frusta e il corpo* and *5 bambole per la luna d'agosto/5 Dolls for an August Moon*, the location of the pre-credits sequence and finale of *I coltelli del vendicatore/Knives of the Avenger*, and it was adorned with some glass matte paintings to become Vulture Canyon in *Roy Colt & Winchester Jack*—just to name a few of its many appearances in Bava's work.

"Tor Caldara was my father's favorite place to shoot," confirms Lamberto Bava. "He used to say, 'Wherever you put the camera, you can call "Action!"' He loved to watch the sea—he was born in Sanremo, which is by the sea—but he also feared it. I don't believe he ever learned how to swim, because the water disturbed something deep in him. I have no personal memory of ever seeing him in a bathing suit, though he kept one from the time he was young. It was always dry."

From the very first shot of *Mio figlio Nerone*—as the camera gazes out to sea, and pans down the coastline to an impressive matte painting of a series of columned Roman buildings lining the



NERO *(Alberto Sordi) hides in bed from his tyrannical mother Agrippina (Gloria Swanson).*

17 Alberto Abruzzese, et al., *La città del cinema—produzione e lavoro nel cinema italiano 1930–70* (Rome, Italy: Napoleone, 1979), 83–89.

18 Gloria Swanson, *Swanson on Swanson* (New York NY: Pocket Books, 1981), 502.

19 Abruzzese.

shore, with just the edge of one foregrounded column at screen right to provide an illusion of depth and contrast—we feel at once that we are seeing things through the eyes of Mario Bava. This shot is also the most likely illustration I have found for an anecdote shared with me by Mario's grandson, Roy: "On one of the films he made before he became a director, he was setting up a shot with columns, and he only had three or four of them. He needed another column for the foreground, to balance the shot and give it a sense of dimension. So he asked the people around him if anyone had a match, and he took a wooden matchstick and stood it upright in a wad of chewing gum positioned in front of the camera. On film, the matchstick became the extra column!"

It may be that Rodolfo Sonego's script—co-signed by Sandro Continenza, Diego Fabbri, Ugo Guerra, and Stefano Vanzina—was closer to Bava's own ironic sensibilities than any other picture he had previously shot, and thus brought him into closer contact with the spirit of the filmmaker he would later become. *Mio figlio Nerone* takes a comic approach to the subject of a mother and son plotting mutual murder, and is thus appealingly prophetic of the tongue-in-cheek murder thrillers Bava would concoct as a director in the late 1960s and early '70s.

This perverse streak also afforded Bava his first opportunities to use color impressionistically, irrationally, to complement scenes or shots of a macabre nature. Most of these center around the presence of Agrippina, whose first appearance finds her being carried to her son's palace in a caravan, her head swathed in blood-red scarves that pack a chromatic shock when the golden outer curtain of her carriage is pulled aside. Later, when Agrippina survives the collapse of the ceiling above her bed, Bava photographed Swanson emerging from the dusty catastrophe like a rigid ghost who, as she approaches the camera, steps into a theretofore undetected belt of eerie green light, which discolors her face monstrously at the precise moment it begins to fill the frame. It is an unexpectedly chilling moment, nearly as hair-raising as her final "close-up" in *Sunset Blvd.*, and must have been even more startling when the film was first released in 1956, several years before Bava made his first revolutionary horror films in color. And when Agrippina returns to the palace after surviving a sunken ship, disrupting the revels of Nero's celebratory orgy, her appearance—limned with icy blue light, much as Silvana Mangano is painted in her scenes as Circe in *Ulisse*—coincides with a thunderclap, and her formidable stance—flanked by angry soldiers—anticipates the first appearance of Princess Katia (Barbara Steele) in *La maschera del demonio*, as she stands at the entrance of her family crypt flanked by two menacing dogs. At the close of this same sequence, as Nero eavesdrops on the dealings between Agrippina, Seneca, and Poppea to have him committed, Bava paints in Nero's mercilessness by having Sordi lean forward into the same icy blue light that limned Swanson's return from her watery grave.



AGRIPPINA *returns home to discover Rome and her palace corrupted by her son's decadence.*

Where might Bava have derived his inspiration for these bizarre chromatic touches? We can't know for sure, but one timely possibility is Oswald Morris' acclaimed cinematography for John Huston's then-recent biopic *Moulin Rouge* (1952), which painstakingly reproduced the look of the paintings of its subject, Hénri Toulouse-Lautrec. It is a film (and an artist) Bava was likely to have studied before filming his own Belle Epoque drama, *La donna più bella del mondo*, and like both of those films, *Mio figlio Nerone* combines soft pastel colors, peripheral shocks of garishly unnatural theatrical lighting, and set design full of gauzy, lacy frippery—in this case, courtesy of art director Piero Filippone, a frequent collaborator with Riccardo Freda on such films as *La vendetta di Aquila Nera/Revenge of the Black Eagle* (1951), *Maciste alla corte del Gran Khan/Samson and the 7 Miracles of the World* (1961), and *Giulietta e Romeo/Romeo and Juliet* (1964)—in a way that smacks of Lautrec, though the film is set in ancient Rome.

As with his earlier collaboration with Alberto Sordi, Bava was again compelled by the actor's rapid-fire (and probably somewhat extemporaneous) performance to film most of the comedian's scenes in single extended takes, because it would have been impossible for Sordi to duplicate precisely what he had done in one take in a subsequent attempt. These scenes show Bava, once again, under creative duress with his camera locked down for minutes at a time. Consequently, his virtuosity is not as apparent for the movements of the camera as for what he brings to the *mise-en-scène* itself, in terms of contributions to the look of the film: its makeups, wardrobes, and set designs.

One instance of Bava's likely influence on Filippone's set design can be found in the scene of Agrippina's unheralded return to the palace, where she makes her way toward Nero's chambers through the snoring aftermath of an orgy. The set is completely dead except for a single, swaying, adult-sized swing, festooned with scarves. In several of the films he later directed, Bava used swings to introduce motion into otherwise overly stationary sets—as in Brett Halsey's "swinging" bachelor pad in *Four Times*



BEFORE GOD *(or Roger Vadim) created her, Brigitte Bardot took a milk bath for Mario Bava in MIO FIGLIO NERONE.*

That Night—and even more often in situations where he wished to make reference to a child separated from a parent—the ghostly Melissa Graps in *Operazione paura/Kill, Baby . . . Kill!*, the teenage Isabelle in *5 bambole per la luna d'agosto* and Marco in *Schock/Beyond the Door II*, for example. The genesis of this can be traced to the postcard Mario and his sister Elena received from his father Eugenio, when he was away at sea with Mussolini's sons, picturing the two siblings on a swing. As a cameraman in the Italian system, Bava was allowed a voice in all matters of a visual nature, including set decoration, makeup, and special effects; with this in mind, the swing is more likely a deliberate than accidental addition to the scene of Agrippina's homecoming. We can't know whether or not Bava was *conscious* of what the swing represented to him, but its consistent use in his films over the years as a symbol of solitary child's play, in addition to its value as a decorative object of motion, would seem to confirm this subconscious value. In this, the earliest use of the swing I have found in his *oeuvre*, it possesses the same value, commenting on the state of neglect and decadence into which Nero has fallen during his mother's absence.

Bava and Filippone also collaborated on a splendid setpiece built around Brigitte Bardot, who, at age 21, is captured in the first bloom of her beauty. The international sex star known as "BB" is widely regarded as the discovery of Roger Vadim, who met her in 1949 (after she had appeared on the cover of *Elle*) and married her in 1952, when she turned 18. (The emotional girl had attempted suicide when her parents refused to give their permission for an earlier ceremony.) Vadim wrote a series of original screenplays expressly for Bardot, beginning with two 1956 productions, *En Effeuillant la Marguerite/Mademoiselle Striptease* (directed by Vadim's uncle Marc Allégret) and *Sette Sacrée Gamine/Ma'amzelle Pigalle* (directed by Michel Boisrond). Vadim's own directorial career began, after these, in 1956 with the notorious *. . . et Dieu Créa la Femme/And God Created Woman*, which offered audiences many opportunities to admire BB's unadorned *derrière*. And yet before any of these memorable displays, Mario Bava—working with Bardot for the first and only time—recognized her possibilities and photographed her taking a milk bath.

The milk bath sequence, clearly inspired by a corresponding soak taken by Claudette Colbert in Cecil B. DeMille's *Cleopatra* (1934), is a delightful confection of cinematography, art direction and nubile flesh that is made even more enticing with the sudden intrusion of Nero, who babbles neurotically throughout the sequence. As Poppea steps from the bath (her figure silhouetted through a thin towel proffered by a quartet of placid handmaidens) and sets about toweling herself dry on her bed, Nero can't resist pausing in his babble now and again to crush his mouth against her milky, young flesh. [It should be mentioned that "poppea" is an Italian slang word for a woman's breasts, making every reference to Bardot's screen name a *double entendre*.] The sequence surprises us again when Poppea rises from the bed, steps offscreen, throws her towel in Nero's face, and announces that she is going to dance nude for him. In a shot most evocative of Bava, Nero raises his hand to watch the dance through a jewelled monocle ring, and the film cuts to a subjective shot of a vaguely nude female figure dancing at the green-tinted heart of a multi-faceted stone (evidently a kind of specially contrived extension of the lens, consisting of a "tunnel" of glittering arranged mirrors culminating in a thick green color gel). At this point, the disappointed egotist Nero—uninvolved by her display—suggests, "No . . . *quasi*-nude!" and throws her a bit of his own, homely brown clothing. The sequence is so much more enchanting than anything Vadim ever did with her, and Bardot would not be so well handled again until she worked with Jean-Luc Godard in 1963's *Les Mépris/Contempt*.

In the wake of Bardot's later success with Vadim, many of her earliest films were bought-up by zealous American distributors who exaggerated their erotic content with titles like *The Girl in the Bikini, The Act of Love, A Night of Love* and *Crazy for Love*. But *Mio figlio Nerone* was the first movie to really build an erotic sequence around the actress, and the first to showcase her considerable comic talents as well.

Not only was *Mio figlio Nerone* Bava's first assignment with a top-flight international cast, it also found him formally credited once again as "Director of Photography and Special Effects." Bava earned this distinction with numerous trick shots, including the aforementioned matte painting of the columned buildings lining the beachfront. When Nero gives a performance of an unendurable song called "*Mamma*," in tribute to Agrippina, it is prolonged through a thunderstorm which is introduced with a storm cloud matte whose highlights fluctuate from blue to gold with the rumbling of the soundtrack. Bava also used Vittorio De Sica in a shot filmed in reverse, as

Seneca jumps backwards to land on his bottom atop a tall cabinet at the sight of a slithering viper in his office. The final scene, in which Rome burns, was assembled with miniature columned buildings arranged in three dimensions on a tabletop of rocky terrain, in concert with silhouetted paper cutouts of a horse and carriage, while billows of blue, red, and yellow smoke rose in the background, slowed to a more dramatic scale by an overcranked camera.

Whereas *Mio figlio Nerone* was released in Rome with Sordi top-billed, the film was released in France as *Les Week-Ends de Nérone* with Bardot's name pre-eminent. There are some curious differences between the two versions that deserve comment—for the most part, too minor to have been intentional. The two versions include distinctly different takes of the shot of the soldier placing vipers in Nero's bed, and the later shot of one stray snake slithering through the beard of a sleeping senator. Nero's musical performance in his mother's honor is much shorter in the French version, hobbling its comic impact as the unendurable concert drags on through a rainstorm to the suppressed anger of the Roman populace. Also affected are the scenes of Agrippina's survival of the two attempts on her life. After the collapse of the ceiling on her bed, the French version cuts to the next shot before Swanson steps into the foregrounded field of eerie green light; it is not the effect of a bad splice, as the music remains consistent and unbroken. Agrippina's return to the palace after the sinking of her ship is also different in both versions, evidently making use of alternate takes. The French version makes her seem more vulnerable (a soldier rushes her into a cloak to warm her), while the Italian version makes her seem larger-than-life, indomitable, and frightening—like someone returned from the grave. The *finale* is longer in the French version, with a longer song from Nero and additional trick shots of Rome burning. The Italian version fades out the song and flashes "*FINE*" on the screen after only one view of the smoldering miniatures.

Filmed at Titanus Studios in the latter months of 1955, *Mio figlio Nerone* evidently took long to birth in the editing room. Though the shooting ended in time for the Christmas holiday, the completed picture was not delivered to the Italian censor until August 1956—an unusually long delay, considering that several of the films Mario Serandrei would later edit for Mario Bava were ready for release only three weeks after the end of shooting. The likelihood of editorial problems is furthered by the crediting of two editors, Serandrei and Giuliana Attenni. Serandrei's name appears as editor on thirteen films made in Rome between 1955 and 1956 (including Federico Fellini's *Il bidone*), whereas Attenni's name appears only on this one and one other (Marcello Pagliero's *Chéri-Bibi*, 1955). Attenni was a veteran of several Totò films for Steno, but this production stands out as the director's only collaboration with Serandrei, who had acquired a reputation for rescuing films in a pinch.

Given the static nature of so many of Alberto Sordi's extended scenes, *Mio figlio Nerone* would have given Serandrei few opportunities to exercise his craft, and this fact—combined with his hectic schedule and lack of history with Steno—makes it all the more unlikely that he was ever the film's supervising editor, despite his upper-tiered credit. It seems much more likely, given the chaotic circumstances of the film's production (as described by Bava, above) and its unusually long period of editing, that Attenni was unable to assemble the picture to producer Cristaldi's satisfaction, and that Serandrei was summoned at the eleventh hour to salvage the picture. *Mio figlio Nerone* was finally released to Roman theaters in September 1956, opening at the prestigious Basilica di Massenzio, but it was not a popular success.

It was not released in America until 1962, when it was distributed under the title *Nero's Mistress* by Manhattan Films International. In preparing their 8 x 10" stills to promote the film's release, MFI saw fit to doctor the photographs, "drawing" wardrobe on Bardot (by outlining and painting over the skimpier wardrobe she was in fact wearing), slyly deceiving prospective audiences into thinking that she appeared nude in the film itself! Like many other imports from this short-lived period of demure "Adults Only" exploitation, *Nero's Mistress* has not been seen in America since its theatrical playdates. This is a shame, because *Mio figlio Nerone* is a farce of considerable style that has withstood the test of time better than many other, overrated films of its time and ilk. It deserves to be resurrected—for Bardot, for Swanson, and also as a pivotal chapter in the career of its cameraman.



BRIGITTE BARDOT *is made the center of attention, in a scene in which she did not appear, in this heavily "doctored" still for the US release of NERO'S MISTRESS.*



Orlando e i paladini di Francia

First released: December 5, 1956
Eastmancolor, CinemaScope,
2.35:1, 110 minutes.

Production: Italgamma Film. **Distributor**: Regionale. **France**: *Roland, Prince Vaillant,* "Roland, Valiant Prince." **Germany**: *Saragossa* (original release), RKO-Atlantic, *Roland der Eroberer,* "Roland the Conqueror," (reissue title), Pilot Film, 1958. **Spain**: *Orlando*, Mundial Film. **US**: *Roland the Mighty*, 94m.

Produced in the spring and summer of 1956, Pietro Francisci's *Orlando e i paladini di Francia* ("Orlando and the Paladins of France") is a medieval swashbuckler derived from Matteo Maria Boiardo's unfinished epic poem *Orlando innamorato* ("Roland in Love," written 1487). It begins circa 800 A.D., with the Saracens invading a French Christian encampment in search of the painting *Madonna di Saragosa*, with which the Saracen leader Agramante (Cesare Fantoni) hopes to blackmail Charlemagne (Ivo Garrani), King of the Franks, into surrender. When this plan fails, Agramante decides to send his daughter, the pagan seductress Angelica (Rosanna Schiaffino, in one of her earliest roles) to the French headquarters, where she can corrupt the morality of the Paladins, the King's knights, and weaken Charlemagne's might.

Unfortunately, the film delivers neither the swordfights with fantastic creatures nor Angelica's scintillating erotic defeats of the Paladins which are found in Boiardo's masterpiece; instead, Francisci's script (co-written by Gaio Frattini, Giorgio Graziosi, and the ever-industrious Ennio De Concini) turns the tables on Angelica, by having her unexpectedly seduced by exposure to wholesome Christian living and the first true love of her life, the handsome paladin Orlando the Brave (Rik Battaglia). There is an interesting subplot concerning Orlando's arranged marriage to Charlemagne's daughter Alda (Lorella De Luca) and her love-at-first-sight encounter with the young, buffoonish paladin Rinaldo (Fabrizio Mioni), but it is allowed to become overcomplicated as the two lovestruck *paladini* conspire to swap uniforms and duties in order to correct the confusion of their arrangements and marry the women they love.

Orlando . . . was perhaps less inspired by Boiardo than by the boxoffice success of Jacques Tourneur's *The Flame and the Arrow* (1950), a Warner Bros. production, which starred Burt Lancaster as an acrobatic peasant who leads a successful rebellion in medieval Italy. Rik Battaglia, whose muscular physique quickly elevated him from earthy romantic roles to heroic leads in epic films, proves himself an able horseman and swordsman, but Francisci aimed too high when he decided that Orlando should be an acrobat on a par with Lancaster. In his first scene, during which he recovers the *Madonna di Saragosa* from its Saracen captors, there are a few embarrassing shots of Battaglia—or, more accurately, his stuntman—rocketing like a wire-propelled superhero from tree to tree. (The same wire rig is called into service during the tournament sequence, when Roland literally knocks his Saracen opponent into a somersault off his horse!) Despite the expert menace of Cesare Fantoni, *Orlando . . .* is ultimately too dry; it is primarily of historical interest as a precursor of Francisci and Bava's Hercules films with Steve Reeves, and therefore of the *pepla* in general.

As we have seen, Bava began to incorporate the baroque visual trappings of grand opera into his cinematography with comedies like *Le avventure di Giacomo Casanova* and *Mio figlio Nerone*, where decorative exaggeration underlined their comedic context throughout, and also in dramas like *La donna più bella del mondo*, where it was rationalized by the opera house milieu and the heightened emotions of the climax. *Orlando e i paladini di Francia* finds Bava—along with Francisci and art director Giulio Bongini—taking the brave step of interpreting a serious (or at least

BELGIAN *affiche.*

non-comic) historical action film in such a decidedly fantastical fashion. The Italian cinema was too poor to be meticulous about historical veracity; as a result, something unique and fascinating was brought to boil.

The Saracens battle the well-feathered Franks in the scaled and spangled armor of Japanese warlords; Angelica's coach is a cake-like vision of pink and white frosting, rolling out of a fairy tale on tulip-styled wheels to cross corpse-strewn battlefields; a Renaissance painting is rescued from a battlefield 500 years before the Renaissance; the dust-blown tents of invading troops harbor velvet harems; in short, whatever was most tantalizing to the eye was stirred into the soup. The result was a kind of jackdaw expressionism, developed by artisans who had spent years picking workable props from the postwar rubble. Historical veracity was junked in favor of emotional authenticity, which was more affordable and looked more imaginative. *Orlando . . .*'s talented set dresser, Arrigo Breschi, would be promoted to art director eight years later for Bava's *Sei donne per l'assassino/Blood and Black Lace*.

Mario Bava shares the cinematography credit on this film with Renato Del Frate. Born in Rome in 1911, Del Frate had started his career as a cameraman in 1938, as a camera operator on the second unit of Goffredo Alessandrini's *Luciano Serra pilota*, coscripted by Bava's own earliest professional collaborator, Roberto Rossellini. Three years Bava's senior, he received his first credit as director of photography that same year on the comedy *Il marchese di ruvolito*, starring Peppino De Filippo—a very quick ascent—but his career was not a success. Perhaps his greatest distinctions were photographing *L'amorosa menzogna* (1949), an early short film by Michelangelo Antonioni, and the Totò comedy *Totò e Marcellino* (1958). He died in 1962, one year after shooting Alberto De Martino's second unit contributions to Silvio Amadeo's interesting horror *peplum*, *Teseo contro il Minotauro/The Minotaur* (1960).

I have not been able to discover why the film's cinematographic duties were divided between Bava and Del Frate, but the fact that the credits also list separate operators (Ubaldo Terzano and Nino Annunziata) suggests that they worked as separate units. Bava's unmistakable photographic style dominates the picture, including the tournament sequence; Del Frate may have been entrusted with the second unit scenes involving the Saracen warriors, which are also well-done, but show more concern with compositional balance than baroque detailing. Most of the film's outstanding visual moments involve, predictably, Rosanna Schiaffino's *femme fatale* Angelica. With much of Agramante's early dialogue concerning the "unseen" face of the *Madonna di Saragosa*, Bava cleverly withholds Angelica's face from her first scene, as her coach is accosted by would-be Saracen suitors offering her tributes from the spoils of the raid on the Christian camp. Her arm snakes through the curtains of her ornate coach in a haughty pantomime, her fingers painted and beringed, dropping the baubles acquired at the cost of innocent lives contemptuously into the dirt. There is also her pagan dance, performed in a light blue skirt that twirls in chromatic relief to the black-skirted silhouettes accompanying her, which is narrated with almost pornographic appreciation by her father ("In her eyes there is discord . . . her laughter is like the edge of a blade . . . her arms are a thousand times more dangerous than those of her goddess . . . they are as sinuous as serpents. She is beautiful"); the exotic sequence fades-out after a match-cut to an inscrutable stone likeness of Kali, each of her multiple arms ending in a tightly gripped dagger.

The scene in which Alda and Rinaldo first meet is especially memorable, as the entire 5-minute sequence was captured in a single uninterrupted take—Bava's longest such experiment to date. En route to her father's encampment, Alda pauses to stretch her legs by a magnificently picturesque waterfall (the Cascate di



THE PALADINS *of France are given orders as Rinaldo (Fabrizio Mioni, far left) listens.*

Montegelato, a location that appears in numerous Francisci films)[20] and is threatened by a marauding wild boar. Rinaldo responds to her screams by spearing the creature, which causes Alda to faint. Because no cuts occur during the sequence, their encounter has a spellbound, time-suspended quality that makes their sudden emotions for one another curiously plausible.

Another of the film's outstanding attributes is a distinctive, heroic score by Angelo Francesco Lavagnino. His scoring of the jousting tournament between the Paladins and the Saracens is especially thrilling, with the preparatory closing of each contestant's visor complemented with reverberating chimes of escalating timber. Lavagnino would never score another Bava film, but his career would encompass such outstanding works as *Gorgo* (1961), Ferdinando Baldi's *Orazi e Curiazi/Duel of Champions* (1961), Antonio Margheriti's "Gamma I" quartet of science fiction movies (1964), and Tonino Valerii's Western *Oggi a me . . . domani a te/Today It's Me, Tomorrow You* (1968, scripted by Dario Argento). Lavagnino also played at least one bit part, as a doctor in Mario Colucci's *Qualcosa striscia nel buio/Something Creeping in the Dark* (1971), before his death on August 21, 1987.

Orlando . . . also marks the first significant collaboration between Bava and some key players who would appear again and again during Bava's most memorable work as a cameraman and director, notably Ivo Garrani and Mimmo Palmara. Solid, dependable actors, they tended to play the same roles over and over onscreen—Garrani as the nobleman who finds himself compromised in his autumn years, and Palmara as a secondary villain, always more boorish than threatening—but among Italian actors, they could bring these caricatures to life with more color and aplomb than anyone.

Born February 6, 1924, in Intradaqua, at Sulmona (L'Aquila), stage actor Ivo Garrani made his first screen appearance in *Ragazze da marito* ("Married Women," 1952) and first worked with Bava while playing the supporting role of a doctor in *Città di notte*. After playing the role of the compromised King in *Orlando e i paladini di Francia*, Garroni became stereotyped as such, and went on to play variations of this character in *Le fatiche di Ercole/Hercules*, *La morte viene dallo spazio/The Day the Sky Exploded*, and *La battaglia di Maratona/The Giant of Marathon*—all photographed and co-directed by Bava—before being cast as the apotheosis of this character, the white-haired Prince Vajda of *La maschera del demonio/Black Sunday*—a role which he would essay at the age of 36! Garrani was still active in the Italian cinema as recently as Antonio and Marco Manetti's horror comedy *Zora la vampira* (2000), in which he played a priest.

Born on July 25, 1928, in Sardinia, Mimmo Palmara—beginning with this film—became a fixture of the *pepla*, being featured in over twenty of them before turning to spy pictures in the mid-1960s under the restyled *nom de l'ecran* "Dick Palmer." Tall, handsome and muscular, Palmara entered films on the strengths of his accomplishments as a bodybuilder. His first screen role was an uncredited appearance as a French officer in King Vidor's international co-production of *War*



RIK BATTAGLIA *as Orlando and Ivo Garrani (below) as Charlemagne.*



20 One of the classic Italian film locations, famous for its appearances in *Hercules* and *Hercules Unchained*, the Cascate di Montegelato is said to be reachable only by automobile. According to Fabrizio Balestra's article "The Hercules Tourist Map" (*Classic Physique* 5:1, Winter/Spring 1999), it can be reached thusly: "About 30 kilometers north of Rome on the Via Cassia going in the direction of Viterbo, go towards the small village of Settevene (before Marzano). Continue north on the small country road for about 5 kilometers, then turn right at the sign 'Cascate di Montegelato.' You'll be there in a couple of minutes."

and Peace (1956), but he evidently endeared himself to Francisci and Bava on this production; he would work with them both several more times, notably in the two Hercules films soon to come. Screenwriter Ennio De Concini would write (or co-author) almost every Bava film for the next six years.

Francisci's overlong film—110 minutes—was reduced in length for its exported versions; a 94-minute edition was distributed in France and in America. The American version was never distributed theatrically, but was sold directly to television in grossly cropped 16 mm prints that omitted nearly half the CinemaScope frame. Shot and processed in unstable Eastmancolor, the color of these prints has now faded, bringing injury with insult. Capturing the dead center of the widescreen at all times, *Roland the Mighty* actually features a conversation between two people during which the only thing onscreen is a horse's ass.

Husband, Father, & Artist

In his private life, Mario Bava was now the father of teenagers, a trying period of life for any parent. His daughter Elena, who turned 18 in 1956, is said to have had a very close and dependent relationship with her father. This view is supported by one of Mario's rare interviews, in which he mentioned taking his daughter to Tor Caldara in the hope that its sulphur springs might cure her acne. It is unusual—especially in the 1950s—to hear of a father, least of all a very busy one, taking time to shepherd his daughter through such a personal ordeal, which is traditionally the province of mothers. Elena inherited the artistic talent and temperament of her forefathers, but had difficulty in deciding which medium was the correct one for her to pursue. In the early 1960s, she spent a year or two in the set design department at the De Laurentiis Studio, then relocated to Venice where she studied to become an architect, finally achieving this goal in 1970.



A WONDERFUL *photo of the Bava family dining out, circa 1951.*



Just as Elena's teenage years were coming to a close, those of Mario's son Lamberto were coming into view. In 1956, Lamberto was 12 years old and prone to all the mischief and misbehavior one expects from a growing boy. Lamberto tells wonderful stories about how his father coped with his "season of rebellion," revealing Mario Bava to have been as innovative at parenthood as he was at his profession.

"Without a doubt, he was thirty years ahead of his contemporaries," Lamberto has declared. "Not just in terms of the cinema, but in terms of his personal approach to life. When I was a child, my friends and classmates lived in terror of their fathers in the usual way, but mine was more like a friend. Sometimes, when I came home from school, he would come to me and ask, 'Why do you go? What do you do there?' It wasn't his form of education. Later, when I got to the age when one experiments with smoking, about 13 years old, I bought the cigarettes which were least expensive and most popular at the time. I can remember one day taking my pack of cigarettes from the coat pocket where I hid them and finding written on the cellophane wrapper, 'You smoke *these*?' That was my father's form of humor; he didn't forbid me to smoke, but rather poked fun at me gently for doing so."[21]

In a separate interview with the author, Lamberto continued in this vein: "I remember my father as a really positive person who gave me all that he could, emotionally. He hardly ever shouted at me—or if he did, it was no more than any father would. I mostly remember his wonderful sense of humor . . . One day when I woke for school, he came into my room and said, 'Lamberto, it's such a horrible day—why should you have to go to school? You stay in bed!' He wasn't like other fathers, who are always worried about their children's grades. He hardly ever asked me about my school activities . . . Another time, when I was older, I was playing hooky from school with some friends of mine and suddenly, one of them came running and said, 'Run! Your father's coming!' I

21 Lamberto Bava interview, "Mario Bava, Mio Padre" in Luigi Cozzi, *Il Cinema Gotico e Fantastico Italiano Vol 1—Mario Bava, I Mille Volti Della Paura* (Rome, Italy: Mondo Ignoto/Profondo Rosso, 2001), 149–56.



IOLE BAVA *takes the family dog—a Scottish terrier named Lili—for a walk on the beach.*

dived behind a bush. I heard a car stop nearby and my father's voice saying, 'Lamberto, with that big ass of yours, it's not hard to see you!' And later, when I was 14 or 15 years old, I had a teacher who was giving me a hard time, and my father advised me, 'Well, try and get along with him as best you can—though he seems a bit stuck-up to me!'"

When Lamberto turned 16, Mario initiated a series of lessons in musical appreciation, playing him recordings of the works of Beethoven, Chopin, and other classical masters, and discussing afterwards (and *during*) why they were great, why they were important. To Mario, a thorough grounding in the classics was essential to one's civility; he was providing his son with something not necessarily given in school: a cultural education.

Lamberto feels that some of Mario's unorthodox approach to parenthood may have come from his father Eugenio's unpredictable behavior. "My grandfather was also somewhat eccentric," he says, reaching back another generation. "I remember when he was about 60 or 65 years old, he was still getting around on his motorcycle. My grandmother used to say he'd go out to buy a pack of cigarettes and come back two months later!" The women in the Bava family tended to be as devoutly Catholic as the men were nonreligious and apolitical, and the influence of being around spiritually minded women bred a certain kind of superstition among the Bava men.

"Whenever I was out walking with my grandmother and we passed a church," Lamberto continues, "we always had to go inside. I wouldn't say that my father was superstitious, but he was fascinated by anything shocking or sinister. I remember when my grandfather died, my father—who was obviously upset—didn't want me to go to the funeral. He thought the ceremony itself was quite horrific. Whenever we found ourselves behind a funeral procession, he would try to distract me, or protect me, because even when I was 16 or 17, he still regarded me as a child. He thought the whole idea of a funeral was macabre . . . and yet, in all his films, there is usually some bloody great coffin!" [22]

When I asked Lamberto's daughter Georgia if she considered Mario (to whom she was very close) a superstitious man, she said, "No!"—in a way that gave me the impression that this was a preposterous charge. When I followed up by saying I'd heard from others that Mario had a dread of owls and regarded the color purple as a harbinger of disaster, she laughed, "Oh, but that's *everybody!*"

The dark turn taken by Mario's imagination can be attributed to many influences, including his memories of his father's workroom, of the horrors of war, of postwar malaise, and indeed the violent nature of much of classical Italian art. But another factor was surely the ways in which his wife Iole had changed since their marriage. As mentioned earlier, once the couple began their family, Iole dropped her earlier interests in the cinema and became entirely focused on her home and children. In itself, this is not so unusual, but in Iole's case, her withdrawal into private life made her increasingly fretful, hypochondriacal, morbid, and reclusive.



MARIO*'s sister Elena, young Lamberto Bava, and mother Iole enjoy a gondola ride.*



A CROWD *of spectators looks on as Mario prepares an on-location shot for one of his 1950s films.*

"It is a very strange story, because I know very many friends of Mario who never met his wife," says Andrea Piazzesi, one of the few family intimates who actually met Iole. "She became very fat and was always suffering from a dread of heart attacks. She was always saying that she was going to die, that she was afraid to die, and this affected his life very strongly. She was not an easy person to be with; she wasn't the kind of wife who could go places with him or help to promote him. She never wanted to travel—and she didn't want *him* to travel! He told me that this was a problem, but nevertheless, he stayed with this woman his whole life."

Obviously regarding this as a very personal subject, Lamberto Bava declined to speak about his mother for this book, but his children remember their grandmother fondly—while allowing in the same breath that their grandparents were anything but an ideal couple.

"My father [Lamberto] was very close to Mario, but not so close with his mother," Georgia Bava explains. "That's not because my grandmother had a strange character or anything—she was a very nice woman—but because she had no interest in cinema. She was interested in basic things, like cooking and her family. She didn't like to go out and meet people, to go to dinner parties or the theater; she stayed at home. [Her relationship with Mario] was very strained; I don't think he was all that happy, quite honestly. If he had met another woman, he would have been happier, and vice versa. They were quite different from one another in every way. He liked reading and the work he was doing, but around the house, he had to hide these interests."

Gustave Flaubert once advised that artists should be bourgeois and conservative in their personal lives, the better to be violent and daring in their art. Bava is the perfect exemplar of this philosophy.

"Mario was very reserved in his life, but he was attracted to extreme things," his grandson Roy suggests. "He was an observer, a *voyeur* really . . . and he was attracted to the strange, extreme side of human behavior. He was always telling me about this. For one of his early documentaries [probably Luigi Comencini's *L'ospedale del delitto*, 1950], he had to film inside a madhouse, and he remembered a person there who was a brutal murderer, who had spent the last twenty years of his life standing still and following the sun as it was moving. He said, 'This is unbelievable! This person, who is so quiet and does nothing all day but watch the sky, once annihilated his entire family?' He spent a whole day observing this man, and it began to haunt his imagination—why people did such things, how they can sometimes be moved to do something that extreme." [23]

Whatever the cause, as Mario Bava's cinematographic talent matured, it became more expressive of a dark sensibility. Certainly, he could fill the screen with images of fanciful, indelible beauty, but there was always a sense of falsity, of personal disbelief, when he was called upon to accentuate the positive. It was only when a story provided him with opportunities to explore the anguish of life—its melancholy, its violence, its despair and tragedy—that his work became most truthful and passionate: the apocalyptic climax of *I pagliacci*, the suicide of Tamara Lees' character in *Miss Italia*, the comic nightmare scene in *La famiglia Passaguai fa fortuna*, the spectral "Motherless Child" sequence from *Natale al Campo 119* and Gloria Swanson's imperious return from a watery grave in *Mio figlio Nerone*.

After fifteen years as a feature film cameraman, Bava had finally assimilated his influences and personal experience into a signature style. But, at this point in time, it still awaited its context.

22 Lamberto Bava, *Mario Bava Maestro of the Macabre* interview transcript, 2000.

23 Roy Bava, *Mario Bava Maestro of the Macabre* interview transcript, 2000.





More Than a Cameraman

"They snap, they break, they pop, they crackle!
And I'm the one who has to put them back together again!"
—Lisa and the Devil



ITALIAN *due-foglia, art by Arnaldo Putzu.*

I VAMPIRI

The Devil's Commandment

THE HORROR FILM—prohibited in Italy during Mussolini's rule—remained out of general favor in the wake of the real life horrors of World War II. Science fiction—nowadays a cynical genre, but in the 1950s a vehicle for constructive optimism—was suddenly in vogue, showing audiences how the resilient human spirit could survive cataclysms of even cosmic proportions to rebuild society from the ground up, as in the case of the 1951 George Pal production *When Worlds Collide*. Between 1950 and 1956, there had been only one authentic success in the classic horror mode: Andre de Toth's *House of Wax* (1953)—a faithful remake of Michael Curtiz' *Mystery of the Wax Museum* (1933). The film's popularity was as rooted in the humorous novelty of its 3-D photography as in its hair-raising Grand Guignol thrills; it had wisely taken care to add *fun* to fright.

Unlike most active filmmaking countries, Italy had not produced a true horror film since *Il mostro di Frankenstein* (1920). The classic American horror films of the 1930s and '40s were not exhibited in Italy until the early 1950s, when the censors began to allow certain titles to filter through. Prior to this, the fantastic cinema had survived for Italian audiences of that period only in the form of fairy tale films (e.g., Walt Disney's animated features) and art films tinged with darkness like Michael Powell and Emeric Pressburger's *The Tales of Hoffman* (1951). As for Italian films, the fantastic had been diminished over the years to the romantic, light-hearted strain found in such popular fare as *Miracolo a Milani/Miracle in Milan* (1951) and *Totò all'inferno* ("Totò in Hell," 1954); there was always a comic, satirical or whimsical attachment.

While other countries had seemingly lost interest in producing horror movies, there was a groundswell of interest in Italy as Universal's classics *Dracula* and *Frankenstein* (both 1931) were shown there for the first time. The renaissance was somewhat thwarted by the Italian censors; as Giuseppe Tornatore's *Nuovo Cinema Paradiso/Cinema Paradiso* (1988) illustrates, it was a time when simple kissing was not permitted to be shown in some districts. Rare was the horror film that could be shown in Italy without extensive national and local censor cuts.

Mario Bava had kept up his friendship with Riccardo Freda, while moonlighting as a special effects day-worker on films like *Teodora imperatrice di Bisanzio* (1954), the comedy *Da qui all'eredità* (1955, which was partly filmed at Istituto LUCE), and *Beatrice Cenci* (1956). At some point in the course of their conversations during this interval, they arrived at the crazy idea of making a horror film together. It *was* a crazy idea at the time; Hammer Films of Great Britain was still a year away from producing Terence Fisher's *The Curse of Frankenstein* (1957), the film whose fresh interpretation and international popularity would light the wick of the horror renaissance of the 1950s. It's possible that the subject came up as early as Freda's initial visit to Bava's home in 1953, when he first admired Eugenio's wax sculptures of the Saints. 1953 was also the year of *House of Wax*, which was making money in other countries and would soon be making money in Italy under the title *La maschera di cera* ("The Wax Mask"); its success, and the sculptures, would have been the perfect catalysts to such a discussion. Regardless of when their talks on the subject actually began, and whatever prompted them, Freda didn't get around to making a pitch until 1956.

Freda made an appointment with Ermanno Donati and Luigi Carpentieri—two gambling buddies, who also happened to be film producers—and told them he was interested in directing a horror film. They were intrigued, but also leery of losing their shirts by backing a film in an unproven genre. Knowing how quickly Bava worked at lighting and cinematography, Freda appealed to their gambling instincts. He bet them that he could complete such a picture in only twelve days.

"They asked if I had anything prepared," said Freda, describing the fateful session. "I said no, but I promised that I could cook something up by the next day. When I returned with my proposal, I brought it—not written on paper, but recorded on tape! I did the sound effects also, even the creakings of the door; it was very amusing!" [1]

Donati and Carpentieri were impressed by the novelty of Freda's "radio" presentation and took the reel to Goffredo Lombardo, the executive producer at Titanus. Lombardo felt likewise, and with Freda's avowed twelve-day schedule made a condition of the deal, he agreed to fund the production.

Freda's concept was built, like most of his films since the late 1940s, around his lover Gianna Maria Canale, whose flawless, mask-like



ITALIAN *due-foglia for HOUSE OF WAX.*

I vampiri

"The Vampires"
Filmed at Titanus Appia Studios (Scalera Film) and on location in Italy
Autumn 1956
First released: April 5, 1957
B&W, CinemaScope, 2.35:1, 85 minutes

Production: Titanus–L'Athena Cinematografica. Producers: Ermanno Donati, Luigi Carpentieri. Directors: Riccardo Freda, (uncredited) Mario Bava. Screenplay: Piero Regnoli, Rijk Sijöström. Director of photography: Mario Bava. Camera operator: Corrado Bartoloni. Art direction: Beni Montresor. Props: Mario Sertoli. Special effects: Mario Bava. Wardrobe: Beni Montresor. Wardrobe assistant: Adriana Berselli. Makeup: Franco Freda. Hairdresser: Ada Palombi. Production manager: Piero Donati. Production inspector: Claudio Agostinelli. Editor: Roberto Cinquini. Music: Roman Vlad, Franco Mannino (some sources). Distributor: Titanus.

Gianna Maria Canale (Gisèle Du Grand/Duchess Marguerite Du Grand), Dario Michaëlis (Pierre Lantin/LaSalle), Carlo D'Angelo (Inspector Santel/Mornier/Chantal), Wandisa Guida (Laurette Robert), Antoine Balpêtre (Prof. Julian Du Grand), Renato Tontini (Roland Fontaine), Paul Müller (Joseph Seignoret), Angiolo Galassi (assistant), Charles Fawcett, Gisela Mancinotti (Nora Duval), Miranda Campa, Emilio Petacci, Armando Annuale, Riccardo Freda (doctor, uncredited).

Additional US credits: Executive producers: Jonathan Daniels, Victor Purcell. Directors: Richard Freda, Ron Honthauer [Ron Honthaner]. Screenplay: J. V. Rhems. Cast: Gina Maria Canale [*sic*] (Duchess Marguerite Du Grand), Charles Fawcett (intruder), Barbara London (dancer), Ronny and Joy Holliday (nightclub dancers), Bert Goldstein (maitre d'), Barbara Wohl (girl in restaurant), Al Lewis (assistant—additional inserts).

Belgium: *De Bloedzuigers*, "The Bloodsuckers," Cosmopolis Films
Cuba: *Los Vampiros*, Películas Europeas, S.A.
France: *Les Vampires*, Les Films Marbeuf, 11/27/57
Germany: *Der Vampir von Notre Dame*, "The Vampire of Notre Dame," Prisma Film–Mueller, 11/28/58
UK: *Lust of the Vampire*, Gala Film Distributors Ltd., 65m 53s, Certificate "X," passed with cuts
US: *The Devil's Commandment*, RCIP, 73m



I VAMPIRI *fotobusta: Dario Michaëlis, Renato Tontini. The photo of Gianna Maria Canale seen here was the work of famed fashion photographer Elio Luxardo (1908-69), the uncle of future director Dario Argento.*

beauty projected an aura of imperious power and sensuality—the perfect vamp for a contemporary vampire film. "The undead creatures invented by Bram Stoker hold no interest for me," he said. "I believe that, if modern vampires exist, they must survive by stealing away the youth of others."[2]

His proposal—simply titled *I vampiri*—appears to have been studiously crafted to sidestep potential problems with the Italian censors. Despite the title, there would be no blood-drinking; despite the romantic aspects of the story, there would be no kissing; the story would take place in Paris, to keep the horror at a safe distance; and though the story necessitated violent death, it would always occur offscreen. Horror would be suggested entirely through the film's sepulchral decor and cinematography, one or two well-positioned feats of magic, and the unseen. Produced in 1956, released in 1957, it would be the first Italian horror film of the sound era.

Synopsis

In Paris, construction workers toiling on the edge of the Seine discover the dead body of Mireille, a teenage student at the Ecole du Jeanne d'Arc, floating in the river, drained of blood—the latest victim in a series of "vampire" murders. Pierre Lantin, a newspaper reporter, is taunting Inspector Santel of the Sureté, much to his irritation, for his inability to solve the case.[3] *The next young woman to disappear is Nora Duval, a music hall showgirl of twenty, who is abducted from her dressing room by a tall, pale man wearing black gloves.*

Though his editor shares Inspector Santel's displeasure over his theoretical "vampire" stories, Pierre continues to press on with his private investigation. At the office, visited by his photographer friend Roland Fontaine, Pierre tries to "picture the vampire," while Ronald becomes fascinated by a photo of Gisèle Du Grand—the astonishingly beautiful niece of the elderly and vastly wealthy Duchess Marguerite Du Grand. Gisèle has eyes for no one but Pierre, but he is too dedicated to solving the "vampire murders" to care. Besides, Pierre cannot overlook the fact that the Duchess, despite her advanced years, nearly destroyed his parents' marriage with her obsessive love for his father—which was based solely on his resemblance to her first love, Pierre's grandfather, a family trait that continues with the current generation.

On a street in Montmartre, Pierre interviews three girls who attended the Ecole du Jeanne d'Arc with Mireille. One of them, Laurette, recalls that Mireille was shadowed for several days prior to her disappearance by a tall, pale man. Gisèle drives by and summons Pierre, chastising him for ignoring her. Roland observes their meeting and, faced with this divine creature in the flesh, falls in love at first sight. Returning to work, Pierre examines a photo of the missing showgirl and notices a tall, pale man walking at a short distance behind her.

The abductor, Joseph Seignoret, writhes in pain in his darkened apartment until a stranger in black gloves arrives to administer a drug injection. He is shown a photograph of Laurette and told to abduct her if he wants another fix. Joseph does not know the identity of his administrator.

The next day, in Montmartre, Pierre notices Seignoret in the street and trails him to a second floor apartment, a location set apart from surrounding apartment buildings of the same type by a roadblock sign positioned in front. He verifies the man's residence, then makes a report to Santel; unfortunately, after dragging Santel to the apartment, they find a retired gendarme in residence. (Unknown to Pierre, the roadblock sign had been moved by workmen to the front of a different, outwardly identical apartment building farther down the block.)

Meanwhile, in his own apartment, Seignoret finds the ampule of the drug administered to him the night before lying on the floor. It is labelled with the address of the Clinica Salus, run by Prof. Julien Du Grand. He goes there, insists on seeing Du Grand and demands more drugs and money, otherwise he will expose him as the mastermind behind the "vampire" killings. Joseph is overcome by the Professor's burly henchman. At that moment, Du Grand's aged domineering wife—the Duchess Marguerite Du Grand, to whom he is married only in name—bursts into the room and declares that the Professor's sloppiness has endangered their operation, and that he must now protect their cover by staging his

1 Emanuela Martini and Stefano Della Casa, eds., *Freda* (Bergamo, Italy: Centro Sperimentale di Cinematografia Cineteca Nazionale, 1993), 53–61. It should be mentioned here that Goffredo Lombardo was a man of paramount importance to the history of the Italian horror film, because he not only green-lighted *I vampiri*, but also Dario Argento's *L'uccello dalle piume di cristallo/The Bird With the Crystal Plumage* in 1970.

2 Michel Caen and J. C. Romer, "Entretien avec Riccardo Freda," *Midi-Minuit Fantastique* 7, September 1963, 1–6.

3 Pierre's surname is changed to "La Salle" in the American version, while the Inspector Santel is renamed "Mornier" in the French version and "Chantal" in the American version. Pierre's surname is given as "Valentin" in several published references, but this is evidently no more than an old and oft-repeated error, with no basis in any known version.

own death. Du Grand's death makes headlines (A GREAT LOSS TO MANKIND: THE UNEXPECTED DEATH OF PROF. JULIEN DU GRAND), and the unconscious body of Seignoret is interred in his place in the family tomb, then later removed for further experimentation in Du Grand's laboratory, which occupies the family chapel and connects with the Du Grand castle through a secret passage behind the main fireplace.

While walking to school one morning, Laurette passes a blind beggar, who asks if she would do him the great favor of delivering a letter to an apartment in Paris. She takes the letter to a cluttered but otherwise vacant apartment, where she is abducted by another of Du Grand's henchmen.

Pierre learns of Laurette's disappearance while paying a social call at the apartment of her parents. Pierre, who has begun to see Laurette socially, is distraught over her disappearance. Making matters worse, his editor forces him to forget the "vampire" murders for one night by attending a ball at the Du Grand chateau. Roland accompanies Pierre to the ball, where the reporter is quickly approached by Gisèle, who leads him to a private, moonlit balcony. There, she expresses her love for him and her equal hatred for her aunt's guests. When the couple hear a scream in the night—actually Laurette screaming from the room where Julien is holding her prisoner—Gisèle explains that it must be her aunt, suffering in seclusion from a painful disease. Pierre soon makes his apologies and leaves, but Roland stays behind. When all the guests have gone home and Gisèle retires to her bedroom, Roland romantically scales the wall to her quarters. Gisèle's anger at his presumptuous intrusion provokes a transformation. As Roland stands aghast before her, the woman's youth and beauty withers into the aged Duchess Marguerite Du Grand! She shoots Roland to death in anger.

The Duchess' youth is being maintained by Prof. Du Grand with the blood of young virgins, but the transformation is very tenuous and can be reversed by turbulent emotions. Using Laurette, Julien subjects the Duchess to a three-hour experimental ordeal, which restores her youth once again but leaves Laurette near death and the Duchess/Gisèle herself somewhat weakened.

Later, Pierre bumps into Gisèle, who drags him to an antiques store where she plans to acquire a painting on her aunt's behalf. She asks the dealer about the work's authenticity and he asserts that he would never cheat the Duchess. "To me," he says, "you and the Duchess are one and the same!" On a hunch, Pierre decides to return to the castle that night, and he flees after setting off a macabre security alarm, only to discover another escapee—a disoriented Joseph Seignoret—staggering on the grounds. Pierre takes Seignoret to be questioned by Inspector Santel, and the man admits to kidnapping the young women, but Santel discounts his claim that Prof. Du Grand—supposedly dead and buried—is still alive and masterminding the abductions. At the end of his confession, Seignoret collapses on the floor, dead.

Noting that Ronald has not been seen since the Du Grand ball, Pierre persuades Santel to search the castle. Though the police are mystified by the odd legend on the Du Grand family crest (Conquisterò Inferno, "I Shall Conquer Hell"), nothing incriminating is found. As Santel and his men prepare to withdraw, Gisèle's outrage triggers an unbidden reversion to her true age. Pierre and the authorities gape as the beautiful woman withers before their eyes, crumbling into a withered, staring shell. A scream in the cellar attracts the police to the underground laboratory, where Santel is amazed to find Prof. Du Grand still alive. But not for long: Du Grand and his burly associate are shot dead. Wondering who occupies Du Grand's tomb, Santel has it opened. Laurette is found inside—weak but still alive.

Freda's homemade radio play was fleshed-out on paper by Piero Regnoli (b. 1929), a young but accomplished screenwriter who had previously produced and co-authored Filippo Walter Ratti's *Non è mai troppo tardi* ("It's Never Too Late," 1953), a modern-day interpretation of Charles Dickens' *A Christmas Carol.* Regnoli also added some of his own commercial touches to the story, like having the women abducted and bled to death by the Du Grands include leggy chorus girls. A few years after *I vampiri*, Regnoli would direct his own elaboration on this theme, *L'ultima preda del vampiro/ The Playgirls and the Vampire* (1960), starring Helene Rémy and Walter Brandi.[4] Regnoli also served on the production as assistant director. One of the most important contributions to the screenplay, possibly owed to Bava, was inventing Pierre as the object of the 100-year-old Duchess' romantic obsession, due to his uncanny resemblance to his own grandfather, whom she had loved in her youth. The use of a family portrait to explain Gisèle's obsession—indeed, the whole concept of men and women doomed to replay the loves and hates of their ancestors—would become one of the key premises in Italian horror; indeed, both Regnoli and Bava would restate this theme prominently in their respective directorial debuts in 1960.



GIANNA MARIA CANALE *strikes an iconic pose as s Gisèle Du Grand, amid the art direction of Beni Montresor.*

Pre-production & Cast

Freda and Bava decided that the film should be photographed in black-and-white CinemaScope. Both men had been working in the anamorphic format—Freda's previous film *Beatrice Cenci* had been his first anamorphic film, and he was sufficiently enamored of the epic frame that he would use it more often than not for the rest of his career—but only in color. The decision to shoot in monochrome might seem an automatic choice at the time, insofar as filming horror was concerned, but in fact, color horror films had already come into vogue with *House of Wax* and *Phantom of the Rue Morgue* (1954). The decision to film in black-and-white was actually imposed on the production by the nature of the trick shots Bava had planned.

4 Piero Regnoli would remain a prominent screenwriter for the popular Italian cinema throughout the early 1990s, working mostly in spy thrillers and Spaghetti Westerns; his later horror scripts include Mino Guerrini's extraordinary *Il terzo occhio* ("The Third Eye," 1966; credited to "Dean Craig"), Mario Landi's *Patrick vive ancora* ("Patrick Lives Again," 1980), Andrea Bianchi's *Le notti del terrore/ Burial Ground* (1981), Umberto Lenzi's *Incubo sulla citta contaminata/City of the Walking Dead* (1980), and two films for Lucio Fulci, *Demonia* (1990) and *Voci dal profondo/Voices From Beyond* (1991).





After Bava, the production's most valuable asset was undoubtedly its chief designer. "We had an extraordinary art director, Beni Montresor, who worked hard without ever complaining," Freda praised. "The scene in which Gianna Maria Canale suddenly ages into an old woman seems successful to me, in part, because the look of his sets corresponds perfectly to the truth about her character." [5]

Born in Verona in 1933, Montresor was only 23 years old at the time of filming, but he threw himself into creating the world of the Duchess with a marvelously uninhibited flair for the macabre. The sets are a sumptuous feast of decadence, resplendent with a surface articulation of skulls, tall dripping candles, and sheer fabrics torn to sigh in the breeze like cobwebs. The Du Grand family crypt, reached via a secret passage behind the castle's main fireplace (the first of many such conveniences in the annals of Italian horror), contains a variety of ornamental femurs and skulls, one of which serves as a pre-*Addams Family* security alarm, with flashing eyes and an owl-like shriek. The entrance to the castle's main hall is couched in satin drapes folded into jagged points around the peaked arch, in a manner that recalls the outstretched wings of a bat or dragon. One of the most striking furnishings in the castle is a bronze sculpture found at the base of the main hall's stone balustrade: a swan-necked dragon with skeletal, upturned wings, bare female breasts, and the clawed feet of a griffin. Montresor's work is deliriously inspired, and some might argue that it's a bit overdone; during the ball sequence, none of the Duchess' high society guests take any notice of the bountifully morbid decor—nor do the police look askance at any of this horror show when they arrive to interrogate Gisèle late in the film. In fact, the sheer hyperbole of Montresor's work—its emphasis on atmospheric clutter over logic, the heaping-on of art for art's sake—would be one of the film's most lasting contributions to the character of the Italian horror film.

RICCARDO FREDA *(seated) confers with Mario Bava (right) on the set of I VAMPIRI.*

In the absence of an existing Italian horror film tradition, Freda and his chief collaborators were required to venture into virgin territory. The unique look of *I vampiri* was not necessarily decided, but more likely resulted from the amalgamation of available space and props, and the Italians' own limited knowledge of the evolution of the horror genre in the sound era. Consequently, *I vampiri* is less influenced by Universal's *Dracula* or *Frankenstein* than by silent French serials, neorealist drama, romantic melodrama, fairy tales and grand opera. In fact, one of its most noticeable stylistic influences is Walt Disney's *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs* (1937)—one of the few American films of a macabre nature to play in Italy prior to the war years—with Gianna Maria Canale a formidable flesh-and-blood embodiment of the Disney classic's Evil Queen.

Canale is captured here at the height of her allure, her severe yet incandescent beauty refreshed by a smart, mannish *coiffure.* One of the film's missteps is that it doesn't quite provide her with an entrance worthy of her impact (she simply drives up and calls to Pierre from her car window); however, the first time her face appears in the movie is in the form of a glamorous Luxardo photograph that literally drew gasps from the theater audience of which I was part. Of course, it is the juxtaposition of Canale's beauty with the shrivelled ugliness of the Duchess Du Grand that is its locus of horror, and this establishes yet another of the film's enduring legacies: in the best Italian horror films, there can be no horror without the counterpoint of classical beauty.

Second-billed after Canale was Carlo D'Angelo, whose minor role of Inspector Santel was presumably more prominent in Freda's original script. Born in Milan on February 2, 1919, D'Angelo had been playing supporting roles in films since the late 1940s; his biggest exposure up to this time had been an uncredited role in Howard Hawks' *Land of the Pharaohs* (1955). In later years, he would continue to find work in costume pictures and assorted *pepla*, including Viktor Tourjansky's *Erode il grande/Herod the Great* (1958) and Ferdinando Baldi's *David e Golia/David and Goliath* (1960), and he would be photographed by Bava once again in *Ercole e la regina di Lidia/Hercules Unchained* (1959), in which he played an important secondary role. His later career included appearances for Antonio Margheriti (*Il pianeta degli uomini spenti/Battle of the Worlds*, 1961), Riccardo Freda (*Giulietta e Romeo*, 1964), Giorgio Ferroni (*New York chiama Superdrago/Secret Agent Superdragon*, 1966), and Sergio Corbucci (*Il grand silenzio/The Great Silence*, 1968). Sometimes billed as "Charles Angel" in his Western appearances, D'Angelo died in Bologna on June 9, 1973.

Billed below D'Angelo onscreen, but in effect the film's principal actor, was Dario Michaëlis. Born March 29, 1929, in Resistencia, Argentina, Michaëlis had previously appeared in minor roles for such prominent directors as Mario Bonnard and Christian-Jacque. His hair was dyed blonde for *I vampiri,* which was his first starring role. He would work with Bava again on *La morte viene dalla spazio* (1958), and continued to appear in Italian films through the early 1970s, but never succeeded in landing another leading role.

The role of Laurette was played by Wandisa Guida (b. 1937), making one of her earliest screen appearances. Guida—who was also known to act under the name "Wandisa Leigh"—would become especially prominent in *peplum* films of the 1960s, including *La vendetta di Ercole/Goliath and the Dragon* (1960), *La vendetta di Ursus/The Revenge of Ursus* (1961) and Antonio Margheriti's impressive *I giganti di Roma/The Giants of Rome* (1964), a thinly disguised sword-and-sandal rewrite of *The Guns of Navarone.* She later became the wife of producer Luciano Martino and has been retired from films for many years.

From a casting standpoint, Freda's greatest *coup* was signing French acting legend Antoine Balpêtre (1898–1963) for the role of Prof. Julien Du Grand. The renowned director of the Sociètaire de la Comèdie Française, the actor was so well-known in France that, as early as 1932, he was being billed onscreen simply (or grandly) as "Balpêtre." Among his cinematic triumphs were Maurice Tourneur's *Le Main du Diable/Carnival of Sinners* (1943), Henri-Georges Clouzot's *Le Corbeau* ("The Raven," 1943), Robert Vernay's *Fantômas contra Fantômas* (1949), and Robert Bresson's *Journal d'un Curé Campagne/Diary of a Country Priest* (1951). In 1955, Balpêtre branched out to star in his first Italian film, *Il piccolo vetraio*, made in Turin. Casting him in *I vampiri* was done partly to deceive audiences into thinking the film had been shot on location in Paris.

The film's most familiar face, to devotees of horror cinema anyway, belongs to Swiss actor Paul Müller (b. 1923). Müller had also been active in films since the late 1940s—he had a small but visible role in *Fabiola*, and worked with Gianna Maria Canale that same year (1949) in *Il bacio di una morta.* He has since achieved a cult following for his gallery of slimy, untrustworthy doctors, psychiatrists, and closet libertines in countless European exploitation films of the '50s, '60s, and '70s. Among his more conspicuous roles are the sadistic cuckold Dr. Arrowsmith in *Amanti d'oltretomba/Nightmare Castle* (1965, in which he is married to a faithless Barbara Steele), Dr. Seward in Jess Franco's *Count Dracula* (1970), Ewa Stroemberg's psychiatrist in Franco's *Vampyros Lesbos* (1970), Dr. Frankenstein's assistant—and brain donor—in Mel Welles' *Lady Frankenstein* (1971), the dead father's ghost in Franco's *Une Vierge chez les Morts-Vivants/A Virgin Among the Living Dead* (1971), and the tutor of the young Pharaoh in the TV miniseries *Moses the Lawgiver* (1975), for which Mario Bava provided the special effects.

Production

Though the main titles identify the studio location as Titanus Appia, the twelve-day production schedule commenced in the late autumn of 1956 at Scalera Film. The exterior view of the Castle Du Grand was filmed at a villa located on a Roman consular road called Cassia, known as Villa Mamzolin, which was owned at the time by an old woman of that family name. The location—exterior, interior, or both—was subsequently used in a number of Italian films, including Ernesto Gastaldi's directorial debut *Libido* (1966), which was filmed both inside and outside the premises.

"It was almost a castle, as you can see in *Libido* and many other movies that were filmed there, but it is not close to the sea, as it appears in my film," Gastaldi describes. "Behind the villa, there was a big space for horse races and green fields. Today, that area is almost completely covered with buildings, but I think the villa is still there."

Viewers familiar with Bava's earlier work may recognize the backstage theater area, where Joseph Seignoret stalks a chorus girl, from the early backstage scenes of *Vita da cani.* Judging from photographs taken on the set, the studio must have been ice cold—Freda can be seen wearing a three-piece pinstriped suit and gloves indoors, while Bava is bundled-up in two sweaters, a shirt, and a necktie. Despite the chill, a *faux pas* that survives in the finished film suggests that the studio ceiling was sometimes opened in the afternoons to bring in extra warmth from the sun. When Marguerite empties a revolver into her mirror in a fit of self-loathing, the pieces of broken glass settle to briefly reveal a couple of onlooking technicians, a stone chimney, and a bright sky—all reflected in the midst of a supposedly interior night scene.

There was considerable tension on the set, some of it caused by the imperative to work quickly, but much of it due to the imperious attitudes of the director. Freda comported himself tyranically on-set, barking his directions and handling his actors with equal measures of disregard and contempt.

"Freda knew his job very well, he was gifted," Bava allowed, "but his behavior was unacceptable. He was convinced, like Mario Soldati, that most actors have their heads up their asses. Maybe I agree, but Freda took this notion to extremes. Just imagine: he would only walk onto the set after each new scene had been

5 Jacques Lourcelles and Simon Misrahi, "Entretien avec Riccardo Freda," *Prèsence du Cinema* 17, Spring 1963, 11–30.



THIS MARIO BAVA *glass matte transformed the outer grounds of Scalera Film into an avenue in Montmartre.*

completely blocked and rehearsed [by the cameraman]. Then he would arrive, sit down in his chair, turn his back to the cast and shout, '*Si gira!*' ['Roll 'em!']! After the take was finished, he would turn to me and ask if we should print. Well, after a few days of that, the actors were at their wit's end!" [6]

If anything related to the production was commanding of Freda's complete attention and respect, it was Bava's special effects photography. Typically in Italian films of this station and period, special effects filming was always reserved for the final week of production, but Freda was so eager to get to these scenes, they were evidently scheduled early.

Freda praised Bava as "a master of special effects . . . able to solve any problem, regardless of its difficulty. When we were making *I vampiri*, we worked together to recreate the streets of Paris in the stately courtyard of Scalera Film. In Paris, they refused to believe that Montmartre and Lungosenna had been shot in a courtyard with the help of a simple sheet of glass!" [7]

Freda is referring to two exterior shots—Pierre's first meeting with Laurette and two other chorus girls, and his later shadowing of Joseph Seignoret, whom he sees reading a newspaper while getting a shoeshine—which appear to have been shot on a street in Montmartre, with the twin towers of Notre Dame du Paris visible in the distance. This scene was actually filmed on the street outside the offices of Scalera Film, which happened to be located in a Roman apartment building. Bava created the illusion by affixing a convincing collage of large clipped photographs to a sheet of glass placed between the camera and the action. In the establishing shot of the street, everything you see in the top half of the frame was put there by Bava. His facility with this kind of illusion astounded Freda, but to Bava himself, it was old hat; in fact, he had previously done the same trick on the same location—in 1948's *Follie per l'opera*, using a glass matte to redress this same Roman street as a road in London.

The very first shot in *I vampiri* is also a trick, with Bava using the same means to insert the Eiffel Tower into the background as a group of workmen discover the corpse of a young woman (supposedly) floating in the Seine. Another glass matte suggesting the Montmartre district accompanies the street scene where Laurette meets the blind man and kindly agrees to deliver a letter for him. In the exterior shot of Pierre meeting Gisèle, prior to the scene in the antiques shop, actor Dario Michaëlis occupies the extreme left of frame while the remaining three-fourths of the frame is occupied by a photographic matte. (The source photograph is also seen during the main titles, under Paul Müller's screen credit.) Bava sells the illusion with a couple of leafy branches, which overhang the extreme right of the matte, lending movement to the foreground of the foliage collected there. This is a signature trait of Bava's trick cinematography: the placement of real foregrounded objects to lend verisimilitude to an illusory underlayer of the composition.

In contrast to the film's moodily lit interiors, the quality of these exterior shots may look somewhat crude to a contemporary viewer, but they are in keeping with the overexposed look of the neorealist films still being produced in Italy at the time. It may also have been necessary for Bava to deliberately overexpose these shots in order to persuasively blend his Roman locations and the French scenery he had clipped from magazines and postcards. At any rate, the look of *I vampiri* is the quintessential bridge between Rossellini's *Roma città aperta* and Bava's own *La maschera del demonio*, and whatever technical shortcomings its cinematography may have illustrate perfectly the enormous creative leap of faith involved in trying to launch a horror tradition in Italy at this moment in history.

However, Freda was most awestruck by the ingenious technique Bava employed to transform the beautiful, brunette Gianna Maria Canale into a withered hag with white hair, and back again, without the benefit of cutaways. Freda at least pretended to be under the impression that this effect was being done in his film "for the first time in the history of cinema," but in fact, the illusion dates back at least as far as 1925, when the American cinematographer Karl Struss used it in MGM's *Ben-Hur: A Tale of the Christ*—for the scene in which Ben-Hur's leprous mother and sister are cured by the touch of Jesus' hand. Some years later, Struss used the same technique even more famously to film the transformation scenes of MGM's *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* (1931), directed by Rouben Mamoulian. Critics and audiences were astounded by these shots, which helped Struss to win that year's Academy Award for Best Photography, but despite the public's intense curiosity about how

RICCARDO FREDA *touches up the multi-plane glass matte on-set.*













GISÈLE *transforms into the aged Duchess Marguerite Du Grand (left sequence), and later admires her rejuvenated beauty.*

the effect was achieved, both Struss and Mamoulian kept the explanation a closely guarded secret—until the late 1960s, when the cameraman finally spilled the beans to an audience of film students:

"It was done by using a red filter on a strong red makeup," Struss explained, "so that when you photographed red with a red filter the object was white. In front of the lens you put a two-inch red square 'A' filter that had the same speed as a green 'B' filter so that when you went from one exposure to the other, the density remained the same . . . When the transition started, it would slowly change and with the green filter you could see the image, the face, become quite dark, with lines and so forth, depending on how much makeup we had put on in the first place."[8]

Struss may well have derived the trick from the world of stage lighting. Some descriptions of Richard Mansfield's turn-of-the-century performances in a famous stage play adaptation of *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*—in which the actor executed his on stage transformation in full view of the audience—suggest that he may well have accomplished this feat with colored lighting effects. Nevertheless, at least a decade before Struss let the cat out of the bag publicly, Mario Bava used the same principles to effect Gianna Maria Canale's aging and rejuvenation scenes in *I vampiri*. It's possible that he cajoled the secret out of Struss while working with him on Francisci's *Attila* in 1954, but I suspect that Bava was such a born technician that he could have looked at the Mamoulian film and figured out the trick with his own two eyes. It is also possible that Eugenio Bava was present on the set of the 1925 *Ben-Hur* for the filming of the healing of the lepers (either as a visitor or as a secondary cameraman), and later shared the secret of its execution with his son.

What is significant about Bava's approach to these sequences is that he didn't simply copy Struss' technique; he managed to simplify it, and also take it a step or two further. Wrinkles were drawn on Canale's face in red grease pencil, which were then rendered invisible on the black-and-white film stock with red lighting. Old age makeup was applied to her hands, which the actress kept below the frame until the green lighting became dominant. (In a gaffe during the first transformation, which was inadvertently left in the picture, the makeup on Canale's hands leaves powdery traces on the front of her robe as she clutches at her throat.) As the scene was performed, the red light was manually dimmed while a green light was simultaneously raised, which caused the red makeup to photograph as black. Red makeup was also applied to Canale's teeth, making them look more discolored and rotten as the green light became more pronounced. But perhaps the most dramatic addition was having Canale fitted with a special wig whose artificial filaments looked dark under normal, indirect lighting conditions, but reflected light, photographing as white, when bombarded with direct illumination. By intensifying the light on the wig during the transformation, Bava was able to show her hair literally turn white on

6 Luigi Cozzi, *Il cinema dei mostri* (Rome, Italy: Fanucci Editore, 1987), 249–60.

7 Riccardo Freda, *Divoratori di celluloide—50 anni di memorie cinematografiche e non* (Milan, Italy: Emme Edizione–Il Formichiere, 1981), 80–130.

8 Karl Struss, as quoted in Susan and John Harvith, *Karl Struss: Man With a Camera* (Bloomfield Hills MI: Cranbrook Academy of Art Museum, 1976) in Gregory William Mank, *Hollywood Cauldron* (Jefferson NC: McFarland & Co.), 15.



JOSEPH SEIGNORET *(Paul Müller) is walked to the guillotine in the discarded prologue of I VAMPIRI.*

cue. Even when seen today, the effect—especially during the rejuvenation sequence—remains uncannily smooth and effective, so much so that one could slap editor Roberto Cinquini for interrupting the flawless process of the effect with needless cutaways to flashing laboratory equipment. Bava was so fond of this effect, he would repeat it in his directorial debut *La maschera del demonio* with Barbara Steele (where it doesn't work quite as impressively) and reveal the principles of its execution on a TV talk show in the early 1970s.

Corrado Bartoloni, who served as camera operator on the shot, remembers that it impressed everyone who saw it, including their fellow professionals. "Everybody started asking Bava how he did this—not only in Italy, but also people from the United States!" he laughs. "Mario told me, 'Corrado, I recommend that you do not say a single word about this. Let's keep it our little secret.'"

Bava's camera trickery in *I vampiri* also extends to the power of visual suggestion, as in the scene of Joseph Seignoret's visit to the Clinica Salus. The set itself appears to be nothing but three white walls, one of them with a door and an opaque, sheet-paper window displaying shadows of the medical world within. Seignoret sits and waits, the shadow of a non-existent "fourth wall" window projected on the wall behind him, while the shadows of doctors and nurses move about amid various pieces of vaguely delineated medical equipment, wheeling a patient out of the area on a gurney. Close attention to the shot reveals that the "medical apparatus" is actually a clever arrangement of surplus camera equipment; to the left is some kind of stage light, and the thing on the right that looks like an iron lung also looks like a combination of a swinging keylight, another stage light, and some "barn door" light shutters.

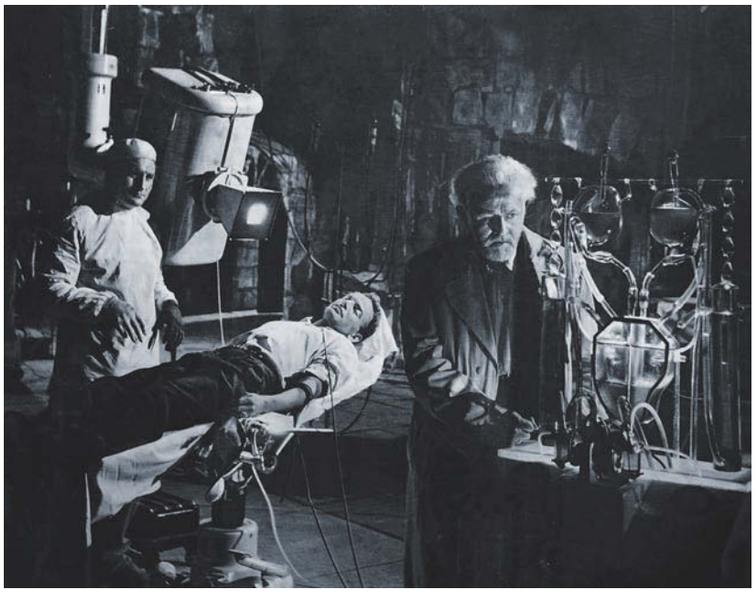
Unfortunately, even these triumphs of ingenuity were not enough to keep the production on schedule. After ten days of shooting fraught with mix-ups, setbacks, and temperamental outbursts, Freda managed to film only half of the shooting script. Freda appealed to Donati and Carpentieri for an extension, and when they reminded him of their bet, he angrily folded his cards and went home. As he later explained to Luigi Cozzi, "I quit working on the film due to an argument between myself and the producers, and they had to complete what little bit remained to be done in two days."

Donati and Carpentieri assessed the situation and it was decided by all concerned that it would be impossible to complete the film as it was written in this allotted time. However, being attracted to problem-solving, Bava put his head together with Piero Regnoli to rework the script, adapting the footage Freda had shot into a new, simplified storyline that could be brought in on schedule. The new directions of the script were apparently dictated by the availability of the actors—thus, Antoine Balpêtre's character (originally the lead role) was bumped down to secondary status, while Dario Michaëlis—whose Pierre Lantin was evidently no more than a supporting character in Freda's original treatment—was rewritten as the film's lead. As these final changes were imposed without Freda's involvement, Regnoli shares credit for the final screenplay with the fictitious "Rijk Sijöström." As usual, Bava took no credit, though the initiative and corrective concepts were entirely his. Against all odds, the mad scheme worked: Mario Bava completed *I vampiri* in two days.

It is interesting to ponder the ways in which Freda's original conception might have differed from *I vampiri* as we know it today. One thing we know for certain is that Freda's approach would have been more horrific, focusing more on Julien Du Grand's experiments with synthetic blood and reanimating the dead. It may well have been intended to reserve the secret of Gisèle's true identity till much later in the story. Freda delineated some of his unused story concepts in interviews. When the French periodical *Présence du Cinema* asked him about his problems with censorship, Freda mentioned a scene that was forfeited from the final cut of *I vampiri*: "There was a sequence which was particularly dear to me, which I had placed before the main titles. One saw the execution of Paul Müller on the guillotine. It was a short but very effective scene."

In a subsequent interview, Freda elaborated: "There was a prison yard with a guillotine and people dressed in black, accompanying the man who was to be executed. He was in fact guillotined, and his head was shown dropping into the basket, which was then carried away by the doctor. He took the head to his laboratory, and there—like Dr. Frankenstein—he attached it to another body and brought the resulting creature to life. When the journalist discovers that this man was responsible for the abductions of the girls, he takes him to the police station. The inspector interrogates this guy, trying to make him confess, but suddenly this creature, feeling disoriented, falls to the ground, devoid of energy. At that point, his head disconnects from his body, rolling away, because it wasn't really his body. He was an artificially reconstructed man."[9]

Freda's account of his intentions is impressive, as pre-credits sequences were still uncommon in 1956, particularly in Italian films. His description of the lost sequence is also a startling precognition of the approach that would soon be taken by Hammer's Frankenstein films, particularly their second such production, *The Revenge of Frankenstein* (1958), which opens at the guillotine of a prison yard. Remarkably, though the entire scene was consigned to the







EVIDENCE *of Freda's original re-animation storyline. Above: Prof. Julien Du Grand (Antoine Balpêtre) and his assistant (Angiolo Galassi) restore life to a dead body recapitated with the head of Joseph Seignoret; Seignoret (Paul Müller) is interrogated by Pierre Lantin (Dario Michaëlis) and Inspector Santel (Carlo D'Angelo)—note the neckline scar denoting his re-attached head. Left: Deprived of his reanimation drug, Seignoret perishes on the floor of Police Headquarters.*

cutting room floor while the film was still in production, excerpts of three shots—an impressive descending crane shot as Seignoret is walked to the guillotine by prison guards, the prison yard peopled with witnesses huddled under black umbrellas, and another shot of the blade dropping—appeared in the trailer for its German release version, *Die Vampire von Notre Dame*.[10] Unfortunately, the trailer cuts away from the second shot before the blade decapitates Seignoret. The severed head used in the filming was very likely provided by Bava's father, Eugenio, who sculpted a number of similar props for some of his son's later films as a director.

Freda's character of Joseph Seignoret was likely inspired by a scene in Karl Freund's MGM release *Mad Love* (1935), in which Dr. Gogol (Peter Lorre) persuades Stephen Orlac (Colin Clive) that he (Gogol) is a similar, *re*capitated, neck-braced horror. During Seignoret's interrogation at police headquarters, the scar encircling his neck is plainly visible as he becomes dazed and loosens his collar—the only surviving remnant of Freda's concept—but the scene fades out before he literally loses his head. Another source of inspiration may have been H. P. Lovecraft's short story *Herbert West—Reanimator*, about the discovery of a serum capable of reactivating the dead and dismembered.

Looking at *I vampiri* with Freda's original concept in mind, it seems plausible that the scenes of Joseph Seignoret were originally filmed with the idea that he was being kept alive with regular ministrations of a Lovecraftian reanimation drug, which was withheld from him—causing agonizing pain—until he performed the abductions necessary to Julien Du Grand's development of "synthetic blood." Freda's comments about the loss of the scene suggest that the censors wouldn't pass it, but the censor board would not have been shown the film until it was completed. The record shows that *I vampiri* was presented to the Italian censor board on April 3, 1957, and passed two days later. The fact that it breezed through with approval lends credence to the theory that Bava himself made the difficult decision to drop the pre-credits scene, after Freda's departure—simplifying the plot in an all-out effort to bring the picture in on time.

Under Bava's direction, *I vampiri* became more grounded in reality, romance, and humor. Formerly a reanimated zombie that defied credibility, Joseph Seignoret was reconceived by Bava as a common heroin addict rewarded with fixes after abducting young women for the Du Grands' experiments. (The inspiration may well have come from the junkie character

9 Stefano Piselli and Riccardo Morrocchi, eds., *Bizarre Sinema! Horror all'italiana 1957–1979* (Firenze, Italy: Glittering Images, 1996), 21. Translation revised for clarity by the author.

10 This trailer can be accessed on the German DVD of *Blutige Seide/Sei donne per l'assassino* released by Hände Weg! and Buio Omega. It is hidden in the Mario Bava filmography, along with many other Bava-related trailers. The German trailer raises the interesting question of whether this footage might have somehow turned up in the German print, but no copies of *Die Vampire von Notre Dame* are known to exist, either in German archives or private collections; it has also never been shown on German television. Because trailers are often assembled while a film is still in production, or being edited, they often (especially in this period) utilize rejected "takes" which happened to have been printed and other footage that was not being used to assemble the final cut.



played by Arthur Edmund Carewe in the Michael Curtiz film *Mystery of the Wax Museum,* or Ned Young in *House of Wax.*) However, most of Bava's amendments to the film concerned the character of Pierre Lantin. Among the more obvious late additions to the picture were the scenes of Pierre at the newspaper office, ranting to Roland about his determination to capture "*il vampiro*"; waiting for Laurette at the home of her parents, where her late arrival suggests that something has gone wrong; the entire ball sequence; an extended scene of Pierre entering the castle unannounced and prowling around for clues to Laurette's and Roland's whereabouts, until his presence is noted and he is chased by marauding shadows onto the grounds, where he discovers the disoriented Seignoret; and the penultimate scene of him comforting the recovered Laurette in the bed of the Duchess. [11]

We may assume that Bava also introduced the budding love story between Pierre and Laurette because there is no apparent attraction involved in their initial encounter, and when she is abducted, the news of her disappearance doesn't seem to add anything to his concerns; he seems to regard her as just another missing girl. However, by inserting the scene with Pierre waiting for Laurette with her parents, a step toward intimacy is established and this also gives Laurette a more important place in the scenario. As Pierre's "true love" (as opposed to Gisèle), the dramatic imperative for her rescue is increased. The scene of her abduction—and Santel's later investigation of the scene—also appears to have been directed by Bava, as the abductor is played by someone other than Paul Müller or Angiolo Galassi, who plays Du Grand's burly, scar-faced henchman.

In some of the dialogue scenes directed by Bava—notably the balcony scene, and the later antiques shop scene—there are some very clever *double entendres* that have no counterpart in Freda's humorless *oeuvre*. For instance, at the office, when Pierre scowls at his talkative friend Roland that he is "trying to picture the vampire," the photographer picks up a photograph of Gisèle which happens to by lying around. On the balcony during the ball, when Pierre suggests to Gisèle that she is ignoring her other guests, she rants, "My guests! I hate them! A bunch of dried-up mummies is what they are! I despise the idea of becoming like them someday . . . You have no idea what a woman goes through!" And later, in the antiques store, when Gisèle questions the authenticity of a painting being offered to her, the elderly dealer avers that he knows better than try to deceive the Duchess. He explains his remark by saying, with their great likeness in mind, "To me, you and the Duchess are one and the same!" To which Gisèle replies, "I didn't realize you were such a perceptive man!" On first viewing, only the last of these lines provokes a knowing laugh, because the first two scenes occur before Gisèle is unmasked as the "vampire"; they are planted as a reward for those who see the film a second time.

TWO EXAMPLES *of Beni Montresor's superbly sepulchral art direction. Roland (Renato Tontini) bursts into Gisèle's bedroom to confess his infatuation in this scene, filmed by Freda but later reshot to appease Italian censors. Opposite: Marguerite Du Grand visits the family crypt.*

I vampiri also contains some loose threads that probably would have found fulfillment in scenes planned, though never filmed, by Freda. For instance, when Marguerite suggests that Joseph Seignoret has blown the cover for the Clinica Salus, why does Prof. Du Grand respond by faking his own death? The film contains no scene with Balpêtre that directly refers to this convolution; in the scene in question, the dialogue is spoken entirely by the silhouetted Marguerite and Du Grand, whose back is turned to the camera—these characters, dubbed even in the Italian version, could be saying *anything*. A stock footage shot and a mock-up headline announcing Du Grand's death bridge the action to a scene in a cemetery, where the aged Duchess is clearly mourning someone. Who is being carried in the casket to the Du Grand family tomb? After the funeral, a couple of henchmen arrive to remove the body from the crypt; we don't see the face of the body being lifted out of the tomb in the master shot, but there is an insert (obviously shot later by Bava) of Joseph Seignoret being dropped comatose to the ground. (Given Freda's description of his intentions, Seignoret would have been in Du Grand's laboratory all along.) To confuse matters further, when the tomb is opened at the end of the film, there is another isolated shot revealing Laurette inside, supposedly concealed there by Du Grand.

Other clues to possible dropped scenes can be found among the film's publicity stills, but one must be careful in speculating which were actually filmed and which were

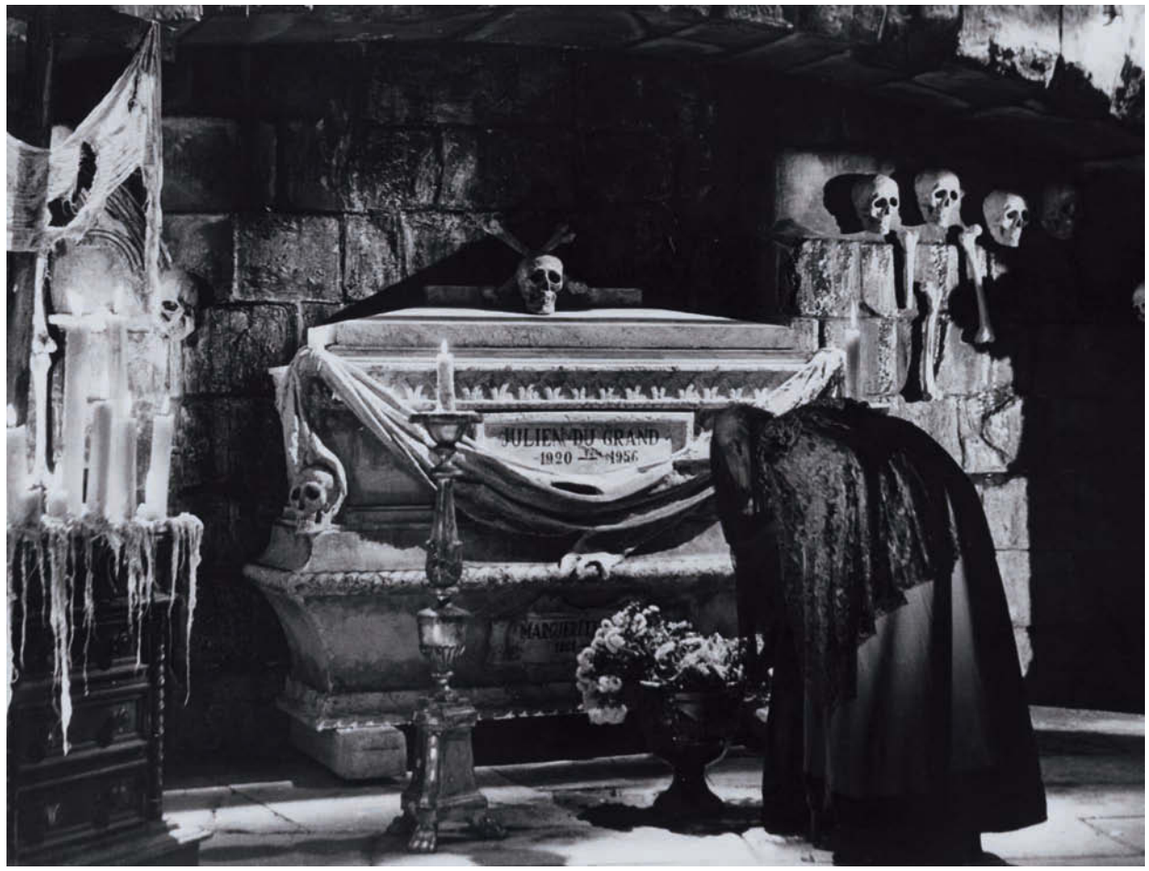
no more than posed publicity shots. One still shows Pierre's lovestruck friend Roland entering Gisèle's bedchamber after she has already undressed and climbed into bed for the evening. We know that this is not just a posed shot because the aforementioned German trailer for the film includes footage from this rescripted sequence, which was evidently first shot to show Roland invading the Duchess' privacy after she had retired—but, one presumes, had to be reshot when the Italian censor objected to such an intimate intrusion. Another still shows the abducted Laurette cowering as the aged Duchess prepares to spoonfeed her from what appears to be a bowl of soup, while Prof. Du Grand looks on. What is remarkable about this shot is that the Duchess' veil is pulled back to reveal the face of a real old woman, not Canale in aged makeup! This same old woman's face can be glimpsed through her black veil once in the movie, as the Duchess visits her husband's tomb and opens it like a door to access a hidden passage. Naturally, another actress' face could never be shown, as it is in this photographed scene, if Canale had played both roles—unless it was considered, at some point, to dissolve from the lighting trick transformation to an aged stand-in.

Bava's efforts to fill out the running time included various shots of black-gloved hands rifling through file cabinets, turning doorknobs and gnarling menacingly at the camera, as well as Istituto LUCE stock footage of rolling newspaper presses, Parisian landmarks, and so forth. Here, the decision to shoot the film in CinemaScope worked to its ultimate disadvantage, as the stock footage was all in standard ratio, and stretched like a Silly Putty impression by the process.

Music

I vampiri was scored by Roman Vlad, who had been active as a film composer since the mid-1940s. Vlad was born in Cernauti, Romania—formerly Cernovsty, Ukraine—on December 29, 1919. He moved to Rome in 1938 and recorded his earliest movie music for documentary shorts, one of which was photographed by Mario Bava: Carlo Castelli Gattinara's *Il demoniaco nell'arte* (1949). By the mid-1950s, Vlad had composed successful operas (*Storia di una mamma*) and ballets (*La strada sul caffé*), and had become one of Italy's most respected film composers, working not only for distinguished Italian directors like Mario Soldati and Luciano Emmer, but for French productions as well. One of his best-known early scores was written for René Clair's similarly themed *La Beauté du Diable/ The Beauty of the Devil* (1950), an 18th century updating of the Faust legend about an aged scientist (Michel Simon) who makes a deal with the Devil (also Simon) for restored youth (in the form of Gérard Philippe). At the time of scoring *I vampiri*, Vlad was working as the artistic director of the Accademia Filarmonica Romana and writing a book about Igor Stravinski (which was published the following year, and translated into English in 1967).

Stravinski's influence, particularly that of *Le Sacre du Printemps*, can plainly be heard in Vlad's main theme for *I vampiri*: a barnstorming cue in which the orchestra alternately lurks and swoops, with a glacial undertow of strings. It might as easily be the accompaniment to a storm at sea, or a heroine's trip toward a buzzsaw at the old sawmill; this cue is reprised throughout the film whenever action kicks in, when a scene changes, or when the narrative is punctuated with cutaways to urgent newspaper headlines rolling off the press. The same basic theme is reworked throughout the picture as a *leitmotif*, slowed down and sometimes highlighting worrying strings, a dolorous oboe or other instrumentation. For example, in the first scene, the theme is somewhat reprised but reduced to a simmer, with fluttering clarinets, as the dead woman's body is found in the Seine. When Gisèle is introduced, a cloying string quartet is played; as an accompaniment to the scene, it seems ill-chosen, but in retrospect, the antiquated music signifies Gisèle as essentially belonging to another era. Seignoret's cold turkey sweat is played out against an echo-treated vibraphone, giving the scene an added dimension of delirium. The funeral scene contains one of the most haunting cues: a progressively dissonant 2/4 dirge characterized by a call-and-answer dialogue between a chiming bell and a piano-dominant orchestra that is ultimately assumed by the string section; the cue is reprised when



11 This last scene also offers an amusing retrospective glimpse at how long some of the stage props in Italian horror films remained in service. The ornately carved headboard of Gisèle's bed would reappear in other Bava films over the next fifteen years, belonging to Michèle Mercier in *I tre volti della paura/ Black Sabbath* and to Stephen Forsyth in 1970's *Il rosso segno della follia/Hatchet for the Honeymoon*, and also furnishing a room in Alida Valli's villa in *Lisa and the Devil* (1973).



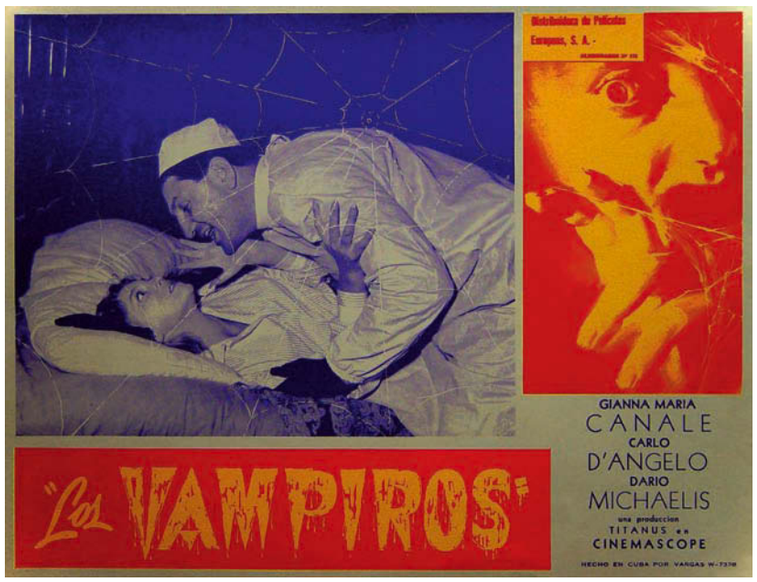


GISÈLE *tries to attract Pierre on the balcony. Right: a view of the elderly actress who played Marguerite in scenes later cut from the film, including this one, in which she tries to spoonfeed soup to the abducted Laurette (Wandisa Guida). Bottom: a rare Cuban lobby card depicting Du Grand's mute assistant's attack on Laurette.*

Marguerite visits the family crypt. In the next scene, Marguerite's impressive emergence from the fireplace, the theme assumed by the strings is transferred to deep brass, infusing this frail yet frightening apparition with an aura of formidable power. When Laurette takes the blind man's letter to the apartment, the score finds its greatest moment of inspiration: as she steps inside its rooms, an hypnotic piano/vibraphone ostinato, played over suspenseful strings, seems to take her into another dimension, divorced from reality, while the curious furnishings of the place—particularly its spinning, glittering birdcage and playful kitten—are accentuated by bright, irregular trills from the flute section.

While a derivative score in some respects, Vlad's music for *I vampiri* contains moments of brilliance which have stood the test of time; indeed, some of its cues would enjoy a life well beyond the film for which they were written. Published by CAM and made available to filmmakers on albums of miscellaneous library music, various cues from *I vampiri* reverberate throughout various Italian productions of the 1960s, including Bava's own *Operazione paura/Kill, Baby . . . Kill!* (1966).

After scoring *I vampiri*, Vlad continued as artistic director of the Accademia Filarmonica Romana through 1958, moving on to the Maggio Musicale in Florence (1964) and the same city's Teatro Communale (1968–72), while also teaching composition at the Perugia Conservatory from 1968. His career in the realm of Italian classical music is so accomplished, it is impractical to list all of Vlad's many accomplishments, awards, and honors here; suffice to say, in the 1990s, the French bestowed upon him the honor of being named a Commandeur des Arts et des Lettres, and in recent years, he has served as the artistic director of the Teatro alla Scala in Milan. Vlad's career as a film composer is actually secondary to his more formal musical achievements, though he has written over 100 film scores.



Commentary

Though *Mio figlio Nerone* marks the moment when Mario Bava truly came into his own as a cameraman, *I vampiri* is an even more decisive chapter in his self-discovery as an artist. Before this film, Bava's particular talent—as we have seen—was most frequently matched with what might be termed the "outsized" genres: comedy, epic adventures, and high drama. There was no horror genre in Italy, and no way of telling if Bava would have a better or worse aptitude for its milieux than any other, but *I vampiri* finds him perfectly and immediately at home. Everything that will follow in Bava's *oeuvre* as a director can be found here in embryo: the contrasts of the new and the old, of beauty and its destruction, of romance and morbidity. Admirers of *La maschera del demonio/Black Sunday* are often surprised to discover so much of its achievement already present in *I vampiri*, made four years earlier. If all roads lead to Rome, all roads in Italian horror lead to *I vampiri*.

Freda's intended escape-from-the-guillotine opening indicates—as does his title—that his chief inspiration did not come from the classic Universal horror films (which had been, after all, unavailable in Rome for many years) but from the Fantômas novels of Pierre Souvestre





LAURETTE *is held captive by Prof. Du Grand in this shot, later adapted to create the Italian poster art. Above: Inspector Santel shoots Du Grand dead during the final reel. Bottom: Pierre consoles Laurette following her rescue, as she rests in a bed whose headboard would continue to appear in Bava films for the next twenty years.*

and Marcel Allain, which had provided the grist for the earliest movie serials produced for Gaumont by Louis Feuillade. (The first Fantômas novel and serial end with the eponymous master criminal cheating death by substituting a lookalike actor in his place for his date with the guillotine.) After making four Fantômas serials between 1913–14, Feuillade made a crime epic of his own devise, *Les Vampires* (1915–16), which sported several of the trappings found in its Italian namesake: a prominent member of society who is revealed to be the mastermind of a criminal ring; the frightening yet alluring woman who is his mistress, also a master of disguise and ultimately the more resourceful fiend; a crusading reporter hero, a dour police inspector, and an abducted heroine; the publicized "death" of the male criminal figure—and so on. These aspects make sense not only of the film's seemingly arbitrary decision to locate its story in France, but also of the pulpish, barnstorming verve exhibited by the film. *I vampiri* could be easily adapted into a chapterplay format. The title which Freda gave to his film was hardly coincidental, though the resulting work can hardly be described as an adaptation—better to call it "a variation on a theme."

The effectiveness of the transposition of action from Rome to Paris and Montmartre is sometimes criticized today by a generation of film buffs raised on CGI, but for their time and place, Bava's glass mattes are better than serviceable. The opening shot, which pans from a glass matte of the Eiffel Tower to a ravine located not far from Scalera Film (doubling as the Seine), remains a convincing blur of the real and imaginary. Despite its attempts to look French, most everything about *I vampiri* remains certifiably Italian: its baroque approach to the Gothic, its bizarre amalgam of science and magic, its use of family portraits to bridge generations, its subtle sketching of the social gulf separating the upper and working classes, and the neorealist atmosphere surrounding the location scenes at Seignoret's apartment and the peeling building where Laurette is abducted, whose postwar dereliction parallel the ambient decay common to so many of Bava's later works.



One of the film's most lasting contributions to the continuum of Italian horror is the chillingly imperious figure of Marguerite Du Grand. Frail yet secretly indomitable, veiled yet assertive, hideous and hoary-voiced with age yet still invested with the secret of youth and eternal sexual power, Marguerite—appearing under many names—has become one of the archetypes peculiar to the Italian horror film. Her own name resonates throughout Riccardo Freda's own filmography; Margarethe is the name shared by the supposedly dead wife of the necrophile in *L'orribile segreto del Dr. Hichcock/ The Horrible Dr. Hichcock* (1962) and of the supposedly dead but still-active spouse of a blackmailed industrialist in *A doppia faccia/Double Face* (1969). Other variations on the name are accorded to vindictive female characters in nearly all of Freda's other films, beginning as early as Gianna Maria Canale's Marisa in *Vedi Napoli e poi muori/ See Naples Then Die* (1951). [12]

12 Also to be found in Freda's catalog are Claudine Dupuis' **Mar**tinal in *Beatrice Cenci* (1956), Geneviève Page's ***Mar***y in *Agguato a Tangeri* (1957), and Scilla Gabel's Princess **Mar**ia in *Agi Murad il diavolo bianco* (1959).



Marguerite would leave her macabre impression on other directors as well. She would be the obvious blueprint for the monstrous old woman played by Sarah Ferretti, who becomes her own younger daughter (Rosanna Schiaffino) in Damiano Damiani's *La strega in amore/The Witch in Love* (1966, an adaptation of Carlos Fuentes' classic story "Aura"), an inarguable source of inspiration for Dario Argento's diabolical Mater Suspiriorum in *Suspiria* (1977) and of course, the obvious genesis for the twin characters of Princesses Asa and Katia in Bava's *La maschera del demonio*.

Another element introduced by *I vampiri* and shared by other Italian horror films is the central emphasis on the fireplace of the Castle Du Grand, which secretly communicates with the family crypt. This depiction of the family hearth as a passage to family secrets (as also seen in the contemporaneous *The Black Sleep*, 1956) would be most prominently reprised in *La maschera del demonio*, and again by Bava *in La frusta e il corpo*, but it also appears in many other Italian horror films, including Massimo Pupillo's *Il boia scarlatto/Bloody Pit of Horror* (1965). The dominant use of such a fixture takes on a special significance in Bava's hands when one remembers that his father Eugenio (and therefore, the Bava family) first became involved in the cinema when he was recruited by Pathé Frères to sculpt a fireplace frame for a silent movie. Therefore, in a sense, the centrality of the fireplace in this and many other Italian horror films might be read as a tribute to Eugenio Bava—consciously by his son, and unconsciously by his imitators.

Had Freda directed the entire film as planned, or had Bava directed from the outset of filming, *I vampiri* would surely have become a more consistent viewing experience. Instead, it is more of a successful rescue than a successful film, wherein evidence of competent haste and above-average ingenuity is indistinguishable from attractive, yet erratic and occasionally sloppy filmmaking. Scenes of stately, elegiac pacing are

ITALIAN *quattro-foglia, art by Arnaldo Putzu.*

bridged by hyper-accelerated shots of newspaper presses and spinning headlines, the musical accompaniment kicked up from nocturne mode to over-the-top "heroine at the sawmill" braying in the blink of an eye. At times, the combination of the two directors' respective visions works—if not necessarily to the film's advantage, at least as a boon to its complexity. Had *I vampiri* focused solely on the relationship between Pierre and Gisèle (as was evidently Freda's intention), or on Bava's more desperately contrived relationship between Pierre and Laurette, it would have lost some valuable dimensionality. Likewise, the combination of their respectively sentimental and sensational tendencies result in a few pleasantly jarring *frissons*, as when Roland's expression of his rapturous infatuation with Gisèle climaxes not only with her transformation, but with the withered crone pulling out a pistol and firing it first at Roland, and then—in a frenzy of self-hatred—blasting away quite a few more times at her own mirrored reflection.

Despite Bava's penchant for illusion and visual deceptions, the film's most powerful sequence is one of its most straightforward. It begins with a medium shot of the blazing fireplace in the main hall of Castle Du Grand, beneath the family crest and its *Conquisterò Inferno* motto, as a secret passage behind the flames creaks open to reveal the emerging figure of the decrepit, black-veiled Duchess Du Grand. As she walks with advanced age around the flame, the camera cuts to a long-shot of the main hall, its stone columns punctuated with sheer curtains that flail in the air like the hems of ghosts as the dark, forbidding figure advances closer and closer. The Duchess ascends the staircase, turns abruptly and shouts out to a servant (who pops in and out at her command) to ready the car, before continuing her ascent. What makes the scene so impressive is how the filmmakers rally in support of a passage that might have accomplished nothing; here the art direction, lighting, and baleful musical score take center stage, to do nothing more than provide an indelible illustration of their combined power.

After nearly a half century, there is a good deal of *I vampiri* that looks dated today—even when it was new, coming as it did after opulent color productions like *Teodora l'imperatrice di Bisanzio* and *La donna più bella del mondo*, it must have looked older than it was—but this one moment, with its emphasis of atmosphere over content, of environment over the human element, remains a key example of all that is best about Italian horror. Given the background story of the production, it's possible that the scene was added with no other imperative than to fill time, yet it conveys the sense of something new in the horror genre, something distinctly Italian, and of a filmmaker who had finally discovered his true calling.

Release / Variants

Despite the best efforts of all involved, *I vampiri* was not a commercial success. Riccardo Freda explained why: "In Italy, a very peculiar thing happened that I would never have expected. I happened to be in Sanremo, a town not unlike Cannes, and I decided to visit a theater that was showing *I vampiri*. I sometimes do this, stand around the lobby to eavesdrop on the reactions of the public. As time went on, I noticed there were very few paying customers. I couldn't understand why, but the theater was almost vacant for every performance, though many passersby had been attracted by the posters, which were indeed very beautiful. They would stop and look: '*I vampiri . . . I vampiri . . .*' This seemed to intrigue them, but then at the last moment they saw Freda. Their reaction was automatic: '*Freda?*' Seeing an Italian name, they all made faces, because they found the idea preposterous. They assumed that Italians didn't know how to make films of this kind." [13]

Mario Bava had an explanation for this biased way of thinking: "In our country, the sun drives everything away . . . this is how I explain to myself why my films are successful in America and the Northern countries, but never in Italy. The Calabrese workman only goes to the movies to laugh or to cry. He doesn't want to see blood; he has the sunshine and doesn't care about such things." [14] Or, as Freda bitterly expressed on another occasion, "Italians won't accept anything from their fellow countrymen but fettucine!" [15]

The film did not fare much better in France, where its *faux* Frenchness translated into something of a laughing stock. The French version, *Les Vampires*, differs from the Italian edition in some curious ways. *I vampiri*'s main titles unfold over various postcard views of Paris, a somewhat exotic montage for Roman audiences, but of no particular interest to the French moviegoing public. Therefore, *Les Vampires* flashes its main titles over a spooky, monochromatic painting of a dank crypt. Curiously, Bava's name appears nowhere in the credits of the French version; the cinematography is mistakenly credited to his assistant, Corrado Bartoloni. The French version also alters the film's opening shot—a pan shot from the Eiffel Tower to the discovery of a dead woman's body in the Seine—by fading-in only *after* the Eiffel Tower is out of sight, probably because the shot looked patently phony to French eyes. The only other evident change was the reshooting of the door identifying Julien Du Grand's Clinica Salus, which is here replaced by a shot of an outdoor plaque labelled *"Institute pour le Médicine Expérimentale."*

I vampiri would not be acquired for release in the United States until 1960, when it was picked up by Jonathan Daniels and Victor Purcell of Releasing Corporation of Independent Producers (RCIP), a low-level distributor of "Adults Only" fare. They covered their bases by distributing the picture in two different editions: an "All Audiences" version called *The Devil's Commandment* and an "Adults Only" version titled *Lust of the Vampire*. A literal translation of the original title was declined to avoid confusion with the Paul Landres film *The Vampire*, given wide release in 1957.

It was the habit of RCIP to buy foreign films and exploit their saucy allure, spicing them up with nude inserts photographed on the cheap in New York. Several such inserts were also written and filmed for *I vampiri*, which forfeited some of its most important scenes in the bargain. This new material was scripted by the pseudonymous-sounding J. V. Rhems and filmed under the supervision of Ronald Honthauer. "Honthauer" was actually Ron Honthaner, who had recently worked as an assistant editor on Robert Clarke's *The Hideous Sun Demon* (1959), in which he also played a bit part as a policeman. Honthaner spent the early 1960s working as a sound editor, and later worked on the CBS-TV series Gunsmoke in various production capacities from 1968 to 1972. He made his only film as a director in 1974: *The House on Skull Mountain*, a dreadful, independently produced "blaxploitation" horror film that was unaccountably picked up for distribution by 20th Century-Fox.

Totalling 11 minutes in length, Honthaner's inserts are easy to identify, even for viewers unfamiliar with the original cut of *I vampiri*. They are photographed with the flattest, crudest lighting techniques imaginable on small sets cobbled together from white-washed walls and found furniture—quite the opposite of Beni Montresor's resplendently baroque decadence and Bava's *misterioso* lighting.

• The first insert is the very first scene, which opens on a lamppost and a man watching an illuminated window from the street below. Inside, a young brunette (Barbara London) plays a record of French concertina music while undressing for a bubble bath. As she removes her stockings and bustier, we cut away to a gloved hand sliding up the downstairs bannister to her room. The woman does not realize until it is too late that a

13 Caen and Romer.

14 Alberto Abruzzese, et al., *La città del cinema—produzione e lavoro nel cinema italiano 1930–70* (Rome, Italy: Napoleone, 1979), 83–89.

15 Martini and Della Casa.



RONNY *and Joy Holiday's supper club entertainment in THE DEVIL'S COMMANDMENT.*

male stranger with wild eyes (presumably Joseph Seignoret) is standing over her. His gloved hands grab her by the throat and force her underwater. (*Lust of the Vampire* offered its audience a token glimpse of the actress' bare breasts through the soap suds during the struggle.)

• A brief scene in *I vampiri*, in which a flashlight beam locates a file cabinet drawer and a pair of gloved hands remove a file marked "Nora Duval," was replaced by a shot filmed by Honthaner.

• During Pierre's questioning of a police surgeon (a cameo by none other than Riccardo Freda), the American version underlines an obvious point of conversation by having a hand—supposedly the doctor's—scribble on a convenient notepad: "Blood Types A-B-O." He underlines the "O."

• The longest of the inserts opens in broad daylight, in an alley off the streets of . . . (beats me—Queens?), where a young woman (Barbara Wohl) is being pursued by a man in a dark suit and hat. She ducks inside an underground restaurant, where a floor show is in progress. Entertainer Ronny Holiday is balancing his wife Joy one hand above his head, tossing and spinning her for the amusement of the dining hall. The woman takes a seat, nervously pulls a cigarette from her handbag, and a rotund *maitre d'* appears to light it for her.

"Good evening, Madamzelle [*sic*]," he welcomes her, apparently unaware that she has stepped inside from broad daylight. "I would suggest our *poulet au grat*. It is magnificent, made from the finest chicken. I had it for supper myself."

"A double Scotch, please," *repondres le petit madamoiselle.*

"A Scahtch!" the *maitre d'* objects, in perfect Brooklynese. "We're famous in Paris for our *food!*"

"A double Scotch—*please!*" she insists.

She borrows a piece of paper from the *maitre d'*, and we overhear the content of her letter. She is writing to her boyfriend Phillip, apologizing for running away from an overheated romantic session. "I couldn't," she writes, "I couldn't."

The *maitre d'* returns with her drink and, as if he too has overheard what she has written, he advises her to call her boyfriend and explain. He offers her the use of a private upstairs telephone. She runs toward the stairwell as Ronny and Joy Holiday's pointless acrobatics climax to deafening applause.

Upstairs, the young woman locates the telephone and dials Phillip's number. "I'm sorry," she says. "I wanted to be married first . . . but if that's the way you want it, it's okay with me!" Abruptly, her call is interrupted. Her black-gloved pursuant enters the room and strangles her, then removes the blood from her body with a gleaming, hypodermic pump apparatus.

This preposterous sequence alone runs nearly 6 minutes.

• The scene of Laurette exploring a room adjoining the area where she is held hostage, and discovering



THE MAITRE D' *lights a customer's cigarette in THE DEVIL'S COMMANDMENT.*

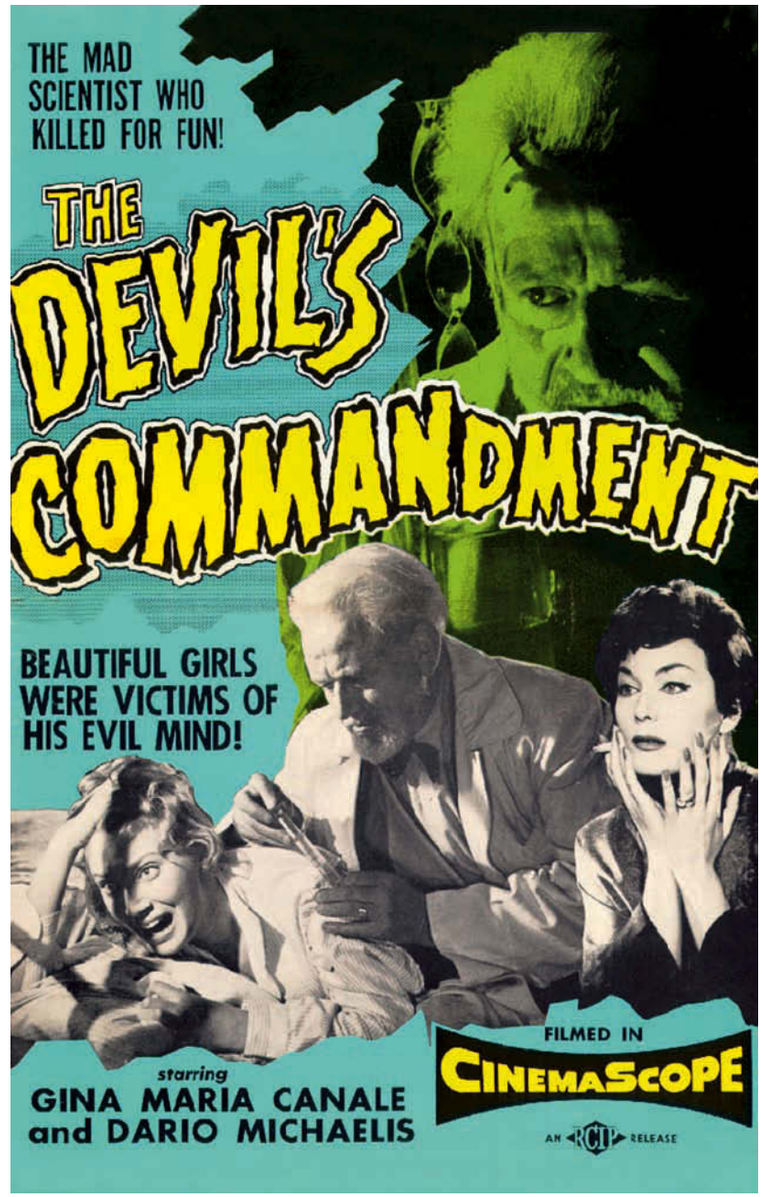
the skeletons of various women, was supplemented with various inserts of rats. Honthaner filmed a rat crawling into the jaws of a skull, and then springing forth from its open mouth toward the camera (the sight that supposedly prompts Laurette to faint). A final shot of a blonde stand-in, lying on the floor as a rat crawls toward her, was also added.

• Near the film's climax, as Inspector Santel and his men search the castle, Du Grand's assistant is shown entering the room in which Laurette is imprisoned. In *I vampiri*, he takes her in his arms, chloroforms her, and conceals her in Julien Du Grand's empty tomb.

In the American versions, Angiolo Galassi's subduing of Wandisa Guida match-cuts to an overlit insert of Al Lewis (later the vampiric "Grandpa" on TV's *The Munsters*), dressed as the assistant, manhandling a blonde stand-in, tearing her blouse open, and pushing her onto a cheap-looking bed. As her brassière is exposed, the blonde scratches at his leering face. What better time for sexual assault than when the police are banging down the door? This particular insert may have been inspired by a publicity still that pictured Galassi and Guida tussling on the bed, the actress playfully fighting him off—a promotional gag shot that had no true counterpart in the original film.

To make matters worse, the American versions deleted a number of scenes and elements important to the narrative, including Pierre's loss of face after dragging Santel to the wrong apartment in search of Joseph Seignoret, and Gisèle's revealing visit to the antiques shop. All references to Gisèle's unrequited love for Pierre originating in the Duchess' love for Pierre's late lookalike father were also dropped; *The Devil's Commandment* deletes the short bit in which Gisèle obsessively contemplates the father's portrait. Also omitted were some interesting directorial "buses," such as the moment prior to showgirl Nora Duval's abduction, when a sudden, violent gust of wind blows open a window at her side.

For all the damage it does, *The Devil's Commandment* nevertheless rewards attention by presenting Gianna Maria Canale's death scene—suppressed by the Italian censors—in full. In both *I vampiri* and *Les Vampires*, Gisèle's final aging sequence ends with Canale simply falling out of camera range. The American version follows this with a shot of her wrinkled, taloned hands sliding off the balustrade and, after a beat, a shock cut to the Duchess' white-haired, semi-skeletal remains—upside-down, staring directly into the camera, effectively scored with a brief trumpet blast of shock. Though the hair-raising prop has survived only in the American versions of the film, and is therefore easily mistaken for another of Honthaner's domestic additions, Riccardo Freda claimed its paternity to Stefano Della Casa in 1993: "The horrific special effect shown after her aging was my invention."



US *one-sheet poster, top-lining the Lollobrigidian "Gina Maria Canale."*

The end titles of *The Devil's Commandment* do not roll over a cue from Roman Vlad's original score, but over a library track of presumably British origin. This mystery cue can also be heard in the original BBC television production of Nigel Kneale's *Quatermass and the Pit* (1958).

The uncut, original version of *I vampiri* would not have its American premiere until August 4, 1993, when it closed a triumphant, two-week retrospective of Mario Bava's work at New York's Film Forum. On July 3, 2001, the film was given its first authorized video release anywhere in the world when Image Entertainment issued an anamorphically enhanced DVD as part of their "Mario Bava Collection." After almost forty years, *I vampiri* is now recognized as a seminal event in the 1950s rebirth of the horror genre. At the time of its original release, however, it was merely another disappointment for the struggling Italian film industry.

Though *I vampiri*, for all intents and purposes, signals the birth of the Italian horror film, it was a false start, commercially speaking. There were no further attempts to bring vampires to the screen in Italy until 1959, when Steno went halfway with the appropriately named comedy *Tempi duri per i vampiri* ("Hard Times for Vampires"), starring Renato Rascel, Sylva Koscina, and Christopher Lee. This film, which spawned a hit single in Italy with Bruno Martino's "Dracula Cha-Cha-Cha," was later released in America as *Uncle Was a Vampire*. The return of serious Italian horror would not occur until a year after that.

The economic crunch being suffered by the Italian cinema reached a point of crisis in 1956. Mario Bava—who had photographed only two features and the last of his short films that year—was forced to sell a number of family treasures and personal belongings, just to make ends meet. He had no way of knowing it, but the lightning bolt that would change everything was just around the corner.





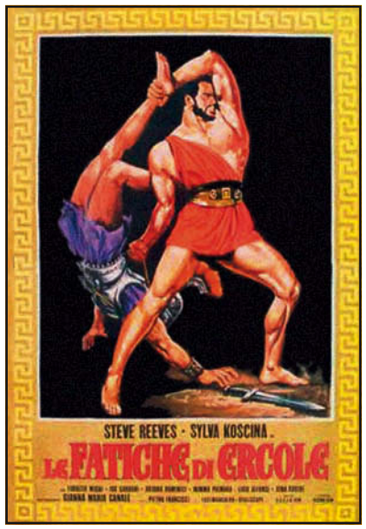
BAVA'S *cinematography at its most iconic: Steve Reeves as Hercules, preparing to topple the columns at Jolco in* LE FATICHE DI ERCOLE.

LE FATICHE DI ERCOLE

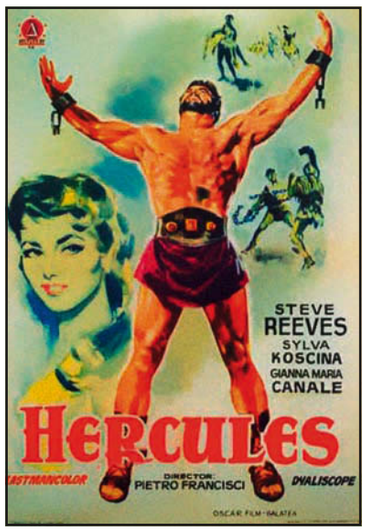
Hercules

ALL OF THE HOPES held by Riccardo Freda and Mario Bava for *I vampiri*—that it would mine infinite new territory for Italian filmmaking, and perhaps make them a nice little nest egg in the process—would be realized instead by Pietro Francisci's next production, a colorful, Hollywood-style spectacle based on the Greek myths of the labors of Herakles.

When one refers back to the original myths of Hercules (the Roman form of his name), those who know the character only from his filmed exploits may be startled by the dark anguish of his story—it's not unlike comparing Disney's *Snow White* to the grisly folk tale recorded for posterity by Jacob and Wilhelm Grimm.







The demigod son of immortal Zeus and the human Alcmene, Hercules grew to manhood under the spiteful gaze of Zeus' wife Hera, who, being immortal, could bear her husband no children. Even as an infant, Hercules' prodigious strength enabled him to overcome two large vipers sent into his cradle at Hera's command, but she had her vengeance many years later, maddening the hero so that he murdered his own wife (Megara, daughter of King Creon) and children. This cataclysm of horror restored his sanity and, in penitence, he spent the next twelve years living a humble life of servitude to King Eurystheus of Tiryns. During that period, Hercules demonstrated his loyalty by performing a dozen impossible tasks, his legendary "labors": he killed the Nemean lion and slew the Hydra, a many-headed monster born of dragon's teeth; he captured the Erymanthian boar and the Cerynean hind with his bare hands; he repelled the harpies of Stymphalia; he cleaned the stables of Augeas; he captured the Cretan bull and reined in the horses of Diomed; he stole the fabled girdle of the Amazon queen Hippolyte; he ended the life of the three-bodied monster Geryon and stole its cattle; he captured Cerberus, the three-headed dog guarding the gates of Hades (and while there, freed his young admirer Theseus, who had been trapped in Hades since trying to abduct his beloved Persephone, the daughter of Pluto); and finally, he robbed the Hesperides of their Golden Apples.

The list of Hercules' labors differs slightly from account to account. Another of his accolades was the defeat of the god Anteus, who gained his formidable strength from the earth itself and had to be strangled by the demigod while held above his head. These murderous feats behind him, Hercules went in search of new adventures, joining the crew of Jason aboard the ship Argos in pursuit of the Golden Fleece. (As played by Nigel Green, Hercules is among the crewmen in Don Chaffey's 1963 film *Jason and the Argonauts*, in which Jason is given the tasks of slaying the Hydra and quelling the Harpies.) But after this adventure, madness seized the hero once again: Hercules took the life of Iphitos, son of the king of Oichalia, when his request for the hand of the King's daughter Iole in marriage was denied. Refused clemency by King Neleus of Pylos, Hercules looted the liege of his wealth and left his young princes lying in pools of their own royal blood. He was later punished for his crimes by the Oracle at Delphi, who sold him as a slave to Omphale, Queen of Lydia. She, in turn, punished him with the indignity of serving her while dressed in women's clothes.

Hercules later wed King Aeneus' daughter Deianira, who was kidnapped by Nessus, a centaur who loved her from afar. Hercules struck back fatally, firing at the amorous creature with arrows steeped in the blood of the Hydra. With his dying, treacherous breath, Nessus bade Deianira to collect his spilled blood, which would have the power to restore her husband's love should it ever wane. In later years, Hercules brought his strength against an army which had abducted the lost love of his life—Iole—and his caring for this liberated hostage aroused Deianira's jealousy. She stained a robe with the collected blood of Nessus—itself contaminated by the blood of the Hydra—and tricked Hercules into wearing it. The garment fastened about him like a second skin and burned deep into his flesh. In his dying agonies, the demigod hastily built a funeral pyre for himself at the peak of Mt. Etna, which was set ablaze at his command by a torch applied by his friend Philoctetes, whereupon the hero's immortal self was freed from his mortal, troubled shell and raised to the heights of Olympus.

THREE POSTERS: *Italian due-foglia (by A. Piovano), Turkish one-sheet and a Spanish one-sheet (by Macario Gomez), based on the Italian poster by A. Piovano (opposite).*

Le fatiche di Ercole

"The Labors of Hercules"
Filmed at Titanus Studios and on location
June – August 1957
First released: February 20, 1958
Eastmancolor, Dyaliscope, 2.35:1, 107 minutes

Production: OSCAR Film (Organizzazione Sociale Cinematografica Artistica Rome), Galatea (Milan), Lux Compagnie Cinématographique de France (Paris). Producers: Lionello Santi, Renato Giuliano, Federico Teti. Director: Pietro Francisci. Assistant director: Pietro Nuccorini. Assistant to the director: Ettore G. Mattia. Screenplay: Pietro Francisci, Ennio De Concini, Gaio Frattini. Story: Pietro Francisci. Director of photography: Mario Bava. Camera operator: Corrado Bartoloni. Camera assistants: Ubaldo Terzano, Silvio Fraschetti. Art direction: Flavio Mogherini, assisted by Gianni D'Aloisio. Set decoration: Massimo Tavazzi. Special effects: Mario Bava. Wardrobe: Assanta Lazzazera. Costume design: Giulio Coltellacci of Casa d'Arte Peruzza (Firenze), assisted by Paolo Tomassi. Makeup: Euclide Santoli. Hairdresser: Mara Rocchetti. Footwear: Pompei. Weapons: Rancati. Production inspector: Mario Pisani. Production secretary: Spartaco Conversi. Editor: Mario Serandrei, assisted by Tito Perozzi. Editorial secretary: Gigliola Rosmino. Music: Enzo Masetti, conducted by Carlo Savina (Nord-Sud). Distributor: Lux Film, Regina Film (1959 reissue).

Steve Reeves (Hercules), Sylva Koscina (Iole), Gianna Maria Canale (Antea), Fabrizio Mioni (Jason), Ivo Garrani (King Pelias), Arturo Dominici (Eurysteus), Mimmo Palmara (Iphitos), Lidia Alfonsi (the Sibyl), Gina Rovere (Amazon), Gabriele Antonini (Ulysses), Andrea Fantasia (Laertes), Afro Poli (Chironi/Chiron), Aldo Fiorelli (Argos), Gino Mattera (Orpheus), Gian Paolo Rosmino (Esculapeus), Willy Colombini (Pollux), Fulvio Carrara (Castor), Luciana Paoluzzi (Iole's handmaiden), Aldo Pini (Tifi), Guido Martuffi (Iphitos as a child), Paola Quattrini (Iole as a child), Giovanni Cianfriglia (Reeves' stuntman).

Denmark: *Herkules og hans Fantastiske Bedrifter*
France: *Les Travaux d'Hercule,* Lux Film
Germany: *Die Unglaublichen Abenteuer des Herakles,* "The Incredible Adventures of Hercules," Constantin-AB Film, 1/13/59
Spain: *Hércules,* 1/4/60
Turkey: *Herkul*
UK: *Hercules,* Archway Film Distribution Ltd., 5/8/59, Certificate "U," passed without cuts
US: *Hercules,* Warner Bros., 7/22/59. Reissue: Embassy Pictures Corporation, 6/75

Clearly, Pietro Francisci had been moving toward a film about Hercules since his 1951 costume adventure *La meravigliose avventure di Guerrin Meschino*. This film, along with the subsequent *La regina di Saba/The Queen of Sheba* (1952), *Attila* (1954), and *Orlando e i paladini di Francia* (1956), illustrate a definite evolution toward a more fantastical representation of the distant past built around a charismatic, larger-than-life, central figure.

But why Hercules? First of all, the character had been the subject of plays by Sophocles and Seneca (to name only two), so he was equally classical and dramatically tried-and-true. More to the point, Francisci was conscious of his country's need for a new Maciste—a symbol of strength rooted in Roman tradition without being besmirched by remorseful ties to Mussolini and the *Duce* image. Hercules had also been the subject of many famous Italian sculptures, as well as at least one significant opera (Francesco Cavalli's *Ercole amante* ["Hercules in Love," 1659]). The character was also nominally tied to one of Italy's most picturesque seaports, the Porto Ercole ("The Port of Hercules"), one of the supposed "true locations of Homer's *The Odyssey*" where parts of Mario Camerini's *Ulisse* had been filmed.

Francisci (according to his own version of events) wrote a screen treatment using the epic poem *Argonautica* by Apollonius Rhodius as his template; it was then turned over to Gaio Frattini (who had previously contributed to Domenico Paolella's Totò comedy, *Destinazione Piovarolo,* 1955) and the ubiquitous Ennio De Concini to be embellished into a shooting script. But De Concini remembers differently: "In a moment of crisis, I invented the so-called *sandaloni*, the Hercules picture," he boasted. "It was a period in which the Italian cinema seemed dead. And so I said, 'Why not make a fiction using a character from fables?' . . . However, when the idea came to me for this character who was good and strong, for Hercules, one whom all men in their hearts dream of resembling, none of the producers were inclined to make it; everybody turned up their noses. The one person who had the balls to take the leap and make it was Nello Santi, perhaps because Francisci had kept him going, because they were both veterans of other successful films like *Orlando e i paladini di Francia.* Those films were more straightforward adventure films, while here there was a fable for children proposed in a manner more elementary and simple, to serve as escapism for adults."[1]



ITALIAN *locandina, art by A. Piovano (Studio Paradiso).*

Regardless of whomever was truly responsible for the idea, the final screenplay narrowed the hero's dozen labors down to two that could be affordably staged (the Cretan bull and the Nemean lion), and revised mythology to show Hercules plagued not by hateful Hera, but by the burden of his own immortality. Fashioned in the shadow of Marlon Brando's tragic performances for Elia Kazan, Francisci's Hercules was wracked by self-consciousness and self-doubt, a demigod who yearns "to live and love like other men." He was a denial of the *Ubermensch*; he was Mussolini rescinded, a new and cleansing symbol of the recuperative powers of humility and righteousness.

Synopsis

A scream. A beautiful young woman has lost control of her chariot, until a muscular stranger uproots a tree, halting the charging horses by hurling it into their path. The woman recognizes her savior as Hercules of Thebes—and he recognizes her from the royal crest on her chariot as Iole, daughter of King Pelias, who has summoned him to the kingdom of Jolco to work as a Master of Arms, educating his son Iphitos in the ways of war.

As they make their way to Jolco, Iole confides to Hercules a disturbing childhood memory. One day, ten years ago, she was out riding with her father, her uncle King Aeson, his son Jason, and her brother Iphitos, when they came across a condemned man (found guilty of robbing and killing a woman) who had been captured by soldiers. She remembers that Pelias had a word with the criminal ("You like to kill, eh?") and whispered something to the King before they continued home. That night, Iole awoke screaming from a nightmare of the murderer's impending execution and found her screams merging with

1 Franca Faldini and Goffredo Fofi, "The Fofi Papers, Part Two: Maciste Rights the Wrongs," *Spaghetti Cinema* 74, March 2003, 2-12. Translated from the Italian by Mike Eustace.

others echoing throughout the palace. Following the clamor, she saw the bloody corpse of King Aeson being carried out by soldiers, her own father Pelias standing near a pool of blood, and the Golden Fleece that formerly flanked the throne missing. Accused of the murder was Chironi, who fled the kingdom with Jason (fearing for the life of this true heir to the throne) and the Fleece, the pelt of a fabled winged ram that is synonymous with kingdom and prosperity. King Pelias blamed Chiron for murdering the King, says Iole, but Hercules tells her that Chiron was his best friend, and that the common people believe King Pelias to have been the real culprit. Iole denies her father's guilt vehemently, and Hercules rejoins, "Why do you relive the story if it's not true?"—to which she has no answer. The hero assures Iole of his protection and swears to clear Chiron's good name.

When they arrive at the palace, Jolco stands literally under a dark cloud, and the interior of the palace is no less haunted. The doors of the rooms where King Aeson was murdered, and the adjoining doors of the rooms where Chiron and Jason slept, are guarded by sentries and are barred with crossed wooden beams covered in chains. King Pelias, a troubled and guilt-ridden man, is warned by a Sibyl to beware the arrival of a man wearing a single sandal; he promptly issues the command that anyone found in Jolco wearing a single sandal shall be put immediately to death. No one knows, but Jolco is not truly being ruled by King Pelias, but from the shadows by Eurysteus—the condemned man Iole remembers from her childhood—who carried out Pelias' orders to slay his brother and was rewarded with clemency and a place in the palace.

Hercules takes his place as the head of war training, and the young men of Jolco do their best to please him—especially Ulysses, the son of Laertes. Not so eager is the spoiled Iphitos, who arrives late and is publicly embarrassed when Hercules guides the young Ulysses to outperform him as an archer. When Hercules himself bests Iphitos' discus throw by hurling a disc into orbit (!), the Prince rides away in terror and even Ulysses regards this inhuman



ITALIAN *due-foglia, "style B," art by A. Piovano (Studio Paradiso).*

demigod with fear. Only Iole looks on with a smile.

When a local family is killed by the Nemean lion, Hercules determines to rid Jolco of this threat and rides off in pursuit. Iphitos follows, hoping to outshine Hercules in this contest, but is killed himself instead. Hercules slays the lion, but King Pelias banishes him from Jolco for not preventing the death of his son: "May the curse of the Gods be upon you, until you have paid for the blood of Iphitos!" He further commands him to the task of slaying the Cretan bull. Hercules appeals to Iole, but after the loss of her brother, even she flees in tears from his protestations.

Feeling that his own immortality is responsible for his alienation from mankind, Hercules ventures to the house of the Sibyl and pleads to Jupiter, through her, to be made mortal like other men. His wish is granted, in a torrential rain.

Riding away from Jolco in search of the Cretan bull, Hercules sees a mortally wounded man, gored by this creature. He jumps from his mount onto his bull's back, wrestling with it. Mortal but apparently still possessed of immortal strength, Hercules kills the bull with a single blow. He notices a young man rowing the victim across a lake toward a cave, and follows them on foot. There, he discovers that the victim is none other than his old friend Chiron, now dying. With him is Jason, whom Chiron has raised in the hope of someday returning him to the throne that is rightfully his. Chiron explains with his dying breath that the proof of Jason's identity can be established with the Golden Fleece, which he hid in an oak tree on the isle of Colchides many years ago, while fleeing angry villagers with the boy. He also asserts that Jason must reclaim the throne without violence, to keep a promise Chiron made to the dying King Aeson.

Hercules takes Jason directly to Jolco, but while helping a woman and children across a lake, Jason loses a sandal to the currents. Frightened into submission by the arrival of the foreseen challenger to his throne, King Pelias grants Jason three months to prove his identity by recovering the Fleece. A crew is assembled for the ship Argos, and the craven Eurysteus finagles his way aboard, determined to thwart the mission in order to claim the throne himself, with Iole as his queen. Though Iole has given Hercules no sign of encouragement ("Your destiny is not mine!"), she misses him and confides to her handmaidens her secret hope that he will not forget her.

The voyage to Colchides is threatened by a tempestuous storm, loss of fresh food and water, and then by an attempted mutiny instigated by Eurysteus. Hercules suspects him, as he's the only unseasoned sailor among them, and orders Eurysteus to stay aboard as other crewman go ashore an island for provisions. The island is ruled by Amazon women—initially a notion of delight ("It's unbelievable that, at 60, I'm taking part in an adventure like this. Thank you, Aphrodite!" beams the giddy Esculapeus), until a cemetery consisting only of men is discovered. Queen Antea explains that all of the men died during a volcanic eruption over 100 years ago, but after their female society was raped and abandoned by other male visitors some years later, they have adopted a "black widow" philosophy of loving and slaying their suitors. Jason falls

SIX FOTOBUSTE *from the film that put Italy back on the map of commercial world cinema.* ▶


STEVE REEVES · SYLVA KOSCINA
LE FATICHE DI ERCOLE
GIANNA MARIA CANALE
PIETRO FRANCISCI
EASTMANCOLOR - DYALISCOPE


STEVE REEVES · SYLVA KOSCINA
LE FATICHE DI ERCOLE
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PIETRO FRANCISCI
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STEVE REEVES · SYLVA KOSCINA
LE FATICHE DI ERCOLE
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in love with Antea, who tries to renege on tradition but is obliged by her elders to follow through with the seduction and slaughter of the Argonauts. Fortunately, Ulysses overhears the plan and arranges to drug the wine of their evening revels with opiates from the poppies blooming on the island. With the Amazons unconscious, Hercules (who has remained aboard ship) carries the drugged suitors back to safety on the Argos.

Arriving on the isle of Colchides, the Argonauts are attacked by a race of ape men, who are soon repelled by Hercules' strength. During the battle, Jason goes in search of the Fleece, which is protected by a dragon (or, more accurately, a Tyrannosaurus rex) that he defeats with a well-aimed arrow. Recognizing this as "the act of a King," the Argonauts take the Fleece—which is inscribed with Aeson's incrimination of Pelias and his insistence that no vengeance be taken in reclaiming the throne—and sail to Jolco. When they arrive, Hercules discovers the Fleece missing, stolen by Eurysteus. Outraged, he storms into King Pelias' throne room, finds Eurysteus there, and demands the return of the Fleece—but they trick him into chains in the royal dungeon. Pelias refuses to hand over the throne on the Argonauts' word alone, and turns his army against them. As swords cross, Iole revives Hercules, who rips his chains from the wall and uses them as a bolo-like weapon against the King's guards. Eurysteus is also strangled with the chains, which Hercules then uses to bring down the columns outside the palace, falling on other armed troops arriving as reinforcements. Iole runs to her father, who has set fire to the Fleece and taken poison ("All men are liable to make mistakes and now mine have caught up with me"). With his last words, he recommends her to Hercules, and prays that the world will forgive and forget him.

Under the rule of Jason, truth and justice are restored to Jolco, and Hercules and Iole sail away with the crew of the Argos, bound for adventure in a new life together.

STEVE REEVES *struts his stuff for admirers in a publicity shot taken after his arrival in Rome.*

Cast

The most imposing problem encountered by Pietro Francisci in mounting a production about Hercules was finding an actor worthy of such a larger-than-life role. At a time when movies were casting the muscle men of legend with the likes of Victor Mature, Francisci despaired of ever finding an actor with a believably immortal physique. However, Francisci's fortunes changed—along with those of the Italian cinema—in 1956, when his teenage daughter went to the movies and saw a new MGM musical, *Athena* (1954), starring Debbie Reynolds, Jane Powell, and Edmond Purdom. Given a small role in the picture was a 28-year-old bodybuilder from Glasgow, Montana, named Steve Reeves, who had reached the screen after being named Mr. America in 1947, Mr. World in 1948, and Mr. Universe in 1950.

"[Francisci's] daughter took one look at me and cried, 'Hey Daddy, there's your Hercules!'" Reeves recalled. "Francisci immediately sent me a telegram inviting me to Rome, but I was hesitant . . . Then he sent me a preliminary contract with a sizeable [$5,000] advance. I wired him back, saying 'Okay, I'll come.'" [2]

Francisci's own recollection of Reeves' casting was somewhat more pretentious. "Being myself a painter and sculptor, my qualifications governing the selection of the man to play Hercules were taken from Michelangelo, in my subconscious," he claimed. "Consequently, I chose Steve because he had an alarmingly handsome face that blended perfectly with history's most spectacular physique. Through the expression of his face, he could communicate to audiences that his mind was deep in thought and far away from the events occurring around him. He seemed at times to be contemplating things beyond the comprehension of ordinary individuals, as a god . . ." Francisci had an equally lofty opinion of his adaptation and the achievement of Reeves' performance: "The background for my Hercules films were the ancient Greek poems, *Le Argonauti* by Rodio [Apollonius Rhodus] and *I Sette Atebe* by Aeschylus. Without the presence of Steve Reeves, the translation of these poems into film . . . would have been vital and relevant only to a meager, scholarly audience. However, Steve Reeves gave the Greek poems the extra dimension they needed to animate and popularize them for everyone on all continents, and through Steve, millions of people received this culture without even realizing it." [3]

Born January 21, 1926, Steve Reeves was the son of a Montana farmer and contractor who died in a work-related accident at the age of 28, when his only child was little more than a year old. As Lester Reeves, Steve's father, was rushing to help a neighbor who was trying to salvage a pitchfork caught in a thresher, the machine chewed through the fork's prongs and spat them out like a rain of spikes. One of them impaled Lester through his abdomen and he died en route to the hospital. Steve, raised by his widowed mother Goldie, started bodybuilding at age 16, served two years in the US Army during World War II, and entered his first bodybuilding competition in 1946. Handsome enough to be mistaken for a movie star long before he became a celebrity, Reeves was encouraged by his admirers to aim for a show business career. He worked with various muscle magazine photographers on a number of promotional shots, including a series entitled "The Twelve Labors of Hercules," the original negatives of which were later bought by admirer–collector J. Paul Getty III.

When one of these publicity photos came to the attention of legendary director Cecil B. DeMille, Reeves was summoned to the great man's office. DeMille was preparing *Samson and Delilah* and was convinced that Reeves would be ideal for the lead. However, after seeing Reeves in person and worrying that the motion picture camera would add twenty pounds to his onscreen appearance, DeMille insisted that he lose that much weight before he would sign him for the part. Reeves reluctantly agreed, but it soon became apparent that even a marginal weight loss such as five pounds was damaging to his physique. Before even half the requested weight loss was complete, DeMille declared that Reeves' diminished physique no longer impressed him and the role was given instead to that man among men, Victor Mature.

Reeves licked his wounds with his unprecedented, three-title sweep of the world's top body-building honors. (At 21, he was the youngest contestant ever to win the coveted Mr. America title.) After starring in a failed TV pilot called *Kimbar, Lord of the Jungle*, the world's Number One bodybuilder won a recurring role on TV's *The Ralph Edwards Show* and made his first billed screen appearance in Edward D. Wood Jr.'s cheap *film noir Jail Bait* (1954). Here he played police lieutenant Bob Lawrence, an inappropriately common role that kept him clothed throughout, except for an amusingly gratuitous, shirt-changing scene. After that came the role in *Athena*. Despite his extraordinary good looks and magnetic charisma, Reeves' performance in both films was wooden, and based on their evidence, it is doubtful that he could have sustained an acting career in America. In Italy, however—where his dialogue could be looped by actors with a greater range of emotion and inflection—Steve Reeves could not only be an actor, he could become a star.

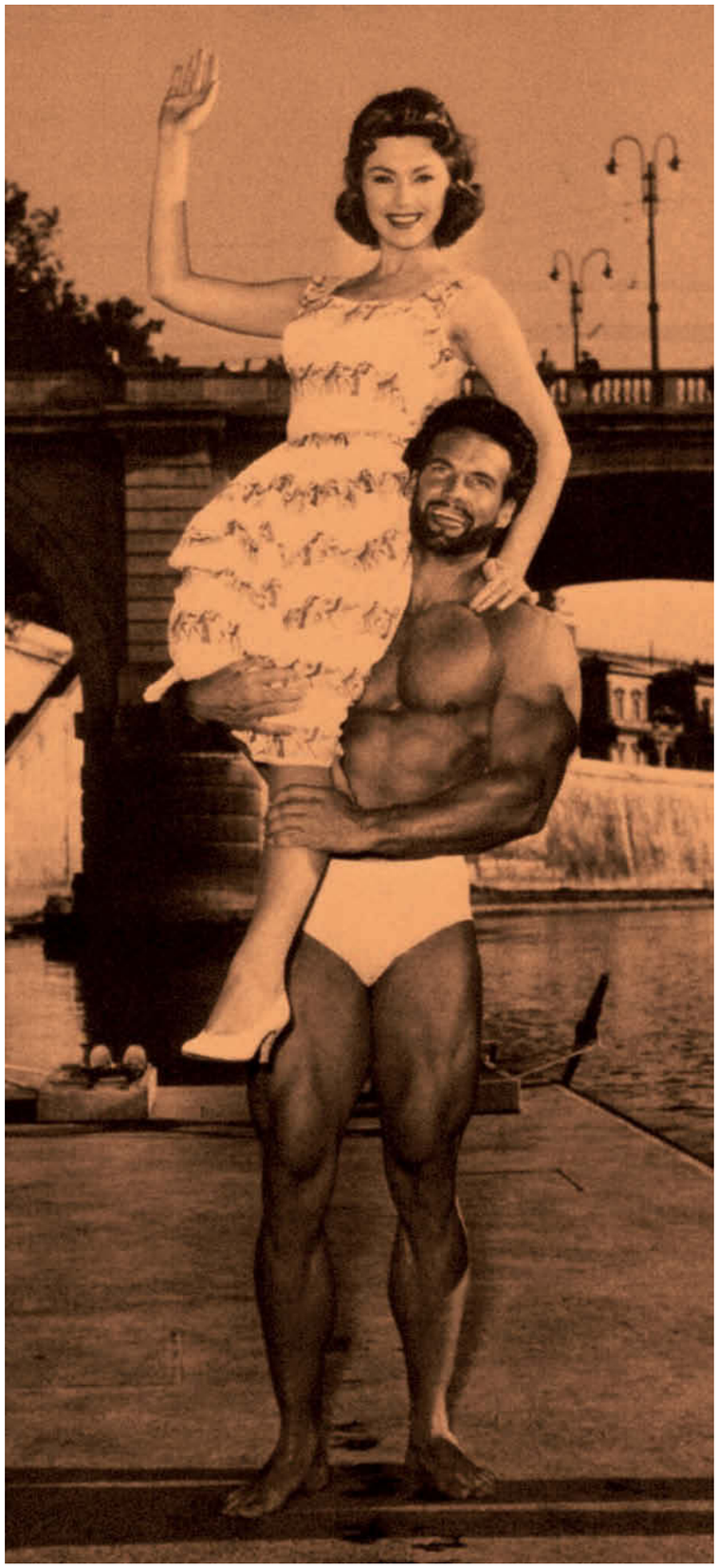
At the time of Francisci's offer, Reeves was working full-time in California as a public relations spokesman

DIRECTOR *Pietro Francisci, Sylva Koscina, and Steve Reeves go to work.*



2 Carlo Piazza, "Entrentien avec Steve Reeves," *Ciné-Zine-Zone* 36/37, September/October 1989, 5-22.

3 Milton T. Moore Jr., *Steve Reeves: One of a Kind* (Dallas TX: Milton T. Moore Jr., 1983), 51.



STEVE REEVES *sweeps lovely co-star Sylva Koscina off her feet prior to filming.*

for Ray Wilson's American Health Studios—having assured Wilson in advance that he was settling down, that his career in motion pictures and television was over. The call from Rome therefore came as a great surprise to both men. Reeves was hesitant to trust it, until the advance check was in his hand. He told Wilson that this opportunity might be his big chance, and it was helpfully pointed out to him that it also might not. Reeves admitted this possibility, but he felt he had to take the risk. Wilson was unwilling to give his star employee a leave of absence, especially so soon after taking him on, so the two men agreed to go their separate ways.

With Reeves in pocket, Pietro Francisci was able to launch *Le fatiche di Ercole* as a co-production between Lux Film and Galatea, a fledgling Milanese production company formed by Lionello "Nello" Santi (1918–95, not to be confused with the famous Italian opera conductor of the same name), a short, bald, stocky man with an incandescent smile. Galatea was bankrolled by Santi's wife Franca Invernizi, the heiress of Egidio Galbani, Italy's largest dairy company, renowned for their "Bel Paese" brand of soft cheese. Remarkably, the epic was budgeted at no more than $110,000.

Francisci assembled a truly mythic crew: Mario Serandrei, Italy's premier film editor; Giulio Coltellacci, designer of the costumes for *Ulisse*; Enzo Masetti, composer for *Fabiola* and *Attila*; Flavio Mogherini, whose art direction for *Il leone di Amalfi* and *Attila* had contributed so much to Francisci's current standing as a director of adventure pictures; and of course, his right hand man, Mario Bava, to photograph the film and supervise its special effects unit. Bava photographed the film in Dyaliscope, a French-patented anamorphic (2.35:1) process akin to CinemaScope.

English-language prints of the film mysteriously credit Bava only with "Lighting and Special Effects," but his contribution was actually much broader. Bava was literally the director of photography, supervising his usual team of Corrado Bartoloni (camera operator) and Ubaldo Terzano (camera assistant)—as well as Silvio Fraschetti, who shot second unit exteriors (including the underwater shots) according to Bava's storyboards—and masterminding the look of the film in concert with the art and makeup departments.

In preproduction for this assignment, Bava studied photographs of Reeves and found something lacking in the culturist's clean-shaven appearance. Reeves' body was ideal, but his face lacked the earthiness and character of Hercules as he was known to every Roman school child from the world of sculpture. Bava suggested the added touch of a trim, face-framing beard, which gave Reeves the air of a noble savage and added celestial fire to his deep blue eyes.

Bava later said, "I owe the style of beard that became Hercules' trademark to a show about [playwright Eugène] Labiche, set in 1890, which I saw on television. The fellow with the beard was Nino Pavese, and I found his beard and mustache to be very, very handsome. Reeves was perfect for the part, but Hercules had to have a beard, so we sent Reeves a telegram telling him to grow one. He arrived wearing it and became the hit of the Italian cinema."[4]

Reeves' appearance in this film established him as an international phenomenon. Though his onscreen mannerisms are sometimes too obviously coached, stiff and overemphatic, one never doubts for a moment that Reeves *is* Hercules. He used the role to emphasize his personal credo that the strength of the body should be used only as an extension of one's intelligence—a point which the film makes more than once. Bava had his own invisible techniques for making Reeves an even more impressive sight onscreen; he blocked the scenes so that the 6' 1" Reeves always appeared to be the tallest person onscreen, and his body was lightly oiled for most shots, helping the light to cling to his muscles. With Steve Reeves, Bava was finally placed in charge with an actor who was the equivalent of a classic piece of sculpture, and being his father's son, he had an innate knowledge of how to light the human body to depict it as a work of art. Mogherini's

set designs relied heavily on backgrounds of *bas-reliefs*, depicting ancient Grecian dramas, and Bava lighted these as he lighted Reeves—suggesting at a glance that this immortal was as one with the figures participating in those ancient, decorative friezes. The physique of Reeves also gifted Bava with amazing new possibilities for widescreen composition; his outstretched arms alone qualified as spectacle. The climactic shot of Hercules using the chains of slavery to topple a kingdom is not only thematically resonant and highly satisfying dramatically. The widescreen image itself is a masterpiece of iconic screen imagery—unquestionably, one of the most famous shots in film history. It may have been inspired by DeMille, but it outclasses DeMille's own execution of a similar moment in *Samson and Delilah* and must have tasted like sweet revenge to Reeves.



A RUNAWAY CHARIOT *facilitates the first meeting of Iole and Hercules.*

Casting such an extraordinary specimen as Steve Reeves created another mammoth casting problem: where to find an actress who could play opposite him without being overwhelmed by him? Who could seem his equal while still embodying an ideal of femininity? Francisci reportedly made his selection by showing the photos of several contenders to a panel of artists and sculptors. They all agreed that the actress with the most picturesque figure was Sylva Koscina, a Yugoslav actress of tender aspect and Amazonian presence, who was cast as Iole.

Koscina was born in Zagreb on August 22, 1933, and moved with her family to Italy at the age of 8. She attended the University of Naples, where she majored in mathematics and physics until the temptations of a modelling career stole her away from academia. Her fashion photographs led to her being named Miss Tappa at the 1954 Tour of Italy bicycle race, and she made the jump into films with a brief appearance in *Siamo uomini o caporali?* (1955). Before *Le fatiche di Ercole*, she worked in films for distinguished directors Pietro Germi and Alberto Lattuada. Auburn-haired, curvaceous and possessed of gentle, wistful features, Koscina was reportedly voted "the possessor of the finest breasts in the history of Italian cinema."[5] Her perfectly proportioned torso is apparent throughout *Le fatiche di Ercole*, in which she wears a sheer peplum dress without a bra—and without the slightest need for one. Aside from her physical attributes, she was a talented and instinctive performer, one of the few actresses primarily active in Italian films who successfully pursued stardom in other countries, including the United States. She would work again with Mario Bava, many years later, in *Lisa and the Devil* (1973).

Just as Italian films of this period were sometimes scripted around leftover sets and available props, it would seem that characters were sometimes tailor-written to the screen personae of actors under contract. As King Pelias, Ivo Garrani was cast once again as a guilt-ridden, compromised noble—an ongoing stereotype he would replay again and again, notably in *La battaglia di Maratona* (1959) and *La maschera del demonio* (1960). Asked if he felt stereotyped during this period, Garrani responded: "I took it as a simple job, my career in cinema—I mean, I had *quite* a different attitude about my parallel career in stage acting! I went on the set to shoot *Ercole* and other similar movies in the most professional way possible, but I never thought of it as anything other than just a job. Maybe I was stereotyped during that period, but I was much more interested in my theater career and, in any case, I always kept working in the cinema and on television. By the way, I think I was much more stereotyped by the character I played later in Carlo Lizzani's *Il gobbo/The Hunchback of Rome* (1960), as far as my career in movies is concerned."



THE MURDERER *Eurysteus (Arturo Dominici) controls the throne of guilt-ridden King Pelias (Ivo Garrani), seen here with the Golden Fleece—a scene not included in the final cut.*

Garrani reflects on his co-stars: "Reeves was a gentle guy. He used to receive regular shipments of . . . you know . . . special products, to keep his muscles up. I remember that those products, for some reason, got lost on

4 Alberto Abruzzese, et al., *La città del cinema—produzione e lavoro nel cinema italiano 1930–70* (Rome, Italy: Napoleone, 1979), 83–89.

5 Moore, 101.

one occasion, so he really began getting weaker and weaker while waiting for the next shipment to arrive—and the kids started telling jokes, saying that Reeves was, you know, like a flying balloon with no gas.[6] As far as Sylva Koscina is concerned, I really don't have too much to say. I can tell you that she was very good on the set, and I enjoyed acting with her. I remember she was always with her mother on the set at that time. Her mother was her agent, or something like an agent for her, and she never left her alone—on or off the set!"

Given a full-screen credit for her "special participation" is Gianna Maria Canale, who plays a variation on *I vampiri*'s Duchess Du Grand as the black widow-like Queen Antea. It is frankly not one of her best performances; Antea is a poorly written, overly passive character (the Queen, yet she rules under the thumbs of her veiled priestesses), primarily decorative, and given no opportunities to interact with Reeves, or to be truly villainous. However, considering the commercial failure of *I vampiri*, Antea is perhaps a more seminal figure in the history of Italian horror. Like the Duchess Du Grand and also the Circe of *Ulisse*, she embodies Man's schismatic fear and desire of Woman, and perpetuates the split image of female potential that persists throughout the Golden Age of the *film dell'orrore*.

Antea's lover Jason was played by Fabrizio Mioni. Born in Rome in 1930, Mioni previously appeared in a minor role in *Orlando e i paladini di Francia*, and he would take advantage of the international success of *Le fatiche di Ercole* by relocating to Los Angeles. He played one of Curd Jurgens' errant, nightclubbing students in 20th Century-Fox's remake of *The Blue Angel* (1959), and moved on to young "Latin Lover" type parts in *Get Yourself a College Girl* (1964) and the Elvis Presley vehicle *Girl Happy* (1965). His numerous US television appearances paid off in a theatrical feature assembled from a two-part episode of NBC's *The Man From U.N.C.L.E.* series, *The Spy With My Face* (1965), which led in turn to his casting in another Robert Vaughn feature, *The Venetian Affair* (1967), which also starred Boris Karloff and Elke Sommer, who would someday have their own important encounters with Mario Bava. Mioni continues to make his home in Los Angeles today.



GIANNA MARIA CANALE *as the Amazonian queen, Antea.*

Cast as the young Ulysses was Gabriele Antonini, born in Rome in 1938. The 19-year-old was a newcomer to films, having only previously appeared in Mario Monicelli's *Padri e figli* ("Fathers and Sons," 1957), given a US release in 1959 as *A Tailor's Maid*. Antonini's nimble, animated performance as Ulysses was a boon to both of Francisci's Hercules films, and he would subsequently appear in several *pepla* of the 1950s and '60s, including Ferdinando Cerchio's *Giudetta e Oloferne/Head of a Tyrant* (1958), Riccardo Freda's *Maciste alla corte del Gran Khan/Samson and the 7 Miracles of the World* (1961), Primo Zeglio's *Le sette sfide/The Seven Revenges* (1961, co-scripted by Sergio Leone), and Andre de Toth's *I Mongoli/The Mongols* (1961). He would also play Alexander the Great in Mario Caiano's *Goliath e la schiava ribelle/Goliath and the Rebel Slave* (1963).

Also noticeable in a few scenes is Luciana Paluzzi (credited under her true surname of Paoluzzi) in one of her earliest roles, as one of Iole's handmaidens. Born in 1931 in Rome, Paluzzi made her first (uncredited) screen appearance in Jean Negulesco's *Three Coins in a Fountain* (1954) and was given her first substantial role in Marc Allégret's *En Effeuillant la Marguerite/Please, Mr. Balzac* (1956). After *Le fatiche di Ercole*, she was featured in Fritz Lang's German-made Indian diptych *Der Tiger von Eschnapur* and *Das Indische Grabmal* (1959), and met and married future Bava actor Brett Halsey while acting in her first American Film, *Return to Peyton Place* (1961). They had a son togther and divorced in 1962. After a memorable guest role on an episode of TV's *The Man From U.N.C.L.E.*, Paluzzi attained international celebrity in the role of the ill-fated Fiona Volpe in the James Bond blockbuster, *Thunderball* (1965). Pert, Titian-haired, and voluptuous, she became one of the best-known Italian actresses of the 1960s and '70s, ultimately retiring from the screen after a series of increasingly erotic roles in 1979. Today she resides with her husband in Bel Air, California.

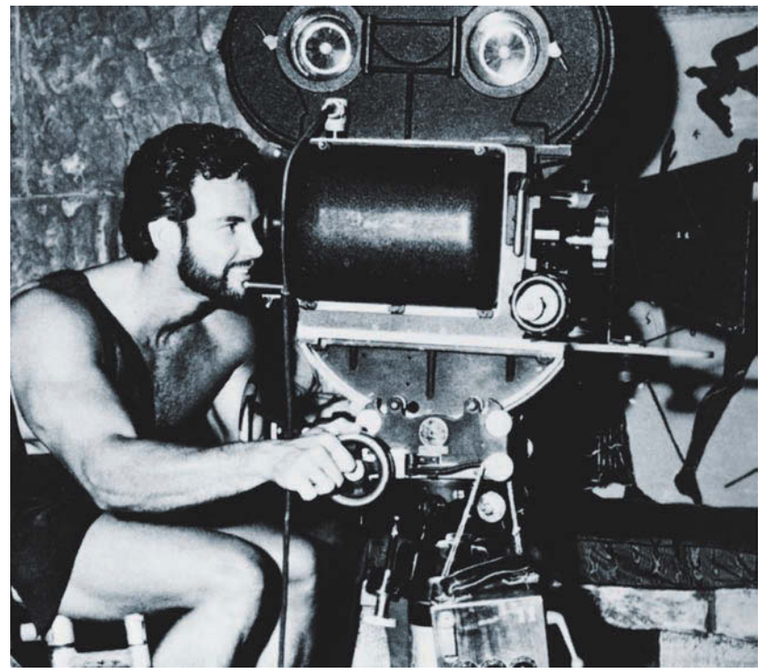
Two of the film's most striking presences are Lidia Alfonsi as the Sybil and Arturo Dominici as Eurysteus—who, moreso than any of the other supporting characters in the film, are presented by Bava with exquisite visual emphasis.

Born April 28, 1928, Lidia Alfonsi made her screen debut in a small role in *Vita da cani*, which Bava had photographed. It appears that she spent some interim time working in Spanish films, but *Le fatiche di Ercole* would influence the future course of her career; she would became a recurring figure in the many *peplum* films it

6 I don't know what kind of "special products" Garrani observed Reeves using, but in all fairness, it should be mentioned that Steve Reeves was one of the most vocal opponents to the use of steroids in bodybuilding. He prided himself on maintaining his physique solely through the use of proper diet, vitamins, and concentrated exercise.

spawned, including Carlo Ludovico Bragaglia's *Gli amori di Ercole/The Loves of Hercules* (1960) and two other Steve Reeves vehicles, Andre de Toth's *Morgan il pirata/Morgan the Pirate* (1960) and Giorgio Ferroni's *La guerra di Troia/The Trojan Horse* (1962), in which she gives a standout performance as another visionary, Cassandra. Alfonsi would work again with Bava in *"Il telefono"* ("The Telephone"), the opening segment of his omnibus film *I tre volti della paura* (1963), in which she played a predatory lesbian bent on avenging her rejection by a former lover.

The actor who plays Eurysteus, Arturo Dominici, would work again and again with Bava over the next several years and would become, in essence, his definitive male villain. Born January 2, 1918, in Palermo, Dominici was encouraged to go into films by friends and family who told him that he looked like American actor Robert Taylor. He played an official in Giuseppe Amato's *Yvonne la nuit/Yvonne of the Night* (1949), starring Totò and Frank Latimore (one of the first American actors to seek Italian stardom), but it was not until the role of Eurysteus that he truly found his niche—not as a leading man, but as a figure of regal evil and duplicity. After *Le fatiche di Ercole,* Dominici was hired to appear in scenes that Bava directed for *Nel segno di Roma/Sign of the Gladiator, Caltiki il mostro immortale, La battaglia di Maratona* and *Il ladro di Bagdad/The Thief of Baghdad.* His greatest role, unquestionably, would be Javutich in Bava's directorial debut, *La maschera del demonio* (1960). After that production, Bava and Dominici inexplicably stopped working together, but the actor continued to rack up a fine assortment of performances in his classic mold, in such important *pepla* as *Perseo l'invincibile/Medusa Against the Son of Hercules, Ercole contro Moloch/The Conquest of Mycenae,* and *Golia alla conquista di Baghdad/Goliath at the Conquest of Damascus.* By his family's count, Dominici made approximately 160 Italian films, but he concentrated primarily on television and dubbing assignments after 1973. He died of throat cancer on September 7, 1992, after spending most of his autumnal years dubbing the lead role in *Taggert*, a popular German TV import.



STEVE REEVES *takes an opportunity to play with the tools of Bava's trade.*



REEVES *teases script girl Gigliola Rosmino as Mario Bava (behind clapboard) does his best to avoid being photographed.*

Production

The set of *Le fatiche di Ercole* was something of a circus, judging from surviving publicity photos. Steve Reeves was a media sensation from the moment he landed in Rome. As filming proceeded at Cinecittà, the set was regularly invaded by celebrity guests, such as singer Mario Lanza and his wife Betty. When the production went on location, it was impossible to keep the locals—especially women and children—away. Reeves was happy to "be Hercules" for them, visiting with them during his breaks, flexing his muscles, signing autographs, posing for photos.

"I told the rookies never to forget those days," Bava said. "We were at the beach all summer, getting suntans, and

we were never bored because we were working all day long. If you're out in the sun too long, you can grow lazy, so our lunches were brought to us in baskets, and we were all given chairs to sit in. I said many times that we would never see days like those again, and I was right." [7]

Seldom had there been such a buzz about an Italian film, and Pietro Francisci wisely stayed as close to the center of this interest—his star—as possible. At the end of his career, after eighteen pictures, Steve Reeves still spoke of Pietro Francisci as his favorite director. Considering how much of Bava's stylistic signature is evident in the picture, Reeves' devotion to Francisci may seem odd, but there is a good explanation for it. According to actor Ivo Garrani: "They used to share the responsibilities of directing. Francisci was a good director; he knew his job very well. He was not, however, a great technician—but he knew how to work with actors, and in a sense, he *completed* himself when he started working with Bava. Francisci's relationship with Bava was like a symbiosis; each one of them took their specific part in the making of the movie. Bava was, of course, the one who had to take care of the technical side of the job; Francisci devoted himself to actors' direction—well, the *actresses* especially [laughs]—but together, they formed an incredible directing team."

Francisci played director whenever a scene was built around his stars; it is appropriate, then, that Reeves never credited Bava with directing him in anything. However, it is not Reeves' line readings that people remember about this film, but the iconography of his physique in relation to its imagery. The job of directing actors' performances is almost unimportant in a film shot without live sound, where the only record of what really took place on the set is visual. Francisci may have directed the actors, but Bava blocked and lighted their scenes. He also was entirely responsible for directing those scenes which were built on technique rather than dialogue—most notably, the wonderfully eerie flashback to Iole's childhood, whose delirious shadowplay and depictions of the young heroine's fright make the sequence a concise preview of Bava's future horror innovations in color. He was also at the helm for some second-unit stuntwork with Reeves' stand-in Giovanni Cianfriglia, an Italian bodybuilder who wore a Reeves-like wig as he wrestled with a drugged lion and grappled with a horned, imitation bull's head covered in brown shag carpeting. [8]



COAXED OUT *from behind the clapboard, Bava reluctantly poses with the man whose star he placed in the ascendant.*

As always, Bava was willing to do whatever was necessary to benefit the picture. He was content to assist Francisci, but also quietly annoyed to be performing so many of the director's duties, while Francisci was away posing with Reeves and Koscina—sometimes pretending to block their scenes—in staged publicity photos. It also didn't help that Francisci was too bent on self-promotion to acknowledge, or even to privately thank, Bava for going the extra mile. It was one thing to not wish to draw attention to oneself—Bava dodged the production's still photographer as best he could, appearing in one publicity photo only as a pair of "Kilroy" eyes peering over a clapperboard that does not even bear his name as cameraman—but it was something else to see Francisci taking all the bows for his hard work.

Bava's confidant during this period of growing discontent was Riccardo Freda. "It was Bava's work that was responsible for Francisci's success," Freda declared, "because he would sit on the set and fall asleep, while Bava would set to work creating the special effects shots, blocking the scenes, and rehearsing the actors. If that wasn't bad enough, I later found out that Francisci was being abusive of Bava, saying nasty things about him behind his back and humiliating him . . ." [9]

Bava was not happy about his souring working relationship with Francisci, but he consoled himself by taking advantage of the creative latitude he was given, and was of course very happy to be working on such a conspicuous project.

The filming was completed ahead of schedule. Reeves personally hated wearing a beard and shaved it off right away, arriving barefaced when he showed up at Francisci's villa to collect the balance of his payment. Francisci was outraged by the change of appearance, as Reeves was still technically under contract to the picture until the end of the week.

"If you were really my friend, you wouldn't ask me to keep it!" Reeves said.

"And you," Francisci shot back, "if you were a true friend, you would never have done such a thing!"

Reeves planned to vacation briefly in Majorca before returning to work in California. On the morning of his departure, while packing his bags, he received a frantic call from Francisci, asking him to report back to the set for an extra day of reshoots. The actor was willing to shave a day off his vacation plans, but of course, he noted, they would have to agree to terms for his extra time. "If you were my friend, you would do it for nothing!" Francisci argued. "If you were my friend, you wouldn't ask me to do it for nothing!" Reeves countered. [10]

Francisci promised that he would be paid somehow, so Reeves went to the location, where his clean-shaved face was covered with a painstakingly applied false beard. When Francisci arrived, he didn't have the money with him; Reeves smelled a rat. Noting that the sky was overcast, too dark to shoot what was needed, the actor looked firmly at his director and decreed, "Until you pay me, those clouds will not go away." Reeves sat in a chair and, true enough, the sky remained stubbornly dark until noon, when a messenger arrived with half his promised amount. "Okay—half the money for half a day's work," Reeves said. At that moment, the clouds parted and the crew was able to get the additional shots in the can. By the end of the day, everyone was half-convinced that Reeves really was the son of Jupiter.



HERCULES *seeks counsel with a Sibyl (Lidia Alfonsi), one of Bava's most eye-popping color compositions.*

Commentary

Over the years, the once-respectable stature of *Le fatiche di Ercole* has been dulled and eroded by the absurd extremes of the countless "sword and sandal" films that followed in its wake. Some of the criticism the film has received is warranted, but one must remember that it, more than any other single film, was responsible for returning Italy to its earlier standing as a major filmmaking capital of the world. It was made, however, *before* that recovery took place and therefore embodies some inevitable flaws in keeping with the circumstances of its filming. The opening shots, for example, are now risible to the sophisticated moviegoing eye, with an obvious male stunt man standing in for Sylva Koscina as her chariot races out of control, and it features a rather sorry-looking dinosaur, but in most ways it remains a rousing entertainment, impressive for the sheer spectacle of Reeves' unparalleled physique and endlessly fascinating for the pictorial contributions of Mario Bava and art director Flavio Mogherini.

In a dubbed film without a native language, the weight of the storyteller's responsibility falls on the shoulders of the cameraman. In *Le fatiche di Ercole,* the performances of Alfonsi and Dominici, in particular, illustrate Mario Bava's ability to elucidate character in visual/symbolic terms, sometimes at a glance. In his present tense scenes, Eurysteus is introduced as a hand reaching from the shadows to pour himself a goblet of the King's own wine; the shot is pregnant with clandestine intrigue, but his action also shows in a single, distilled image his intoxication with power and his intimate standing with the King. When he finally turns to face the camera, Eurysteus hovers on the edge of visibility, never venturing completely forth from the shadows that are his natural element; the one time he does wholly step into the light—to whisper his plan to Pelias—his *words* recede into mystery, unheard. Consequently, for much of the film, his visual rendering makes Eurysteus less a character in his own right than a slimy personification of King Pelias' own dark side.

Adding further comment to his scenes is the way the *bas-relief* murals adorning the walls behind him, telling stories of past dynasties, are lighted in sympathetic shadowplay, some figures standing out while others recede. One gets the impression from Bava's lighting scheme that this is not the first time in history when a King has been so advised. In this context, Dominici's performance is actually secondary to the way it is supported by the *mise-en-scène.*

While Eurysteus is introduced as a creature of twilight caught between light and shadow, the Sibyl is introduced as a shock of color. Forecasting to King Pelias the coming of the challenger wearing one sandal, the Sibyl is first seen in long-shot as a somber figure, darkly draped in a hood and cloak of midnight blue. Advancing into medium shot, she throws back her hood and cloak in an abrupt movement, which redresses her completely in its scarlet lining, as she thrusts forth a cautioning hand. (The effect is further enhanced by red gel lighting that blasts her from stage left, at the signal of her dramatic gesture, and another red gel light from stage right as she advances another step closer to the camera.) Bava had done something like this previously to introduce Gloria Swanson in *Mio figlio Nerone* but he perfects the idea here. He almost certainly got the idea from a similar shot in Vincente Minnelli's MGM musical *The Band Wagon* (1953, photographed by Harry Jackson), where slinky Cyd Charisse changes her entire color scheme by opening her coat during the "Girl Hunt" dance sequence with Gene Kelly. In the context of a musical fantasy sequence, this jolt is only one of a myriad dazzles aimed at the eye, but in the context of a straightforward story (however fanciful), where bold strokes of purely visual effect are not anticipated, it discharges an almost supernatural *frisson.*

Nearly all of the film's characters are introduced with a dramatic shock, meant to impress the viewer while also identifying them subliminally with their major emotion: Iole on a runaway chariot (helplessness); Hercules uprooting a heavy tree from the ground (dutiful heroism); Ulysses vaulting himself over a large hill to land at Hercules' feet (plucky ambition); Iphitos charging his chariot into the midst of the training field, late in the day (laziness and arrogance); Jason as

7 Abruzzese.

8 In the 1960s and '70s, Cianfriglia graduated to starring roles in minor Italian cult films; he is best known for playing the masked superhero Superargo (in two films), the spy Agent Z-55, and the Western hero Johnny Oro. He later returned to stuntwork, contributing to such international productions as Martin Scorsese's *The Last Temptation of Christ* (1988) and John Frankenheimer's *The Year of the Gun* (1991). In addition to doubling for Steve Reeves in *Le fatiche di Ercole,* he can also be seen doubling for Sylva Koscina—in drag—in an early high angle shot of Iole's runaway coach riding very close to the edge of a precipice.

9 Luigi Cozzi, *Il cinema dei mostri* (Rome, Italy: Fanucci Editore, 1987), 251.

10 Chris LeClaire, *Worlds to Conquer: An Authorized Biography of Steve Reeves* (South Chatham MA: Monomoy Books, 1999), 174.

a mysterious figure fleeing the site where Hercules slays the Cretan bull (furtive valor); the Sibyl with the startling revelation of her "inner flame" (illumination); and Eurysteus as a wicked claw reaching out of the darkness to help itself to a cup of regal wine (covert power). The only exception is King Pelias, who is perhaps living too much with the ghosts of the past to ingratiate himself into the present. The visual schemes heralding the introductions of these characters also reverberate wittily throughout the picture in other forms. For instance, just as the Sybil advises Pelias, Antea (another monarch with blood on her hands) is shown being ordered to slay the Argonauts according to Amazon tradition by a group of priestesses who wear a reversed color scheme: bright red outside, dark blue inside, the chromatic inversion making a sly remark about how the Amazons' flaunted sex appeal serves as a bright, attractive cover to their dark and murderous creed.

Alfonsi's second scene, as the Sibyl acts as an intermediary between Jupiter and Hercules, who wishes to "live and love like other men," is the most artfully composed shot in the entire picture. Viewed over Hercules' rippling shoulder, itself limned in deep blue light, the Sibyl stands on the other side of a large stone vat of open flame with the poise of a ship's figurehead, her red gown standing out in stark relief against a night-blue cyclorama bisected by a diagonal ray of light—the listening ear of Jupiter. Seen in its original widescreen splendor, on the big screen, this image ranks high among the most breathtaking to be found in Bava's work. It's more than a great shot; it's a great *painting*.

As attested by this scene, and many others, climaxing with Reeves' iconic toppling of the pillars at Jolco, *Le fatiche di Ercole* is one of Bava's definitive works as a cinematographer. Any credit for the film's remarkable beauty must be shared with Flavio Mogherini, not to mention Reeves and Koscina, but here Bava's images attain both a classical grandeur and a casual grace that his previous films, however accomplished, could only approach. This is not due simply to Bava's peaking skills as a lighting cameraman, but to the material itself being uncommonly well suited to his visual imagination; a mastery of color and lighting, a background in sculpture and painting, and the ability to evoke the demonic as well as the heroic. Even when photographing a familiar location, such as the Cascate di Montegelato (previously seen in Francisci's *Orlando e i paladini di Francia*, which appears here as a backdrop to the Argonauts' frolic with the Amazons), there is an opulence to the scenery that feels fresh and definitive—and also pure, not yet subject to the baroque overstatements of its 1959 sequel, *Ercole e la regina di Lidia/ Hercules Unchained*.

Bava's special effects contributions to the film are also notable. In addition to supervising the miniature shots of the Argos being tossed on a stormy sea (more acceptable than those staged by Eugen Schüfftan for *Ulisse*), he created a number of special mattes for the production. These include the establishing exterior of Jolco, the exterior of the Amazons' cave, the Argos anchored at sea, and the columned buildings huddled on a hillside as the Argos returns to Jolco.

The Jolco exterior seen in the film consists mostly of a large scale set constructed outdoors at Cinecittà: the palace stairs and columns to the left of frame, a *papier-maché* stone wall in the center background, and a stone gate to the right of frame—these were all real. Bava completed this shot with a sheet of glass, to which he added a roof to the palace (replaced later in the film with a collapsible section of *papier-maché* stone blocks), and an entire town of columned buildings that seemed to crown the plateau in the middle field.

Ivo Garrani remembers well the day these shots were filmed: "I have great memories of *Le fatiche di Ercole*, when we were taken to act on a set with fake temples that were only half-built, only the lower half. Those temples ended right above our heads, but Bava had these glass paintings where all the upper parts of the temples had been painted by hand. He positioned the glass midway between the scene and the camera, and the painted part matched the sets exactly! It was amazing to see it in the printed shot."

Likewise, the dark clouds shown hovering over Jolco were air-brushed on a separate plane of glass, positioned to be out of focus in relation to the buildings in the "distance."

The exterior of the Amazon's cave was a combination of an actual location and a matte painting executed by Bava.

For the scenes of the men aboard the Argos, the ship's *façade* was constructed over the surface and one side of a rented oil freighter. The movie also contains two shots of the Argos moored at some distance from shore, and these shared a glass matte painting of the ship, with a light skirt of sea foam around its edges. Bava took care to paint the ship with a black, shaded midsection. For one of the two matte shots, the ship appears to have working oars; for this shot, using careful



JASON *(Fabrizio Mioni) finds love in the arms of monstrous Queen Antea, in this scene photographed at the Cascate di Montegelato.*

measurements, Bava rewound the film in his camera, masked all of the screen area except the unexposed black area of the midsection, and inserted there a new exposure of a group of oars being rowed. Whether the oars were rowed by real people in a dim setting and photographed from a distance—or part of a miniature, mechanized model, we can only guess.

The huddled buildings at Jolco were also painted on glass; the illusion was further sold by cutting out the spaces between the columns in the photos and positioning waving extras "inside" these structures, shading them with screens blocked from view by the clippings to provide the illusion of shelter. The same matte was used for the exterior shot of Hercules signalling the Argos crew by waving a torch from the palace window.

Le fatiche di Ercole also contains some impressive optical work, notably the twin-arced fountain which provides an Elysian backdrop to the farewell scene between Hercules and Iole. The fountain was a real one, called simply La Fontana, which Bava found outside a building on the Viale dell' Agricoltura. He photographed a plate of the fountain from the side (it stands lengthwise in front of the building) and augmented it with a matte painting of trees to eliminate the building from view. Reeves and Koscina played the scene in front of a blue screen, allowing the optical plate to be inserted later as a background. Looking much larger onscreen than it is in reality, La Fontana provides one of the loveliest moments in the picture, evoking the airy, azure atmosphere of a Maxfield Parrish painting.

The weak link among the film's many special effects is undoubtedly the shabby dinosaur that arises to contest Jason's right to the Golden Fleece. Not resembling a dragon in the slightest, this wretched costume (not Bava's work, incidentally) was given its illusion of immense size by the simplest means possible: forced perspective. The actor in the dinosaur costume was positioned much closer to the camera than Fabrizio Mioni (Jason), and the use of a deep focus lens kept the two planes of depth in equal focus, providing the illusion of the scene unfolding at the same distance. A "lifesize" prop was also built, and maneuvered from inside by a couple of technicians, to react when Jason climbs atop its sleeping form to reach the Fleece, and to fling its tail defensively. If anything, this scene shows how desperately the talents of an artisan like Carlo Rambaldi were needed by the Italian film community at this time.

The film's faults also extend to a screenplay that—at least in its English versions (there are more than one, as will be explained later)—seems hastily written, to the point of occasionally contradicting itself. When Hercules first arrives in Jolco, King Pelias announces that "I want to give the throne up, because each year I grow more anxious"—yet for the remainder of the film, he challenges Jason's right to the throne with the rigor of a zealot who refuses to surrender what is wrongfully his. When Iole shows Hercules to his room, she describes how the sun doesn't reach it until noon, which will allow him to sleep late. The hero is grateful for this consideration, but the very next scene on the training field depicts Hercules as an early riser. He criticizes Iphitos' late arrival for the athletic trials by saying, "You sleep too much." Yet these inconsistencies are nothing when compared to the film's handling of what should have been its pivotal event: Hercules' voluntary shedding of his immortality.

When Hercules bests Iphitos' excellent discus throw by hurling a discus literally into orbit, the onlookers regard him with fright, backing fearfully away and fleeing the scene in their chariots; only Iole continues to regard him without fear. This scene, and the unhappy aftermath of his heroic act against the Nemean lion that results in Iphitos' death, cause Hercules to damn his immortality as a curse, something that distances him from other people and will prevent him from ever being truly happy. *Le fatiche di Ercole* could have been more powerful, dramatically, had it chronicled either the story of Hercules' alienation from mankind as a demigod, or the story of his coming to terms with his chosen mortality—discovering pain, love, even the sting of defeat. However,



BAVA *shooting a tracking shot (Steve Reeves and Fabrizio Mioni on horseback) from the rear of a truck. Camera assistant Ubaldo Terzano holds the clapboard.*

Francisci tries to have it both ways, by having Hercules shed his immortality, yet without suffering any consequences. Despite his great sacrifice, Hercules lives out the rest of the picture as he did before, prevailing over every conflict, still possessed of a superhuman strength that far exceeds his musculature.

Duccio Tessari observed that this conflict may have arisen from a conflict of creative opinion between Francisci and Ennio De Concini: "Francisci had been thinking about using Mr. Muscle [Steve Reeves] as a Hercules with real limitations of strength. De Concini instead had the stroke of genius to make a Hercules beyond all the limits—a Hercules that, if he hurled a discus, the discus truly became a flying saucer that never stopped!" [11]

It is also bewildering that Hercules is ostracized by the King and people of Jolco, after ridding them of the Nemean lion, after being held to blame for the death of Iphitos—who was clearly at fault himself, for following Hercules into the lion's den, armed with little more than his own arrogance. Pelias is depicted as being fully aware of his son's faults (Hercules has been summoned, in essence, to make a man of him), which makes it all the more confounding that he would be blind to the real cause of Iphitos' death, even in grief. (According to one version of the Greek myths, Iphitos was a friend of Hercules, murdered by his strong hands under a spell of madness sent by Hera. Had the film been dubbed so that Hercules was mistaken as the murderer of Iphitos, the accompanying images and subsequent turn of events would make considerably more sense.) Equally perplexing, in context, is Pelias' order to Hercules to destroy the Cretan Bull as part of the burden he must carry in penitence. It seems a gratuity to carry the story from one point to the next, and further weakened by having the scene of Hercules' disavowal of his immortality precede the all-too-easy slaying of the mythic bull.

De Concini admitted to writing the screenplay somewhat whimsically: "It had occurred to me to write [the Hercules films] in a very simple way, because the idea of distorting Hercules

11 Faldini and Fofi. Translation amended for clarity.

in an ironic key amused me very much. In fact, these films were very ironic, for example in dialogue like this: 'Esculapeus, get moving, swim across the river and come here!' 'I can't; they haven't invented a cure for rheumatism yet!' Or 'Hey, you handsome youth with the cunning expression—what do they call you?' 'Ulysses!' 'Ah! So, when you're older, they will call you the astute Ulysses!' In short, these films were made with humor, and by a director who believed in them and loved them very much, and it was certainly this factor that made them so successful." [12]

Music

Le fatiche di Ercole was scored by Enzo Masetti (1893–1961), a Bolognese composer active in the Italian film industry since the mid-1930s. After more than a decade of predominantly romantic, adventure and (later) tortured neorealist scores—including William Dieterle's *Vulcano/Volcano* (1949) and G. W. Pabst's *La voce del silenzio* (1953)—Masetti's career as a film composer reached its defining moment with *Fabiola*, which revealed him to be particularly eloquent with heroic themes. (Perhaps because heroic themes are most expressive when they bring together the strains of romanticism, adventure, and anguish that he had previously mined separately.) He pursued this genre further with Pietro Francisci on *Attila* in 1954, and after a brief detour to Guido Brignone's *La schiave di Catagine/The Sword and the Cross* (1956, also featuring Gianna Maria Canale), reunited with Francisci to produce his final two scores for *Le fatiche di Ercole* and its sequel. His was that rare and fortunate career that ended with its best and most beloved music.

"We know all too little about ancient Greek music, but we do know that the Greeks loved the art of song and valued it highly," Masetti said at the time. "Their musical notation was entirely different to ours, but they knew the power of vocal and instrumental melody and harmony, and in my score . . . I have tried to capture something of the old Greek spirit as it was expressed when the world was young." [13]



HERCULES *poses with Ulysses (Gabriele Antonini) on the demigod's first day as Jolco's new Master of Arms.*

Masetti's main theme is a musical marriage between the leitmotifs of Hercules and Iole, the former being a French horn section "fox call" that sounds remarkably appropriate, robust and heroic, which segues into a lyrical, romantic theme. The training sequence opens with a playful, prancing, light-hearted cue that graduates into a theme with undercurrents of "Pomp and Circumstance," evoking a spirit of achievement in the groves of education, before it finally takes an abrupt, darkening turn with the arrival of Iphitos. For the flashback sequence, Masetti scores Iole's extended flashback with the earlier playful theme, which darkens more prominently with the encounter with the condemned man, and gives way to scintillating finger-cymbals as she strokes the Golden Fleece, emphasizing her recollection that it was a magical object that seemed to respond and vibrate to the touch. Masetti also contributed a piece of vocal music to the film, a fine heroic song sung by Orpheus and the other Argonauts to help pace their rowing. The music, mostly of a noble and adventuresome character, softens dramatically for the sequences among the Amazons, with avian flutes flying high over an underwash of orchestra that sometimes churns and eddies, as if lending voice to the sailors' emotional confusion and temptation. There is also a sprightly piccolo theme, usually accompanying the elderly sailor Esculapeus, which helps to accent his contributions of spry humor to the storyline. On the whole, it's a remarkably colorful and well-rounded score, with one or two unforgettable themes, which perfectly reflects and enhances the personalities of its characters. The only musical misstep in the picture is the reprisal of the aforementioned "prancing, lighthearted" cue immediately following the death of Chiron, as Hercules and Jason ride to Jolco, which trivializes the gravity of what has just occurred—but this was Francisci's misstep, not Masetti's.

Masetti was likewise not responsible for the addition of various electronic sound effects, which were used to underscore—and overstate—the heroic feats of Hercules and also various moments of supernatural currency, like the appearance of the Cretan Bull, or the moment when Hercules notices that Jason has fulfilled the Sibyl's prophecy by losing his sandal. (When Hercules throws the discus, it really sounds like a flying saucer!) These electronic cues, similar to the "space-age" music composed for Fred M. Wilcox's *Forbidden Planet* (1956), were library tracks that found their way into several other films, and in fact were later used to entirely rescore Bava's *Planet of the Vampires* (the American International recut of *Terrore nello spazio*, 1965).

Release

When *Le fatiche di Ercole* was released in Rome in the early months of 1958, it grossed 887.5 million *lire* [$553,000]—an almost unheard-of success for an Italian picture, though still not quite in the same league as Gina Lollobrigida's *La donne più bella del mondo*. But Francisci's humble epic had a greater destiny in store on the world market, whereas La Lollo's film had failed to achieve global success.

That destiny began to be fulfilled in 1959 when the film's success in Italy was repeated resoundingly in France and Germany, attracting the interest of American film distributor–independent producer Joseph E. Levine (1905–87). Born in Boston, Massachusetts, Levine had worked his way up the social ladder from shoeshine boy to dress manufacturer to restauranteur, before finally settling into the film distribution

business in the 1940s. He ran a successful Boston-based distribution office that booked films into theaters on behalf of many different independent companies, including James H. Nicholson and Samuel Z. Arkoff's American Releasing Corporation, which later became American International Pictures. In 1955, Levine took a gamble by purchasing the US theatrical rights to Toho's *Gojira* (1954) for $25,000. The art of motion picture dubbing was then still in its infancy, especially where Japanese films were concerned, so an ingenious scheme was hatched to make the film playable for American audiences. Working with writer–editor–director Terry O. Morse (1906–84), Levine and co-producer Richard Kay bankrolled the filming of a fair amount of replacement footage featuring Raymond Burr (prior to the success of *Perry Mason*) as American news correspondent Steve Martin, who is shown almost seamlessly interacting with Japanese co-stars he never met and commenting on the eponymous creature's devastation of Tokyo. The re-edited film, titled *Godzilla—King of the Monsters!*, was distributed by TransWorld Corporation in 1956. It was a success, but it was not until after the advent of the film called *Hercules* that Levine adopted his personal catch-phrase, "And the rest is history."

By early 1959, *Le fatiche di Ercole* was well on its way to becoming the most successful film of the year. According to Steve Reeves: "In Calcutta, India, it played four showings a day, 365 days a year, for two years. It was also a huge success in Japan and throughout Asia. I had no idea; if I would have had that knowledge, I would have cashed-in on it. I would have gone to Japan and done commercials like Stallone and those guys do today." [14]



THIS FULL-COLOR *magazine ad was one of many placed by Joseph E. Levine in his massive promotional campaign for HERCULES.*

Observing the film's popularity, Levine resolved to buy the rights for all of North America, but Nello Santi's asking price was too high. Instead, he worked out an acceptable deal for the US distribution rights only, for which he paid $125,000. "I had no misgivings about *Hercules*," Levine told *Esquire* magazine. "It had something for everybody. It had a dragon for kids, muscle men for the growing boys; a shipwreck scene for waiters and clerks, and a guy tearing a goddamn building apart! Who doesn't dream of getting stuck on some island with some broads? And where do you ever see a guy with a body like Reeves has?" [15]

Levine staked his faith in the picture on the gamble of his life, spending an unprecedented $1,200,000 on publicity—advertisements (many of them full page and color) were placed in more than 130 different publications, and blocks of television advertising time were bought, saturating the airwaves with eight different TV spots, promoting *Hercules* in all its aspects of fantasy, adventure, romance, and spear-bending strength. The film opened simultaneously on 600 American screens in the summer of 1959, and when the dust settled, Levine had grossed over $4,000,000 on his investment.

"Definitely, Levine made more money off my films than anybody," said Reeves, who pocketed only his initial salaries from the two Hercules films. "Other people made money also, but Levine made more money than anyone else on the first two films. I made very little money." [16] Reeves' entire salary for the film was $10,000—half up front, the other half at the end of the shoot. Levine spent four times as much on a single promotional luncheon for the film's exhibitors, held at New York's Waldorf Astoria Hotel.

Ivo Garrani remains thunderstruck by the film's popularity to this day. "*Ercole* was just a job for me," he admits. "I had no idea of the international success that those movies would have eventually, while I was shooting them. When I was told about the American success of the movie, I heard that it was due to a comedy-styled dubbing!"

Variants

Because of Joseph E. Levine, two different English versions of *Hercules* exist. When he bought the film for America, it was equipped with an English soundtrack prepared in Rome by the English Language Dubbers Association (ELDA), with veteran radio actor Brett Morrison (1912–78, best-known for playing the role of Lamont Cranston/The Shadow from 1945–54) providing the voice of Hercules—and several other voices besides. Though limited in variety and timber, the dialogue had a certain literary quality that was perhaps truer to the musical complexity of the Italian dialogue, but little care was taken to match it to the lip movements of the actors.

When Levine bought the American rights, he found this soundtrack unacceptable, claiming that the crash was always heard 10 seconds after something fell. He had the film entirely redubbed at a company that would play an increasingly important role in the Americanization of Italian popular cinema: Titra Sound Corporation, located on the fourth floor at 1600 Broadway in New York City.

"It was owned by two men whose first names I'm unsure of, as we always addressed them as 'Mr. Opachinsky' and 'Mr. Rozenfeld,'" notes voice actor Peter Fernandez, who did extensive dubbing, script writing and—later—directing for the company. "They were both from Europe. Mr. Rozenfeld's son Steve sort of managed the studio part of the operation."

12 Ibid.

13 This quote appears in slightly different form in the Warner Bros. pressbook for *Hercules Unchained*, and it has the ring of authenticity. I have made some minor adjustments to what appears to have been an awkward translation from the Italian.

14 George Helmer, "Steve Reeves Speaks!" *Cult Movies* 18, 1996, 44–45.

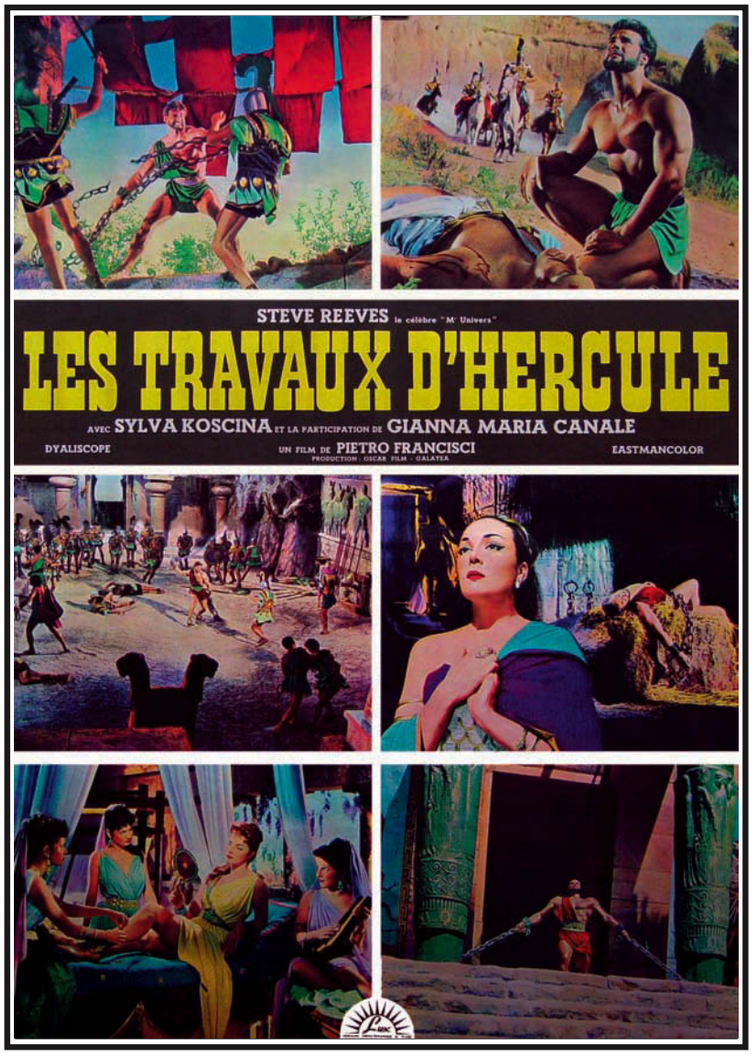
15 *Esquire* 326, January 1961.

16 Helmer.

Titra wasn't the first company to specialize in recording English dub tracks for foreign films, but they became the pre-eminent one, giving employment to actors who found themselves out-of-work due to the decline of radio, or because of Senator Joseph McCarthy's blacklist. Directing the new soundtrack was George Gonneau (1924–97), a deep-voiced American actor who also took over the role of Hercules. His virile timber was so ideally matched to Reeves' ripe physique (and also somewhat true to Reeves' own voice) that Gonneau would provide his voice in many later films, as well. The former voice of Hercules, Brett Morrison, had by this time relocated to New York City and took the role of King Pelias, while the evil Eurysteus was voiced by that unmistakable star of radio, advertisements and cartoons, Paul Frees.

Peter Fernandez describes the setup at Titra: "In the beginning there were two studios and a small complex of offices, all on the fourth floor at 1600 Broadway. The smaller of the two studios was strictly for dubbing. The larger studio was used for final mixing of the converted films, and when that was not being done, was also available for dubbing. Additional studios were added later, one on the fifth floor of 1600 and one, a small one, on the second floor. Once a dubbing script was written and cued for loops, auditions would be held for the principal roles, with no more than three actors considered for each role. Often an audition was unnecessary, if the client (a distributor or his representative) kept a hands-off policy and just wanted the job done. Casting was left up to the dubbing director. The principal voice actors would work alone. When their roles were completed, a handful of other actors would be called in for a day or two's work. Then there would be a 'crowd day' where as many as a dozen actors would fill-in the very minor parts and all of the background ad-libs. A film would take from 5–12 days to be dubbed, depending on its complexity and amount of dialogue. Seldom did an actor work on more than one film in a day, but sometimes there were night sessions. A work day, without overtime, was from 9:30 to 5:30 with a one-hour lunch break. One's brain was scrambled at the end of a day."

FRENCH *reissue affiche, circa 1960s.*



In the case of *Hercules*, an English copy of the shooting script was used to rerecord the dialogue as it had originally been spoken on camera. Reeves had spoken his own lines in English, of course, as did his co-stars (either naturally or phonetically) while sharing scenes with him. Whenever Reeves was not onscreen, as during the love scenes between Jason and Antea, the actors played their scenes in Italian. There are some imperfections, naturally, caused when the actors onscreen substituted words or stumbled over their lines, but on the whole, the Titra redub of *Hercules* is more flattering to the film; its improved matching of words and lip movements restore the performances to their correct register and make them easier to appreciate and enjoy.

The two versions are immediately distinguished by their main titles. The ELDA dub (which runs 104:09) opens with a thorough presentation of credits, in white letters on a red background bordered with Grecian-style illustrations of Hercules' various labors. The Titra redub (103:11) opens with an animated title sequence of the eponymous constellation, a lightning bolt, and very, very few credits (no mention of Mario Bava, for example). To illustrate the difference between these two versions, here is the first dialogue scene between Hercules and Iole, after he rescues her from the runaway chariot. First, the English dialogue as it is heard in the ELDA dub:

IOLE
I thank you. And I thank the Gods for having brought you here today, and for saving me.

HERCULES
I must admit I was frightened for you, watching those runaway horses. How do you feel?

IOLE
[Rising] Better! [Falters] I'm still trembling, I guess . . . [Looks at Hercules] What's the matter? Why do you sit and stare at me like that?

HERCULES
I don't know. So few women come this way.

IOLE
And so?

HERCULES
As long as you're here, I might as well. I've never seen a girl more beautiful.

IOLE
Oh . . .

HERCULES
I've come a long way. Seeing you was worth it!

IOLE
How simple men are—as if I were a plant or an animal! And still, I thank you, you know.

HERCULES
I'm telling the truth; don't thank me for it.

And now the same scene, as it was revoiced at Titra:

IOLE
Thank you! And I thank the Gods for providing me with such a strong man when I needed him!

HERCULES
I'll admit that the sight of those runaway horses had me worried about you. Are you all right?

IOLE
[Rising] Better! [Falters] Ohhh . . . My legs are still quite weak! [Looks at Hercules] Why do you stare at me? Is it so strange that a girl couldn't manage those horses?

HERCULES
Not in the least! I doubt if anyone could have controlled them.

IOLE
Then why stare?

HERCULES
I was looking at you. It's very difficult to find a girl as beautiful as you are.

IOLE
Oh. You say it so very simply—as if you were speaking of a plant or an animal. I almost think you're sincere!

HERCULES
I am sincere. I always speak the truth.

While the more literate qualities of the original dub cannot be discerned from this sample, this comparison does illustrate how well the Titra redub worked to emphasize traits of character in both Hercules and Iole, and made their rapport less stilted and more conversational. Hercules being an unemotional immortal, the earlier dub's characterization of him as "frightened" doesn't quite jibe, nor does it flatter him. Likewise, in contrast to the earlier dub's presentation of Iole as a dizzy girl grateful for compliments, the redub brings out her fire ("Is it so strange that a girl couldn't manage those horses?"), and she responds to Hercules' earnest appreciation of her beauty by teasing his sincerity. Even more impressive about the Titra dub is how well the rewritten English dialogue matches the lip movements of Sylva Koscina because, according to Reeves, the actress (who later learned to speak English quite well) spoke her lines on the set entirely in Italian. One would never guess this from the evidence onscreen.

Unfortunately, while preparing his version of *Hercules*, Levine failed to include his copyright notice in the animated title sequence, and the film fell into public domain in America after his death.

When *Hercules* and *Hercules Unchained* were reissued to American theaters in 1975 as a double feature, new 35 mm anamorphic prints were struck—from the negatives of the original ELDA dub. When the films were given their first home video release by Embassy in 1985, after Levine's retirement from the company, it was this original, imperfect dub of *Hercules* that found its way back into release. The Titra redub was legally available to any company with a presentable print, and it turned up on video a few years later, courtesy of VidAmerica. When VidAmerica and Image Entertainment joined forces to release *Hercules* as a widescreen LaserDisc—following the dissolution of Embassy Pictures in the late 1980s—the uncopyrighted, badly cropped, animated title sequence (evidently derived from a scratchy, warbly, 16 mm source) was combined with a sterling, letterboxed presentation of the ELDA dub, resulting in a third variant.



STEVE REEVES *demonstrates the gulf between reality and publicity while vacationing in France, 1958.*

Reverberations

"Pietro Francisci saved the Italian cinema with *Le fatiche di Ercole*, but nobody gives him credit for anything," Mario Bava later said, showing commendable loyalty. "Once the Americans saw it, they ordered 600 prints—30 for Chicago alone—and we had only 30 prints to our name!" [17]

When Bava claimed that Francisci "saved the Italian cinema" with *Le fatiche di Ercole*, he wasn't only speaking in terms of its commercial rewards. True, in terms of worldwide revenues, it became one of the most commercially successful Italian films of all time, earning more than $5,000,000 in the United States alone in its first release. Originally distributed by Warner Bros., *Hercules* would be subsequently reissued in America in 1964 by Levine's own company Embassy Pictures on a double bill with its sequel *Hercules Unchained*; and, as mentioned earlier, it was reissued again by Avco-Embassy in 1975—each time generating millions of new dollars. But most of that new money went to Levine.

Hercules brought an heroic end to the struggles of the Italian cinema by opening the floodgates to an endless number of cheaply made, highly profitable imitation films—*"pepla,"* as the French critics called them, referring to the short, pleat-skirted adornments favored by their heroes. *Hercules* pushed the first domino in a chain that would allow the Italian cinema to survive, even thrive, well into the mid-1960s.

The film's success soon attracted other kinds of producers and productions to Italy. "Soon the Americans understood that it behooved them to come here and make films for a quarter of what it cost back there," Bava reflected. "Such were the fortunes of the Italian cinema for the next fifteen years so that, in that period, thousands of people—stagehands, technicians, and actors—found steady work." [18]

In time, *Le fatiche di Ercole* began to be knocked by critics who conveniently lumped it together with all the *pepla* of increasing strangeness and decreasing quality that followed. But the colossal success of *Hercules* was not entirely due to Joseph E. Levine's inescapable showmanship; he was also selling one hell of a product. Forty years after its initial release, it's unimaginable that anyone could fail to appreciate the picture's style and polish and charm, or the fact that it puts considerably more than its meager budget onscreen. It is the definitive *peplum*, and Steve Reeves is the genre's definitive hero, and arguably one of the last actors of his generation to achieve the kind of "matinee idol" stardom that was falling out of favor in Hollywood and becoming the 20th century equivalent of myth.

Reeves may have been lifting hollow trees and bending rubber spears, but there was so much about his screen persona that clearly wasn't (and couldn't be) faked, that he had a unique and unmatchable quality as a screen hero. Women swooned as he extended his arms in widescreen supplication to Jupiter, and he also impressed a whole generation of children in ways that would have a far-reaching effect.

Interviewed by *Playboy*, Sylvester Stallone later reflected: "I remember seeing things like *On the Waterfront* and I'd always end up in a deep snore. But one day I saw Steve Reeves in *Hercules* and I thought, 'Hey, it's one thing for Brando to stand up to the union, but this weirdo with the beard and the big calves can pull down a temple all by himself. He's able to take on the entire Roman army using only the jawbone of an idiot, and I'd like to do that too!" [19]

Lou Ferrigno, who followed Reeves in the role of Hercules in a 1983 film directed by Luigi Cozzi, experienced a similar epiphany: "Steve Reeves was my childhood idol. I was terribly lonely and didn't have any friends. Watching films like *Hercules* was an escape for me. I longed to be just like him, and I used to sit for hours watching Steve Reeves play

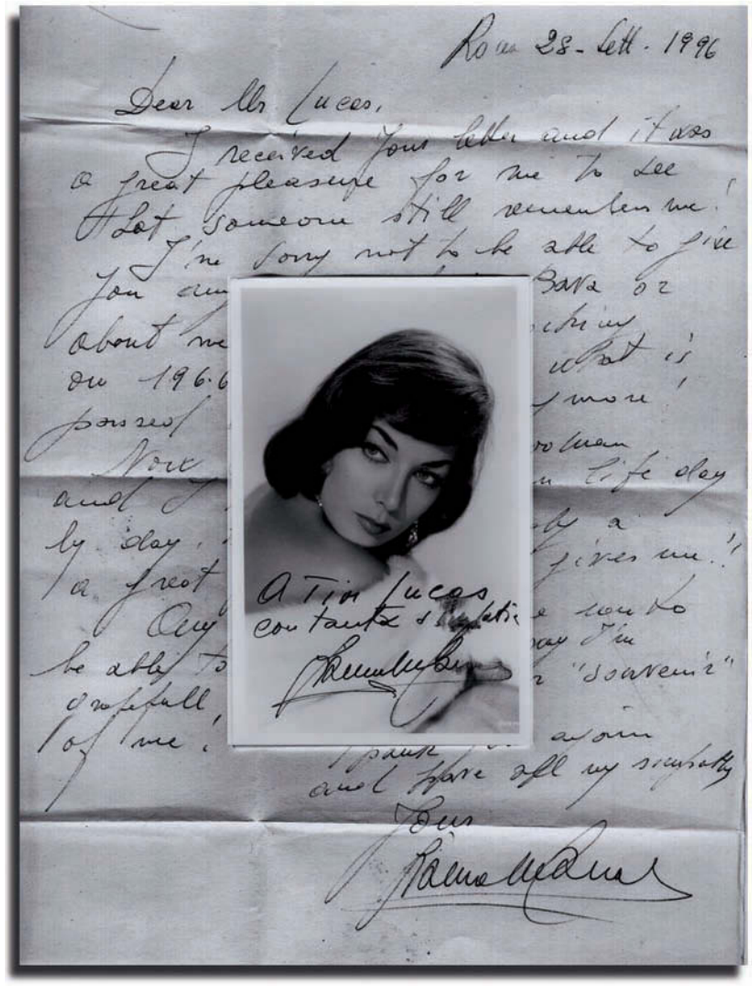
17 Abruzzese.

18 Ibid.

19 "The *Playboy* Interview: Sylvester Stallone," *Playboy,* September 1978.

[Hercules] on the screen. I started bodybuilding when I was 16 years old, because Reeves was a bodybuilder before he became an actor, and I wanted to be just like him. After emulating my hero, I became more self-confident . . . I was transformed from a skinny, lonely kid with a huge inferiority complex into a mature man with muscles and an acting career."

Reeves, of course, was only the nucleus of this transformative spark. He appeared in many competitions, many magazines, and many other films—sometimes with a more accentuated, fine-tuned physique, and sometimes in better-scripted pictures—but he would never equal the same inspirational effect that he would achieve in *Le fatiche di Ercole*. Certainly Pietro Francisci deserves credit for conceiving the film and co-scripting its highlights, but the co-author (with Reeves) of the images that define Hercules in the collective consciousness of our culture was Mario Bava. Without his peerless eye for phantasmagorical color and epic imagery, *Le fatiche di Ercole* might well have gone as unnoted by history as . . . *Athena*. Deep-down, Reeves (who remembered Bava as "a great cameraman and good for special effects")[20] must have understood this, because he kept Bava professionally close to him for as long as possible.


Roma 28-Sett.-1996

Dear Mr Lucas,

I received your letter and it was a great pleasure for me to see that someone still remembers me!

I'm sorry not to be able to give you any news of Mr. Bava or about me. I stopped working in 1966 and, for me, what is passed doesn't exist any more!

Now I am an old woman and I try to go on in life day by day, which is already a great gift that God gives me!

Anyway, forgive me for not being able to help you . . . I am grateful to you for your 'souvenirs' of me! Thank you again, and have all my sympathy.

Yours,

Gianna Maria Canale.

SIGNED PHOTO *and letter to the author from Gianna Maria Canale.*

Le fatiche di Ercole marked the last collaboration—at least the last *official* collaboration—of Mario Bava and Gianna Maria Canale. One of the most beautiful stars of the Italian cinema, Canale could almost have been the Galatea for which Lionello Santi's production company was later named; she would appear in a number of their pictures. In the hands of her Svengali, Riccardo Freda, she had risen to starring roles almost overnight, and by the time of *I vampiri*, she had known the pleasure of seeing her name above the title. But she separated from Freda in 1959 and apparently retired from the screen in 1964, never to be heard from again.

There were published reports that her retirement was forced by an automobile accident that left her partially disfigured, but these are disproved by the testimony of producer Alfredo Leone. According to Leone, Canale was still a striking beauty when she and Freda, and their daughter Jacqueline (nicknamed "Rusty" for her auburn hair), invited him to join them for dinner at a Spanish restaurant in the early 1970s.

"Ah, she was beautiful," Leone marvels at the memory of Canale, more than thirty years later. "They were separated, I guess, but still friendly. I'll never forget, she came to the table wearing a see-through blouse—without a bra. Freda seated her across the table from me—directly in my line of vision, you know?—and he spent the whole dinner watching me like a hawk, daring me to take even one look at her! But how could you help it? They had an 8-year-old daughter, Rusty, whom they raised as a boy. She was an equestrienne, I remember; had a lot of talent in that area—a beautiful little girl too, with hair like her mother's. But they raised her as a boy, dressed her like a boy. I'd ask him, 'Riccardo, why do you treat this beautiful little girl like a boy?' He turned to her and said, 'Tell him, Rusty: Are you a boy or a girl?' And she would answer, 'I'm a *boy*!' On another occasion, I visited one of Freda's sets, when he was filming in Spain, and he actually let his daughter direct! He hated actors; he would turn his back to them during a take. He was this terrible authority figure on the set, showing everyone this great contempt, but then Gianna Maria would come to the set and slap him right across the face!"

While researching this book, I was able to trace Gianna Maria Canale to an address in Rome. I wrote to her, requesting an interview about her years as Italy's reigning Queen of High Drama. Some time later, after enough time had passed for me to forget that I was awaiting a reply, I received the following letter, handwritten in red ink, dated September 28, 1996:

"Dear Mr. Lucas,

I received your letter and it was a great pleasure for me to see that someone still remembers me!

I'm sorry not to be able to give you any news of Mr. Bava or about me. I stopped working in 1966 and, for me, what is passed doesn't exist any more!

Now I am an old woman and I try to go on in life day by day, which is already a great gift that God gives me!

Anyway, forgive me for not being able to help you . . . I am grateful to you for your 'souvenirs' of me! Thank you again, and have all my sympathy.

Yours,

Gianna Maria Canale."

Città di notte

First released: March 6, 1958
B&W, 1.66:1, 110 minutes

Production: Trionfalcine. **Distributor**: Titanus. Germany: Ein Mädchen aus Rom, "A Girl From Rome," German TV, 9/11/62.

The Golden Age of Italian Fantasy had begun, but the general public had yet to realize it. *I vampiri* had not been a commercial success, and *Le fatiche di Ercole* was taking shape in the cutting room of Mario Serandrei. In the meantime, the popular essence of the Italian cinema was composed of the genres which had taken root in the postwar years: neorealism and romantic melodrama. Bava's next film as a cameraman would represent a vacation of sorts from the realms of horror and mythology, but like *Natale al campo 119* and *Il viale della speranza*, it would be a neorealistic study of people's lives as lived on the plane of dreams.

On two of the films which Bava had photographed for director Giorgio Bianchi earlier in the decade, the assistant director had been Leopoldo Trieste (1917–2003), a young writer whose charismatic personality had

20 Helmer.

21 Leopoldo Trieste also appeared, years later, as the ill-fated entomologist Paolo Fosatti in Bava's *Ecologia del delitto/A Bay of Blood* (1971).

22 Fábio Vellozo, email to the author, January 6, 2006.

led to acting roles in *Lo sceicco bianco/ The White Sheik* (1952) and *I vitelloni* (1953) for his friend, Federico Fellini.[21] Bava's next invitation to work came from Trieste, who was about to direct his first feature film for Trionfalcine producer Giovanni Addessi. Partly in response to what he could see happening in America, with a new generation of young stars like Marlon Brando, James Dean, Natalie Wood and Sandra Dee staking out their territory onscreen and winning international stardom, Trieste had the hope of inspiring renewed interest among young Italian moviegoers in their national cinema by making a film that more specifically addressed their obstacles and frustrations, as well as their ambitions, a film set in a town they would recognize as their own.

Based on Trieste's original story and screenplay, *Città di notte* ("City of Night") is the story of a group of young existentialists determined to break into the world of theater—not so much out of personal ambition or talent, but to win independence from their parents, who are inattentive or indifferent to them when not being openly antagonistic. Not all of the picture's "new faces" went on to a lasting career in the cinema. One exception was Antonio De Teffé (1929–2004), who starred in many Italian and Spanish horror films, Westerns, and thrillers during the 1960s and '70s under the pseudonym "Anthony Steffen."

Interviewed by Brazilian journalist Fábio Vellozo, De Teffé remembered Bava as "*simpatico, molto simpatico,*" and spoke with enthusiasm about his facility with the camera and how Bava—unlike the nervous Trieste—would tell jokes all the time to calm the rather unexperienced cast and keep the mood on the set light. Vellozo also made a point of asking De Teffé if Bava ever took over the direction of certain scenes for Leopoldo Trieste, as he had done for many other directors. The actor's response was "Probably, yes." Vellozo stressed to me, while offering these quotes, that De Teffé's fond remarks about Bava were "incredible, as he wasn't very keen on making compliments."[22]



MARIO BAVA *photographs a theater audience watching a performance by the young leads of CITTÀ DI NOTTE.*



PATRIZIA BINI *is scolded by Antonio De Teffè in CITTÀ DI NOTTE, Leopoldo Trieste's drama of Italian youth aiming for success on stage.*

Corrado Bartoloni remembers Leopoldo Trieste as a perfectionist: "We had to shoot 12–13 takes of every scene; everything had to be just right. For this movie, Bava invented a round light that fit onto the camera, in order to take away all the shadows, even when the camera dollied. Anyway, the movie was not a success . . ."

Indeed, Trieste's directorial debut fared poorly at the Italian boxoffice, earning only 31 million *lire* [$19,300]. He would direct only one other feature (1959's *Il peccato degli anni verdi* with Alida Valli and Sergio Fantoni) before turning exclusively to acting. Though *Città di notte* was seen by relatively few people and is quite difficult to see today, it is said to have been the most decisive influence on the film then taking shape in Fellini's mind: the epoch-making *La dolce vita* (1960).

Though Bava likely accepted this assignment with the notion that it was a "serious" picture of some probable consequence, unlike his other recent jobs, and thus probably a good career movie, the inverse proved to be true. The classy *Città di notte* was destined to become a footnote in his career of demigods and monsters, while his next film, another descent into the pulp pits and not a particularly good one, would introduce an entirely new genre of Roman filmmaking. Mario Bava was about to launch the Italian science fiction film.



ITALIAN *due-foglia, art by A. Biffignandi (Studio Favalli).*

LA MORTE VIENE DALLO SPAZIO

The Day the Sky Exploded

LIKE STEVE REEVES, Mario Bava was rewarded for his work on *Le fatiche di Ercole* with a simple paycheck. There would be no future dividends from its success, only the possibility that its popularity would bring him more opportunities to work. At this stage of his career, however, Bava's range of talents was already so well-known within the industry that he was always working, always in demand—it was the Italian cinema itself that continued to inhabit a twilight of uncertainty.

In late 1957 and early 1958, Pietro Francisci's Hercules film was being shaped in the editing room by Mario Serandrei, still six months away from its world-shaking success. Likewise, *I vampiri*'s disappointing performance at the Italian boxoffice had not resulted in a demand for imitations; the horror genre remained as moribund in Italy as it had always been. It was an in-between time when Italian production companies were scrambling madly about looking for the next escapist trend.

Strange as it may seem, in 1958—more than half a century since Georges Méliès took movie audiences on their first trip to the moon—the Italian cinema had yet to produce a science fiction film.[1] William Cameron Menzies' 1953 film *Invaders From Mars* had not been released in Rome until 1957, when the retitled *Gli invasori spaziali* ("The Space Invaders") met with considerable success. Consequently, Italian screens ran riot with such fabulous titles as *Meteora infernale* ("The Hellish Meteor"), *Assalto della terra* ("Assault on the Earth"), and *La cosa da un altro mondo*—or, as they are better known in their native America, *It Came From Outer Space* (1953), *Them!* (1954), and *The Thing From Another World* (1951). It was also in September of that year that the first Italian science fiction journal, *Oltre il Cielo*, published its premiere issue. And so it was that, in the midst of this explosion of newfound Italian interest in science fiction subjects, Mario Bava came to make a desperate little movie entitled *La morte viene dallo spazio*.



MISSION *Control at Cape Shark.*

Synopsis

In response to Russia's 1957 launching of the Sputnik satellite, the world's first manned space flight is quickly mounted at Cape Shark. From a pool of candidates from different world countries, American pilot John MacLaren is chosen to become the first man in space.[2] *The object of his six-day mission is to orbit the moon, while attended by twenty-five monitoring stations around the world. After a tearful separation from his wife Mary ("We'll be in different worlds, John") and young son Dennis, MacLaren climbs aboard his X-Z rocket and blasts off at 3:00 a.m. After exiting the Earth's atmosphere, something strange occurs inside John's capsule: unknown forces interfere with the astronaut's consciousness. The scientists at Mission Control, beginning to lose visual contact, advise him to eject. He does so, but on his own initiative—he has already lost contact with Earth. Unfortunately, in his disoriented state, MacLaren ejects before defusing the rocket's atomic power source, which has left the equivalent of an atomic bomb speeding out into space toward a collision with . . . what?*

Shortly after John's successful return to Earth, the deadly answer becomes apparent. The rocket has exploded in a belt of asteroids, fusing them together into one great mass that is now hurtling towards planet Earth! Animals of all kinds, wild and domestic (including Mission Control's mascot, a dog named Geiger), begin to run in migratory packs. A large sphere appears in the sky, surrounded by a gigantic halo, in the hours before sundown. In time, other bright spheres are manifest in the sky. As the time of ultimate collision draws near, the governments of the world force their populations into subterranean shelters . . . but the intense heat of the nearing threat creates spontaneous combustions that force the hysterical masses to spill back into the streets.

After tussling with guilt over starting the whole mess, John conceives the notion of calculating the asteroid's coordinates and firing explosive missiles at it from various continents while it remains outside the Earth's atmosphere. One of the Mission Control scientists, Dr. Randowsky, is driven to religious zealotry under pressure and kills two of his colleagues, while spouting Holy Scripture. The missiles are fired and John's plan succeeds.

The asteroid mass is decimated.

Earth is saved.

Even Geiger comes home.[3]

La morte viene dallo spazio

"Death Comes From Outer Space"
Filmed at Cinecittà and on location
Early 1958
First released: September 4, 1958
B&W, 1.66:1, 82 minutes

Production: Royal Film, Lux Film (Rome), Lux Compagnie Cinématographique de France (Paris). Producer: Guido Giambartolomei. Directors: Paolo Heusch, (uncredited) Mario Bava. Assistant directors: Franco Rosetti, Alain Roux. Screenplay: Marcello Coscia, Sandro Continenza, based on a story by Virgilio Sabel. Director of photography: Mario Bava. Camera operator: Corrado Bartoloni. Camera assistants: Uraldo [Ubaldo] Terzano, Luigi Giorgio. Art direction: Beni Montresor. Special effects: Mario Baja [Mario Bava], A.I.C. Makeup: Angelo Malandruco. Hairdresser: Ada Palombi. Production managers: Armando Morani, Ione Tuzi. Editor: Otello Colangeli. Music: Carlo Rustichelli, conducted by Pier Luigi Urbini. Sound: Alain Roux. Sound effects: Venanzio Biraschi, Oscar Archangelis, (uncredited) Carlo Rustichelli. Distributor: Lux Film.

Additional Credits: English dubbing: William De Lane Lea.

Paul Hubschmid (John MacLaren), Madeline Fischer (Katy Dandridge), Fiorelli Mari (Mary), Ivo Garrani (Herbert Weisser), Darrio [*sic*] Michaëlis (Peter LaDuc/Pierre LeDucq), Sam Galter (Randowsky), Jean-Jacques Delbo (Sergei Boetnikov), Peter Meersman (Gen. Wandorf), Massimo Zeppieri (Dennis), Giacomo Rossi-Stuart (Stewart), Mario Merlini, Anne Berval, Richard McNamara.

Belgium: *Het Gavaar Komt Uitt de Ruimte*
France: *Le Danger vient de l'Espace*, Lux Cinématographique, 7/15/59
UK: *Death Comes From Outer Space*, Archway Film Distribution Ltd., 1960
US: *The Day the Sky Exploded*, Excelsior Pictures Corporation, 9/27/61

Production

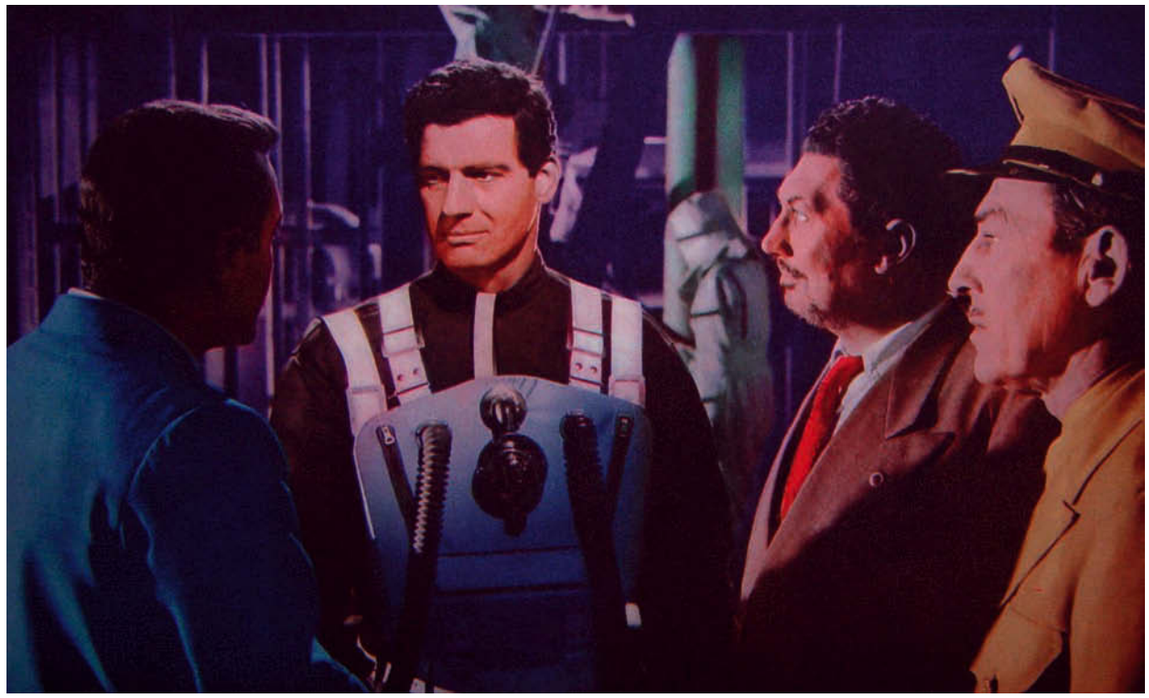
In some respects, *La morte viene dallo spazio* is a blatant copy of Hammer's feature-length adaptations of Nigel Kneale's celebrated "Quatermass" BBC teleplays: *The Quatermass Xperiment/The Creeping Unknown* (1955) and *Quatermass 2/Enemy From Space* (1957). The synopsis shows that screenwriters Marcello Coscia and Alessandro Continenza were familiar with both films; *The Quatermass Xperiment* told the story of the world's first manned space flight, focusing on an astronaut's metamorphosis into an alien species after his rocket returns to Earth following exposure to strange waves in space; its sequel, *Quatermass 2* (to simplify its plot wildly) involved the threat of small missile-shaped meteors falling to Earth. The climax, in which Gérard Landry's Dr. Randowsky succumbs to a last-minute outburst of murderous, religious mania, is equally derivative, based on Walter Brooke's similar breakdown in Byron Haskin's George Pal production, *Conquest of Space* (1955).

These borrowings aside, *La morte viene dallo spazio* was also undertaken in the spirit of originality and opportunism. The film was also primarily motivated, as the synopsis immediately implies, by the international sense of crisis which followed the Russian launchings of Sputnik I and II (in October and November 1957, respectively) and that of the first American satellite, Explorer I (on January 31, 1958)—one of the first international crises to be felt around the world through the immediacy of live broadcast television. The same impetus inspired American producer–director Roger Corman to prep his own treatment of the theme, *War of the Satellites*, which began shooting on December 9, 1957. *La morte viene dallo spazio* went into production around the same time, and the role that television played in its conception is apparent from the very first scene, imitating a live newscast from "Cape Shark."

Whose idea it was to make this film remains a mystery, but since the script was based on a story by Virgilio Sabel, he is the most logical candidate. One of the leading directors of Italian documentary shorts during the postwar years, Sabel had previously worked with Mario Bava on some important occasions. He was the screenwriter of Arturo Gemmiti's *Montecassino nel cerchio di fuoco* (1946, Bava's first work as a cameraman after the war), but more importantly, he was the director of *Una lezione di geometria* ("A Lesson in Geometry"), a 1948 documentary which had showcased the full range of Bava's genius as a cameraman, special effects artist, and animator. This short had proved so popular that Sabel was prompted to make another short in the same mold, *Una lezione di acustica* ("A Lesson in Acoustics," 1951), but it is not known whether or not Bava also contributed to it; it certainly covered some of the same ground as Bava's own *L'orrecchio* (1946). With a science fiction idea in mind, Sabel certainly would have taken it to Bava before anyone else, because only he had the special effects know-how to determine whether or not such a concept was possible to film in Italy.

The film's principal screenwriter also had previous working experience with Bava and his closest professional allies. Alessandro "Sandro" Continenza (1920–96) was a prolific scenarist who had written principally for Totò, Steno, and Riccardo Freda. After contributing to three Totò scripts, working his way up from dialogue to story to screenplay credit, Continenza scripted *La vendetta di Aquila Nera/Revenge of the Black Eagle* (1951) for Freda and *Le avventure di Giacomo Casanova* (1955) for Steno, which Bava photographed. At the time *La morte viene dallo spazio* was made, Continenza had recently scripted *Agguato a Tangeri/Trapped in Tangiers* (1957) for Freda; since we know that Freda and Bava were sharing confidences at this time, it is feasible that Freda could have recommended Continenza, had Bava mentioned his involvement in a production that was seeking a screenwriter. In the years following this film, Continenza wrote the Steno horror comedy *Tempi duri per i vampiri* (1959), numerous *pepla* in the early 1960s (including Bava's own *Ercole al centro della terra*, 1961), various spy and Spaghetti Western films of the later '60s, and some well-regarded Spanish exploitation items of the early 1970s, including Jorge Grau's *Ceremonia Sangrienta/Legend of Blood Castle* (1973) and *No profanar nel sueño de los muertos/Let Sleeping Corpses Lie* (1974). On many of these films, Continenza's writing partner was Marcello Coscia, who made his screenwriting debut with *La morte viene dallo spazio.*

Credited with the film's direction was Paolo Heusch (b. 1926, Rome), who had made his directorial debut the previous year with *L'uomo facile* ("A Simple Man," released 1958), a boxing drama starring Maurizio Arena. Heusch's varied career would continue with *Lycanthropus* (1961, credited to "Richard Benson" and released in the US and UK, respectively, as *Werewolf in a Girl's Dormitory* and *I Married a Werewolf*); a film of Pier Paolo Pasolini's novel *Una vita violenta* ("A Violent Life," 1962); the

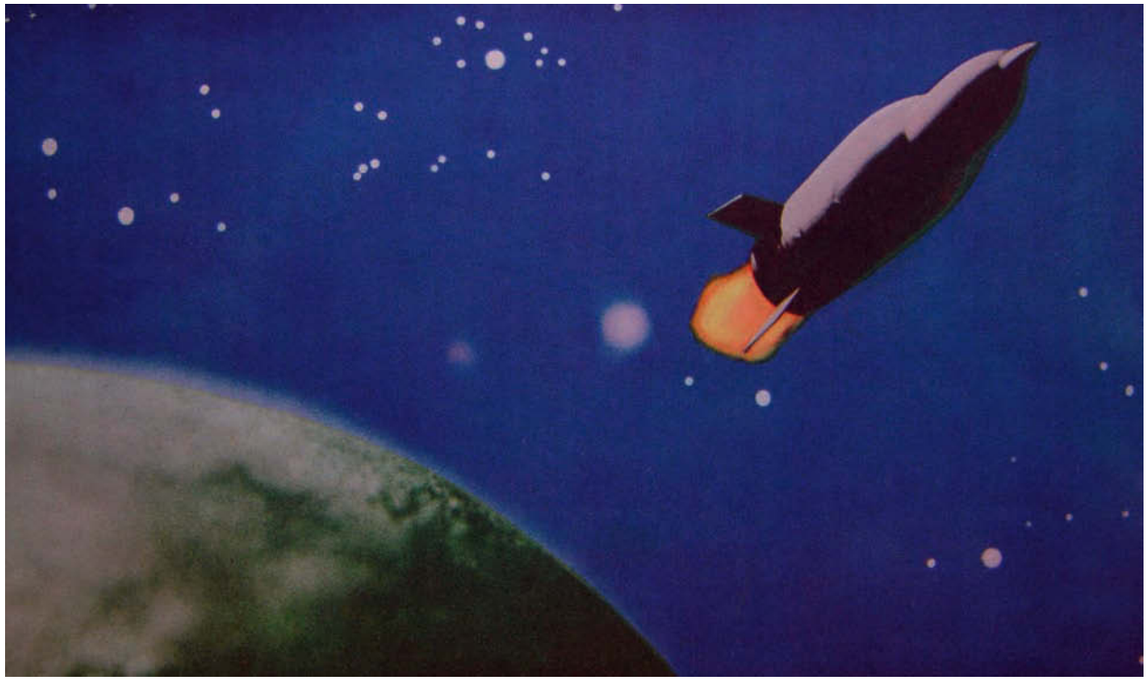


JOHN MACLAREN *(Paul Hubschmid, center) is summoned to become the first man in space.*

1 In 1939, Mario Mattoli made a comedy entitled *1,000 chilometri al minuto* ["1,000 Kilometers per Minute"], which featured scientists involved in early space research, but this aspect had little bearing on the actual plot.

2 The first man in space is generally accepted to be the Russian cosmonaut Yuri Alekseyevich Gagarin, who was launched into orbit around the Earth on April 12, 1961.

3 As film historian Tom Weaver noted upon reading this synopsis, "Heat belt, Earth threatened, religious nut, missles fired skyward to put out the fire . . . This is *Voyage to the Bottom of the Sea* (1961) to a T!"



A BAVA *matte shot tracks the rocket as it leaves Earth's atmosphere.*

Totò comedy *Il Comandante* ("The Commander," 1963); *Una raffica di piombo* ("A Shower of Lead," 1965), and others. Ernesto Gastaldi, the screenwriter of *Lycanthropus*, remembers Heusch in colorful terms: "Paolo was a very nice man . . . homosexual, very sweet, and fond of reclining on sofas in the same position as the famous portrait of Paolina Borghese—so everyone called him 'Paolina.' He was a diligent director." I have not been able to determine whether or not Paolo Heusch is still living; he has not directed a film since *Un colpo da mille miliardi* ("A Billion Dollar Heist," 1966).

However, according to cast member Ivo Garrani, "That movie [*La morte viena dallo spazio]* was *completely* directed by Bava. Really, Paolo Heusch didn't do very much on that set. I can say that I am in the three movies that launched all three of the genres of Italian fantastic cinema: *La morte viene dallo spazio*, *Le fatiche di Ercole* and *La maschera del demonio*—and they *all* owe their success to Mario Bava!"

Thus, while *La maschera del demonio* and even *Caltiki il mostro immortale* have been declared as Bava's first work as a director, that distinction—given Garrani's testimony—actually belongs to this movie, making Mario Bava the true father of Italian science fiction cinema. Bava's control over this picture was apparently well-known within the Italian film industry; when I referred to *La maschera del demonio* as Bava's directorial debut while interviewing production assistant Armando Govoni, he emphatically corrected me: "*La maschera* was not Bava's first film as a director; he had already directed a picture for Paolo Heusch."

It would appear, then, that Bava was always intended to serve as the film's actual director, with Heusch—a man of greater official experience in the position—hired to serve as a "beard" or a "front," because the production required the participation of a proven director to attract funding.

Cast & Crew

Cast in the lead role of astronaut John MacLaren was Swiss-born actor Paul Hubschmid. Born in Schoenenwerd in 1917, Hubschmid was active in Swiss and German films since 1938; he enjoyed a moderate success in Hollywood films in the late 1940s and early 1950s under the name Paul Christian, starring in one of the key science fiction films of



HERBERT WEISSER *(Ivo Garrani, center) stays in communication with MacLaren as his rocket penetrates the veil of space.*











INTRIGUINGLY *designed fotobuste from the Italian release.*













BELGIAN *affiche, art by Georges Allard.*

that period, *The Beast From 20,000 Fathoms* (1953). Under his own name, Hubschmid was subsequently featured as the lead in Fritz Lang's Indian diptych, *The Tiger of Eschnapur* and *The Indian Tomb* (1959), and he made a rare return to American films in 1970's *Skullduggery*. He retired from acting in 1992. He and his ex-wife, actress Eva Renzi (the co-star of Dario Argento's *L'uccello dalle piume di cristallo/The Bird With the Crystal Plumage*, 1970), are the parents of actress Anouschka Renzi. Hubschmid later remarried to Swiss actress Irene Scheisser. He died on December 31, 2001 of a pulmonary embolism.

Familiar from earlier work with Bava are the aforementioned Ivo Garrani (his only contemporary role in a Bava film) and Dario Michaëlis, the Argentinian actor who had played the dashing young hero of *I vampiri*, seen here with his natural, darker hair color.

La morte viene dallo spazio was also the first of several Bava films to feature British-Italian actor Giacomo Rossi-Stuart. Born August 25, 1931, the handsome, jut-jawed Rossi-Stuart entered the cinema through modelling and appearances in *fotoromanzi* publications. Prior to this screen appearance, he had small roles in Roy Ward Baker's *Morning Departure* (1950, a veritable remake of Francesco De Robertis' *Uomini sul fondo*, about the attempts to rescue a manned submarine trapped on the ocean floor), King Vidor's *War and Peace* (1956), and William Fairchild's war drama *The Silent Enemy* (1958).

The most complete cast listings for this film also include the name of Richard McNamara, who would later establish himself as one of the pre-eminent Rome-based directors of English-dubbed film soundtracks. It's anyone's guess which character he plays, or if he appears only as a voice on the dubbed soundtrack. The English version of this film, *The Day the Sky Exploded*, was not dubbed at Titra in America and the difference in quality is sometimes painful to hear. For example, the apocalyptic crowd scenes of the film's climax are made risible by a recurring tape loop of a woman's panicked cry of "My baby! My baby!"



US *half-sheet.*

La morte viene dallo spazio also marked Bava's second and final collaboration with the gifted young art director of *I vampiri,* Beni Montresor. Montresor would continue to work intermittently in motion pictures as an art director, but in 1961, he launched a successful second career as an award-winning illustrator (and sometimes author) of children's books. Among his books are *House of Flowers House of Stars*, *Bedtime!* (the story of a child who must learn to cope with his nighttime fears), and a collection of Neapolitan fairy tales. In 1965, his illustrations for Beatrice Schenk de Regnier's book *May I Bring a Friend?* were awarded the prestigious Caldecott Medal. In the 1970s, he wrote and directed two independent features: *Pilgrimage* (1972, starring Cliff De Young) and *La messe dorée/The Golden Mass* (1975, starring Lucia Bosé). In later years, Montresor ascended to outstanding acclaim in the world of opera—directing (and also designing sets and costumes for) countless productions at La Scala, the New York Metropolitan Opera, and other famous theaters throughout the world. He died on October 11, 2001 at the age of 75.

Photography & Special Effects

Bava's true status as director of *La morte viene dallo spazio* should be obvious to anyone who sees it. If we subtract its stock footage and special effects sequences, there is very little is left to support Heusch's signature—just the melodramatic dialogue scenes, most of which take place in a claustrophobic control room barely large enough to accommodate ten people, and an impoverished exterior scene of a group of the same thirty people running repeatedly through a single alley. Bava's moody, chiaroscuro lighting notwithstanding, these dramatic scenes are pretty miserable, borrowing every possible cliché from American romance pictures to prod the story along; in the worst case, Peter makes a bet that he can thaw frigid co-worker Katie with a kiss within six days, not realizing that she has overheard the bet on the office intercom, seriously complicating their genuine feelings for one another. ("You know something," he purrs to her, "when you're not immersed in mathematics, Katie, the metamorphosis is staggering!")

Bava was not only the cameraman and special effects designer, but he was also responsible for the film's most impressive achievement: the manipulation of existing newsreel footage to tell the story of an imminent global

catastrophe that never took place—a task very much akin to the fake WWII newsreels he had concocted with his father at the Istituto LUCE. Nearly 60% of *La morte viene dallo spazio* consists of stock footage documenting dozens of completely unrelated events, originating from different time frames and countries: shots of Jeeps, mobilized troops, control towers, revolving antennae, rockets, technicians from various countries pushing buttons and speaking into microphones, explosions, animal migrations, elephant stampedes, gigantic blazes, and endless shots of test missile launches—Atlases, Little Joes, Thors, Redstones, and Vanguards. The material was expertly edited together by Bava and Otello Colangeli. [4]

Michael Lennick, a Canadian special effects designer and producer–director of the Discovery Channel series *Rocket Science*, comments on this stock footage: "Most of those early launches tended to blow up on the pad or shortly after liftoff—especially the Vanguards, the tall, skinny, dark rockets that figure so prominently here. It was a Vanguard that blew up quite spectacularly on live TV in late 1957, during the US attempt to match Sputnik. (That was also the first live launch—well, near-launch—I ever saw. It could only go up, so to speak, from there.) And the Atlas? Don't even talk about the Atlas. The first US intercontinental missile, and the first one to be man-rated for orbital missions, the Atlas suffered something like fourteen catastrophic failures in twenty test launches, including one during which the first guy to ride one, John Glenn, was in the viewing stand along with the other Mercury astronauts. In other words, I've never seen so many stock shots of the very few successful launches—especially the Vanguards—collected in one place. Cool *and* ironic."

The anonymous critic for Britain's *Monthly Film Bulletin* was so impressed by the film's utilization of found footage that he hailed *Death Comes From Outer Space* (the literal British release title) as "the stock-shot film *par excellence*."

The special effects Bava created for the film are modest, but nevertheless impressive, especially in contrast with the shoddy production values that glower from the film's non-illusory passages. Bava executed a number of glass shots for the film, including one of Moscow (using a minaret clipped from the pages of *National Geographic*), the "Mt. Hula" observatory (a massive telescope clipped from *Popular Science*), and various shots of the X-Z in flight.

The blast-off sequence was achieved with almost pathetic simplicity: a stationary shot of the rocket (another magazine clipping glass matte) was overlapped with a strobing semi-sphere of light via double-exposure. After a cutaway to a reaction shot of the Mission Control scientists, the same shot of the rocket was combined with a billowing smoke effect conjured by pouring a bucket of white leaded powder into an aquarium.

To place the "large sphere surrounded by a massive halo" in the skies over various cities, Bava simply projected slides of world landmarks onto an opaque silk screen, with a brute light positioned behind it. The frightening asteroid mass that terrorizes Earth appears to have been nothing more threatening than a large sponge, with chunks torn out, silhouetted with backlighting. The truly impressive climactic scene—in which the threat is destroyed in space by the orchestrated bombardment of dozens of missiles—was achieved by overlaying a shot of the "asteroid" with multiple exposures. Bava took the footage of this shot, wound it back in his father's Mitchell camera (his preferred camera for effects shooting because it was "rock steady"), and shot numerous additional exposures of backyard/homemade rocket models (probably as few as one to three at a time, for greater control) launched on an arc away from the camera. By photographing the trajectories of these homemade missiles against a black surface, only the trails of their exhaust were picked up by the camera. The resulting spectacle resembles nothing less than the moment of conception, and it is most impressive when viewed on a big screen.



RANDOWSKY *(Gérard Landry) and Maclaren attend the death of Weisser (Ivo Garrani).*

Music

The film's urgent and progressive score, which utilized acoustic and electronic instruments as well as electric non-musical devices used to musical and ambient ends, was the work of composer Carlo Rustichelli (1916–2004). Born in Carpi, near Modena, on Christmas Eve, Rustichelli was the father of actress/singer Alida Chelli and best-known for his many film scores for Pietro Germi, including *Divorzio all'italiana/Divorce Italian Style* (1961), *Sedotta e abbandonata/Seduced and Abandoned* (1964), and *Alfredo, Alfredo* (1972), as well as Pier Paolo Pasolini's masterpiece *Il vangelo secondo Matteo/The Gospel According to St. Matthew* (1964). Riccardo Freda, whose films *Le leggende di Piave* (1952) and *I giganti della Tessaglia/The Giants of Thessaly* (1960) Rustichelli scored, once described him as, "the only true musician of the Italian cinema . . . a man of tremendous culture and sensibility . . . with an extraordinary sense of the cinema." [5]

Mario Bava agreed. In the 1960s, Rustichelli would score three of Bava's finest films—*La frusta e il corpo/The Whip and the Body* (1963), *Sei donne per l'assassino/Blood and Black Lace* (1964), and *Operazione paura/Kill, Baby . . . Kill!* (1966), as well as his episode of the TV miniseries *Odissea* (1968)—and

stand out, above all the rest, as his definitive musical collaborator.

Rustichelli described how he was recruited into the ranks of motion picture composers: "I took my degree in piano at the Bologna Philharmonic Academy, and in 1940, I moved to Rome where I studied musical composition with *Maestro* Dobici. I worked as his assistant conductor, and one day, in 1947, two persons came to my dressing room at the theater in Terni. One of those two men was Luigi Rovere, a producer from Torino, and the other was the director Pietro Germi, all of whose films I would score beginning with *Gioventù perduta* in 1947. My life completely changed. I ruined a career that might have become very important!" In fact, Rustichelli had previously written the music for one other film, Marco Elter's *Gli ultimi filibustieri/The Last Filibuster* (1942), but it took Germi's appeal to rope him into the cinema as a career.

Bava and Rustichelli had previously worked together once before *La morte viene dallo spazio,* on Mario Costa's *Perdonami!,* which had yielded a chart-topping title song performed by Claudio Villa. "I don't remember exactly when I first met Bava, but it was probably on that occasion," Rustichelli supposed. "I must tell you that Bava was a good director, a great camera expert. Even Pietro Germi—who had a very difficult character and wasn't prone to giving praise—appreciated him a lot. He always told me, speaking about the directors who didn't know how the camera worked, that Bava and [Mauro] Bolognini were two good examples of the contrary, directors who knew the camera very well."

During the scoring of *La morte viene dallo spazio,* Rustichelli reported directly to Bava. He explains how composers were hired to score films in the Italian system: "Generally it was the director who chose the composer, in agreement with the music publishers—and sometimes with the producer, or the screenwriter. In a way, we composers of film soundtracks had to pass an exam for every film we did, throughout our careers. I must confess that it's easy to work with the good directors, but in my experience, it was crazy to work with the bad ones or the less important ones. They were always very conscious of their inferiority and, because they knew that I had worked with people like Pietro Germi, Mario Monicelli, and Nanni Loy, they presumed I would do a hasty, half-hearted job for them. They were wrong, because I always do my best. I worked on some *pepla*—historical movies—where I made a big contribution, because usually in those kinds of films, produced with low budgets, there were whole sequences that were saved by the music, because the music is like a narcotic, a drug; sometimes it diverts one's attention so that the audience doesn't notice the errors, or what is missing."



ITALIAN *locandina, art by A. Biffignandi (Studio Favalli).*

Rustichelli not only scored *La morte viene dallo spazio* but also improvised many of the space-age sound effects heard in the picture. "I went into the recording studio with a fire extinguisher, a blender, and a vacuum cleaner, to do those special sound effects, because there were asteroids, stars . . . I had to invent something new, I was a pioneer of this kind of music. Musically speaking, I must say that it's almost physiological for me to create music; I compose on impulse, shall we say, so I don't know if it's exactly my craft . . . When you study music, what you get is a technical knowledge, but at a certain point, besides having the necessary grounding in technique, there must also be something unexplainable, something personal. There are some very promising composers who stop at a certain time, because they don't have that certain 'something.' It was difficult to create a new sound for this particular genre; you must remember that this was very crude science fiction; it wasn't a *2001*, or a *Star Wars*."

Distribution

La morte viene dallo spazio may be tatty entertainment, but it's hard not to respond with grudging admiration to its game creativity and industrious spirit. In a sense, it is the closest the cinema has come to forging a *faux* documentary space threat along the lines of Orson Welles' legendary 1938 radio broadcast, *The War of the Worlds.* Despite its more ambitious

4 Bava and Colangeli would work together again, almost a decade later, on the Viking film *I coltelli del vendicatore/Knives of the Avenger* (1966).

5 Jacques Lourcelles and Simon Misrahi, "Entretien avec Riccardo Freda," *Prèsence du Cinema* 17, Spring 1963, 11-30.



FRENCH *affiche, art by Georges Allard.*

scale and spectacle, it looks far less expensive than the occasionally neorealistic *I vampiri*. Considering that Bava was able to complete half of that film in only two days, the mind boggles at how little time must have been invested in this production.

The picture opened in Italy on September 4, 1958, earning less than 150 million *lire* [$94,000], which undoubtedly recovered its production costs, but without adding enough to suggest much public interest in more of the same. Although art director Beni Montresor took the commercial precaution of printing every visible sign in English, the film languished on the shelf without an American release until September 27, 1961.

The US distributor, Excelsior Pictures Corporation, had only a small number of previous releases to its credit, none of them successful—so the company was not wealthy enough to make a large number of prints and get the film into many theaters before word-of-mouth could kill it. They did, however, go the extra mile by rewarding young ticket-buyers with non-functional red-and-yellow rockets stamped with the name of the movie.

The film's limited commercial prospects were unimportant; the important thing was that *La morte viene dallo spazio* made back its meager investment and planted an Italian flag, however humble, in the lunar soil of science fiction cinema.

Only two months after its theatrical release, Totò came along with the first Italian spoof of the science fiction craze: *Totò nella luna* ("*Totò in the Moon*"), released on November 28, 1958. I have not been able to screen this picture, but it was directed by Steno, and written by Steno with Lucio Fulci and *La morte viene dallo spazio*'s Sandro Continenza—all friends of Bava. The likelihood of Bava's involvement is also stressed by the nature of Totò's previous picture, *Totò a Parigi* ("*Totò in Paris*," 1958), a "prince and the pauper" comedy starring the popular comic as a vagabond and as a wealthy Marquis. The film's twinning effects are said to be some of the most sophisticated of their kind, even by today's standards—and considering Bava's previous exemplary work of this nature in Mario Soldati's *Quel bandito sono io!*, he would have been the go-to technician to achieve such an effect. Considering Bava's comparatively relaxed shooting schedule in early 1958, and the fact that his matte paintings later complemented cameraman Marco Scarpelli's work on Giuseppe Vari's *I normanni/The Normans* (1962), Bava was almost certainly the artist recruited to execute the matte paintings and other trick shots required by both of these films.

According to film historian James Cheney, who wrote about the picture on the *European Film Review* website, [*Totò nella luna*] "works both as parody and commentary on sci-fi-horror stories and movies, and [as] a bona fide Italian example of the genre, complete with Bodysnatcher Pod people (brain damaged clones, mentally challenged *doppelgängers* who aren't quite capable of actually bodysnatching), death rays, giant cockroaches, mad scientists, an Ape Man, a sex change operation, and a trip to the moon (with a fairly impressive matte painting enhanced set and a cool alien higher intelligence). As in the best Totò movies, a huge amount of cultural ground gets trampled over, and we get very detailed subplots about the girly magazine industry (Totò is the director of a pin-up publishing outfit so cash strapped that he can only afford skimpy outfits for his models to fashion—half a bra, one stocking. He prophetically warns: "At this rate, we'll be photographing them completely nude by 1960!" This is the funniest historical explanation for how models eventually lost their clothes I've ever heard.), and science fiction comic book clichés (Ugo Tognazzi, an aspiring *Amazing Stories* writer, mercilessly critiques all the latest fumetti). The players are perfect with Tognazzi very likable in a dual role, and Sandra Milo extremely sexy as [an] enemy spy."



UK *quad poster, art by A. Payne.*

Given either de-emphasized credit or no credit at all for his contributions to these two pictures, Bava was not properly recognized as the creative spark behind Italy's science fiction movement and the genre did not get underway until Antonio Margheriti picked up the gauntlet in 1960 with his directorial debut, *Space Men/Assignment Outer Space*. Bava, taken away from his preferred genre by a years-long detour through Gothic horror, would only return to science fiction in the mid-1960s. His proposals for other science fiction subjects in the immediate wake of *La morte viene dallo spazio* were tabled for the moment, thwarted by the green-lighting of a more pressing project. Steve Reeves was flying back to Rome to appear in a sequel to the film that was bringing him international stardom.





ITALIAN *photobusta.*

ERCOLE E LA REGINA DI LIDIA

Hercules Unchained

WHEN STEVE REEVES returned to California after the completion of *Le fatiche di Ercole*, he was not greeted as a conquering hero. He had neither a contract for additional pictures nor the promise of a sequel to show for his efforts. Reeves went to Ray Wilson, his former employer at American Health Studios, to ask for his old public relations job back. Wilson rehired him, but with some wrist-slapping attached; he took him back at a reduced salary, and assigned him to less visible PR duties in San Diego. So, for the next six months, Reeves had nothing to show for having played Hercules but diminished means.



STEVE REEVES *gamely hoists a TWA stewardess onto his shoulder upon his triumphal return to Rome's Fiumicino Airport.*

The great Italian success of *Le fatiche di Ercole* in the summer of 1958 inevitably led to foreign sales and demand for a sequel. Far removed from the European film scene, Steve Reeves had no idea that his movie had been released in Italy or that it had been such a resounding success—until he received a call from Pietro Francisci, asking him to come back to Rome to star in a sequel. Reeves was wooed with the promise of a modestly increased salary, but more importantly, by a sense of occasion. The first film had been a test of his mettle—this time, Opportunity was officially knocking. Francisci's offer would force another leave of absence from American Health Studios, but when Reeves broke the news to his employer, Ray Wilson would have none of it. The two strong men had stronger words, and their affiliation came to a permanent end. Reeves was now in the movie business, sink or swim.

Fortunately, what awaited him on the other side of the world was the hottest kind of celebrity. It was pandemonium from the moment Reeves' TWA flight touched down at the airport in Rome. Egyptian-born producer Bruno Vailati (1919–90)—who had produced and co-authored Galatea's maiden production, Carlo Lizzani's *Lo svitato* (1955)—met Reeves with a production photographer in tow. Reeves had no trouble persuading TWA stewardesses to be hoisted onto his shoulders for publicity shots, and adults and children alike cheered him with chants of "Ercole! Ercole!"

Most of the original crew was corralled once again for the sequel, including Mimmo Palmara, Gabriele Antonini, Andrea Fantasi, and of course, Sylva Koscina. But Francisci's new screenplay, once again co-written by Ennio De Concini, had less to do with Hercules' continuing love affair with Iole than with his subsequent enslavement to Omphale, the Queen of Lydia. According to the original Greek myths, after Hercules murdered his friend Iphitos in a craze induced by the manipulative Hera, he was sentenced into slavery for three years, under Queen Omphale. During the period of his incarceration, a perverse symbiosis took place: Hercules became more feminine in his demeanor, while Omphale inherited his male characteristics. Hercules worked among Omphale's handmaidens, dressing as these women dressed, in gowns and veils, while spinning wool and working at looms, while the Queen took to wearing his discarded lion's skin!

The mind boggles at the film that might have resulted from a more faithful adaptation, but the presence of

Ercole e la regina di Lidia

"Hercules and the Queen of Lydia"
Filmed at Titanus Appia Studios (Cinecittà) and on location
June – August 1958.
First released: February 14, 1959
Eastmancolor by Pathé, Dyaliscope, 2.35:1, 105 minutes

Production: Galatea (Rome), Lux Compagnie Cinématographique de France (Paris). Producer: Bruno Vailati. Directors: Pietro Francisci, (uncredited) Mario Bava. Assistant director: Pietro Nuccorini. Continuity: Barbara Fusch. Director of photography: Mario Bava. Camera operator: Ubaldo Terzano. Camera assistants: Mario Mancini, Danilo Desideri. Art direction: Flavio Mogherini, assisted by Giorgio Giovannini, Gianni D'Aloisio. Set construction: Ture Siciliano. Set decoration: Massimo Tavazzi. Special effects: Mario Bava. Costumes: Maria Baroni. Costumes furnished by Casa d'Arte Peruzza (Firenza). Dressmakers: Mimma Olivieri, Assunta Lazzazera. Makeup: Otello Fava. Hairdresser: Maria Miccinilli. Wigs: Rocchetti. Footwear: Pompei, Tani. Master of arms: Enzo Musumeci. Weapons: Rancati. Choreography: Johnny Blysdael. Ballet: "Florence and Frederick." Production manager: Feruccio de Martino, A.D.C. Production assistant: Massimo De Rita. Production secretaries: Spartaco Conversi, Dante Brini. Editor: Mario Serandrei, assisted by Misa Gabrini. Music: Enzo Masetti, conducted by Carlo Savina (Nord-Sud, "Per l'Eternita" sung by Marisa Del Frate). Sound: Giulio Tagliacozzo. Boom operator: Bruno Zanoli. Stills photographer: Aldo Galfano. Distributor: Lux Film.

Additional US credits: "Evening Star," sung by June Valli, lyrics by Mitchell Parrish.

Steve Reeves (Hercules), Sylva Koscina (Iole), Sylvia Lopez (Omphale), Gabriele Antonini (Ulysses), Primo Carnera (Anteus), Sergio Fantoni (Eteocles), Mimmo Palmara (Polonices), Patrizia Della Rovere (Penelope), Carlo D'Angelo (Creon), Andrea Fantasia (Laertes), Gino Mattera (Orpheus), Aldo Fiorelli (Argos), Gianni Loti (Sandon), Cesare Fantoni (Oedipus), Fulvia Franco (Antecleus), Daniele Varga (Anfiaro), Angelo Zanolli (Admeo), Colleen Bennet (solo ballerina), Ugo Sasso, Marisa Valenti, Elda Tattoli, Walter Grant, Sergio Ciani (Reeves' stunt double). Uncredited: Fulvio Carrara (Castor), Willy Columbini (Pollox), G. P. Rosmino (Esculapeus), Aldo Pini (Tifi), Nino Marchetti (Fossore).

Belgium: *Herkules en die Koningen van Lydia,* Ciné Vog Films S.A.
Denmark: *Herkules og Amazonerne*
Egypt: *Herqol fi gazira al-mawt,* 1960
France: *Hercule et la Reine de Lydie,* Lux Cinématographique, 9/4/59
Germany: *Herkules und die Königin der Amazonen,* "Hercules and the Queen of the Amazons," Constantin-AB Film, 3/29/60; *Herkules im Reich der Amazonen,* "Hercules in the Empire of the Amazons," TV title
Mexico: *Hercules Sin Cadenas,* Warner Bros., 1960
Spain: *Hércules y la Reina de Lidia,* 9/12/60
Turkey: *Kahraman ve Melike,* Has-Han Film, 1960, CinemaScope
UK: *Hercules Unchained,* Warner Pathé Ltd., 5/60, 96m 45s, Certificate "U," passed with no cuts
US: *Hercules Unchained,* Warner Bros., 7/13/60



DEJECTED *but still lovely, Sylva Koscina returns as the vulnerable Iole.*

Omphale would give the sequel the formidable female threat it would need to imitate, and improve upon, the Amazon sequences from the previous film. As much as Gianna Maria Canale's Duchess Du Grand and Queen Antea, or Barbara Steele's Princess Asa from *La maschera del demonio*, Omphale—as played by the remarkable newcomer Sylvia Lopez—is one of the archetypal *femmes fatale* of the Italian fantastic cinema.

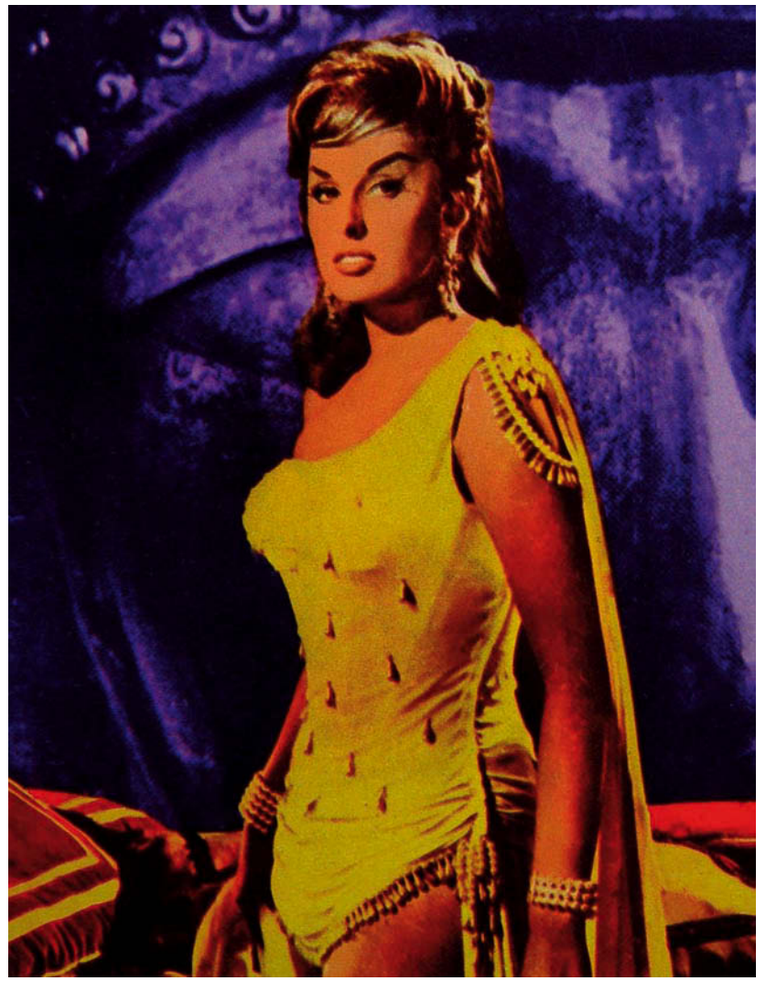
Synopsis

A group of soldiers carry a handsome, unconscious young man on a stretcher through a jungle setting into a fabulous cave, announcing the arrival to Queen Omphale, interrupting her tryst with a nervous young lover. Kneeling for a better look at the new arrival, she signals with a wave of her hand for her present lover to be slain.

Having returned to Jolco from their previous adventure, Hercules and Iole set out by wagon to the hero's homeland of Thebes, accompanied by the young Ulysses. The boy's father, Laertes, gives his son a cage of carrier pigeons and instructs him to send messages with them, should they encounter danger. En route, Hercules praises Thebes ("Why, the manners and courtesy of the people alone!") but is immediately contradicted by Theban soldiers who ride brusquely past them, leaving their wagon in clouds of dust. After a brief, angry pursuit, the chase is dropped and Hercules decides to nap. Iole and Ulysses innocently ride into the valley of the god Anteus, who decides to claim Iole and the horses for his own. Roused from his slumbers, Hercules knocks Anteus down (and out) repeatedly, but he continually rebounds. Ulysses reminds the hero that Anteus gains his strength from the earth, and Hercules soon defeats him by raising him over his head and throwing him into the ocean.

They encounter the rude soldiers once again, further on, in a forest that is said to harbor the gates of Hell. Seeking shelter from a sudden storm, the trio discover the blinded, self-banished King of Thebes, Oedipus, and his son Polinices. After leaving Polinices and his brother Eteocles to rule together in his place, Oedipus has learned that the mad Eteocles banished his brother from Thebes to rule alone; Polinices is now mounting an invasion to reclaim his rule. Hercules appeals to Oedipus and requests six days in which to intercede and appeal to King Eteocles on his family's behalf. Damned with self-hatred, Oedipus decides not to await the outcome and descends through the gates into Hades.

Hercules arrives in Thebes and goes immediately to the palace, where he finds Eteocles—mad, effeminate, evil—being entertained by the spectacle of slaves being dropped into a pit of wild tigers. Iole is appalled. Eteocles is persuaded to send Hercules to Polinices with a peace treaty, and Iole is left in the care of his regent Creon ("the greatest and most intelligent man in Thebes—another Hercules, in his way"). Hercules and Ulysses ride off, but soon make the mistake of pausing for refreshment at a falls weeping the Waters of Forgetfulness. Disoriented and amnesiac, he (and Ulysses, who has not partaken and pretends to be mute) are overcome by soldiers, losing the peace treaty in the process.



SYLVIA LOPEZ *as Omphale, preening amid the striking art direction of Flavio Mogherini.*

Hercules is taken to a magnificent pagoda and presented to Queen Omphale, who is pleased by the looks of the newcomer and signals for her previous lover to be slain by her guards.

When Hercules wakes, Omphale tells him that he is King, yet still subservient to her every wish, and that his name is Love. They revel in their insatiable appetites for one another, while Iole—back in Thebes—passes the time by working on a tapestry. Meanwhile, Ulysses discovers a secret cavern wherein workers toil to embalm the dead bodies of Omphale's discarded lovers, who are then arranged on pedestals in a hideous wax museum. He sends a request for help to his father via carrier pigeon and slowly weans Hercules from the Waters of Forgetfulness, spilling the refreshments delivered to him and thus gradually restoring his strength and identity—which is fully recovered by the time Laertes arrives with the full Argos crew. Omphale curses the day that Hercules arrived, because she has fallen in love for the first time. She orders her soldiers to release the men—and then double crosses them with a surprise attack. After some difficulty, the Argonauts escape the island—and the heartbroken Omphale hurls herself into her own embalming chamber as the ship sets sail.

Twenty days have now passed without delivery or acknowledgment of the peace treaty, and the two sons of Oedipus are marshalling their forces against one another. Eteocles has barred the gates of Thebes and consigned Iole to his dungeons with other undesirables. Polinices and his soldiers ride to the city's gates, where Eteocles drops some captured women to their deaths from atop the city's battlements as a warning against the invasion. Iole, who barely misses being included, faints. Returning to Thebes, Hercules is shown the dead bodies of the women and is told that Eteocles, thinking him a traitor, has sworn to kill Iole at the first sight of him. Polinices later receives a message from the power-mad Eteocles, challenging him to an open duel outside the city gates. As the two brothers charge at one another with spears and axes, Hercules enters the palace stealthily, and finds himself trapped inside the tiger pit. With the help of Ulysses' expert bowmanship, the tigers are killed and a mauled Hercules arrives at the city gates in time to see Polinices slain by Eteocles, who then dies himself from loss of blood. Tifi, the general of Polinices' army, abducts Iole and tries to rape her; she scratches him, and he promises to return and complete the deed once Thebes has been reclaimed. As Tifi leads a charge against the walls of Thebes, the city gates open and Hercules leads a chariot assault, using grappling hooks to fell towers peopled with armed guards. One of the towers falls on Tifi, killing him instantly.

Hercules and Iole, both compromised, have a bittersweet reunion. "Somehow the Gods will be kind to us," says Iole, "as long as we love one another."

Production & Cast

The publicity photos taken of Steve Reeves and Sylva Koscina in the weeks preceding the production of *Ercole e la regina di Lidia* show two very happy young professionals, delighted by each other's company and their mutual success. Unfortunately, in later years, Koscina had a tendency to belittle her larger-than-life co-star in interviews.

"He was handsome and very muscular," she told Frassica, the Italian television host and comedian, "and so he had to be very strong—or so we thought. To tell you the truth, he was unable to carry me, and I weighed only 125 pounds! He couldn't carry me and speak his lines at the same time, because he was huffing and puffing with the effort of it! So they had two technicians kneel in front of him to support my weight!" [1]

Hearing these charges, Reeves responded, "If I could lift [Mimmo] Palmara, who weighed almost 200 pounds, why wouldn't I be able to lift Koscina?" [2]

In response to this mud-slinging: Reeves was a bodybuilder, not a weightlifter; he won national and international competitions for the perfect proportions of his physique and his ability to pose and flex—not for lifting weights. Secondly, the publicity photos contradict Koscina's account, who is seen happily riding one of Reeves' shoulders. The films offer their own testimony: in *Le fatiche di Ercole*, Reeves is shown carrying four grown men at once—two slung over his shoulders and one in each arm—and in *Ercole e la regina di Lidia*, he lifts former heavyweight wrestling champion Primo Carnera over his head. (He doesn't look like he's *enjoying* it, but he's *doing* it.) Therefore, Koscina's ungracious gossip must be discounted.

Even so, it must be admitted that Reeves' relationships with his Italian crews, due to limited language skills or for whatever reason, were never warm, and stories began to circulate about how he was dependent on health foods and needed to "blow up" his muscles like balloons with various exercises before filming a scene. The sheer perfection of Reeves' physique also seemed to invite punctures from the rumor mills. In America, it later became a popular misconception that Reeves had been dubbed in the films because his own voice was weak and high-pitched. In fact, Reeves had a very warm and virile speaking voice, not unlike the voice of George Gonneau heard in the English-dubbed release prints of the films—only drier, less theatrical, and more down-to-earth. Reeves did not dub his own performance because Italy's English Language Dubbers Association (ELDA) was highly unionized, and unless an actor's contract specified his right to dub his own performance, the union line wasn't crossed.

Koscina may have been embittered by the meager provisions made for her important character in the sequel. Iole is consigned to the sidelines for most of the picture, leaving Sylvia Lopez to become the film's foremost female presence. In some European territories, Lopez was accorded second billing while Koscina was reduced to an unflattering "and" credit, following Primo Carnera.

According to the *Hercules Unchained* pressbook, Sylvia Lopez was born Tatiana Sinclair, but she was actually born Tatjana Bernt in Austria, in 1936. She made her first movies in France in the mid-1950s, appearing as Tania Karen. After marrying composer Francisco Lopez (twenty years her senior) in 1956, she adopted the screen name she would make famous. Her first Italian film as Sylvia Lopez was Primo Zeglio's costume drama *Il figlio del corsaro rosso/The Son of the Red Pirate* (1958), which was not released until after audiences had seen her as Omphale. According to some filmographies, *Ercole e la regina di Lidia* was only the fourth film she made. Beautiful as she is, Sylva Koscina has no moment in either film that qualifies as the kind of iconic image that Reeves attained while toppling the columns at Jolco. Lopez wins just such a moment, late in the sequel, as the lovestruck Queen clamps onto one of Hercules' almighty legs and beseeches him not to leave her, a tear rolling down her cheek. Red-haired, ripely beautiful, and able to speak English, Lopez was very attracted to Reeves and sparks reportedly flew on-set between the two stars.

"I can remember doing a scene in which we had to kiss," Reeves recalled. "Francisci was shouting 'Stop, stop!' and we kept on kissing as if we were the only people there. Two technicians had to intervene to pull us apart!" [3]

Lopez next played the lead female role of Queen Miriam in *Erode il grande/Herod the Great* (also 1958); tragically, this would be her last film. It was reported on November 20, 1959—just a few months after the release of her greatest success—that Sylvia Lopez had died, a victim of leukemia. At the time of her death, she was acting in a new film, Michel Boisrond's *Voulez-vous dancer avec moi?/Sexy Girl*, starring Brigitte Bardot. All of Lopez' scenes had to be reshot with Dawn Addams in her role. Had she lived, she might have become an enormous star.

Giving another of the film's standout performances is Sergio Fantoni (b. 1930, Rome), as Eteocles. The son of Bolognese actor Cesare Fantoni (who plays the role of Oedipus, mostly in long-shot), Sergio had previously played supporting roles in Francisci's *Il leone di Amalfi* and *Le meravigliose avventura di Guerrin Meschino*, and more notably, in Luchino Visconti's *Senso* (1954). Like the Egyptian actor Alex D'Arcy, Fantoni had such extremely handsome features that he appeared narcissistic and insincere onscreen, and so was often cast in evil,

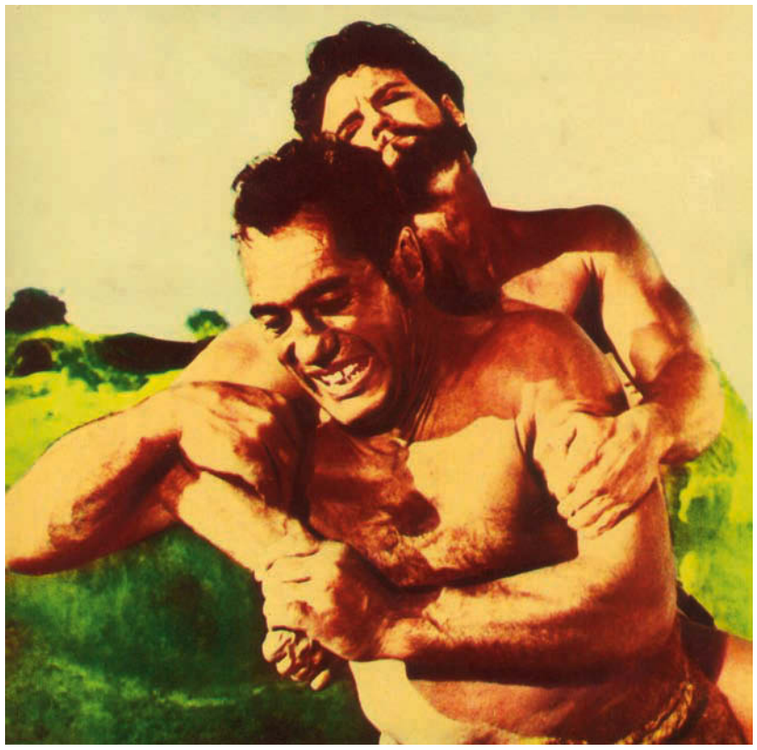
SPARKS *flew between Steve Reeves and his co-star, Sylvia Lopez.* ▶

1 *Frassica contro Ercole*, RAI 1-TV, April 26, 1989.

2 Ibid.

3 Carlo Piazza, "Entrentien avec Steve Reeves," *Ciné-Zine-Zone* 36/37, September/October, 1989, 5–22.





HERCULES *grapples with the earth god Anteus (former world heavyweight boxing champion Primo Carnera).*

decadent roles. He would work again with Bava on *La battaglia di Maratona* (1959) and *Esther and the King* (1960, one of his finest performances), and give a rare heroic performance in Anton Giulio Majano's horror film *Seddok (L'erede di Satana)/Atom Age Vampire* (1960). In the 1960s, he made a short, unsuccessful bid for American stardom, appearing in *Von Ryan's Express*, *Do Not Disturb* (both 1965), and *What Did You Do in the War, Daddy?* (1966). His later screen appearances include Peter Greenaway's *The Belly of an Architect* (1987) and the TV miniseries *Charlemagne* (1991).

Another standout in the cast was Venetian boxing/wrestling legend Primo Carnera (1907–67), as the earth god Anteus. Carnera had begun his career as a circus strong man, and his boxing career reached its apogee in 1933, when he was named Heavyweight Champion of the World. He made numerous film appearances, during and after his boxing and wrestling careers, including *The Prizefighter and the Lady*, *Mighty Joe Young*, *The Harder They Fall*, *Prince Valiant*, *Casanova's Big Night*, and *La corona di ferro/The Iron Crown*. He also appeared as the Creature in a live American television presentation of *Frankenstein* on a program called *Matinee Theatre*. Carnera's grappling with Reeves is an early highlight of the picture, as is his boorish, lusty portrayal of the earth god.

Bava later recalled that Carnera's ego got in the way during the filming of Antaeus' fight with Hercules: "Carnera didn't want to lose against 'that Yankee,' as he liked to say. We had to explain to him that it was *essential* that Antaeus lose the fight with Hercules!" [4]

Commentary

In some ways, *Ercole e la regina di Lidia* tells the same story as its predecessor: the throne of a kingdom is wrongly held; Hercules dedicates himself to the task of setting things right; through no real fault of his own, he and his men go astray and encounter a deadly seductress; Ulysses discovers her deadly plans for the hero and facilitates his escape; the Argonauts sail for home; the throne is not easily surrendered, and considerable blood must be shed before the evil King and his corrupt empire are brought down.

Working again with Ennio De Concini, Pietro Francisci "freely adapted" two acknowledged sources, the Greek tragedies *Oedipus at Colunus* by Sophocles and *The Seven Against Thebes* by Aeschylus. Actually, these plays have almost nothing to do with the script they turned out, other than a cameo by Oedipus (whose reasons for consigning himself to Hades are never specified, at least not in English), and the story of his two sons battling over the throne at Thebes. Other ideas were conveniently lifted from *The Odyssey*—Hercules and Ulysses trading roles as chief voyager and helpmate, leaving Iole to become the "Penelope" of the piece, passing her solitude with tapestry weaving as she inwardly frets over the possible sexual consequences of trading her status as guest for that of prisoner, should her husband not return by an agreed-upon time.

What makes *Ercole e la regina di Lidia* different, and in some ways more interesting, than its predecessor is the liberation of its visual imagination, which was inspired not by the Greek or Roman myths, but by another of the film's (surreptitiously) adapted sources: a 1935 storyline from Alex Raymond's King Features syndicated comic strip *Flash Gordon*.

In Raymond's story, the athletic hero Flash Gordon is captured by Azura the Witch Queen and drugged (by a potion called Lethum) into a state of adoring amnesia, while heroine Dale Arden and associate Dr. Zarkov are kept on display elsewhere in her castle in suspended animation chambers. Once Azura is certain of Flash's devotion, Dale is awakened from her sleep to work as a servant in the castle. While serving them one night at the dinner table, Dale deliberately spills the drug intended for Flash. This, and even Flash's earlier (1934) ordeal in Emperor Ming's pit of "tigrons," found their ways into the De Concini/Francisci screenplay, transposed from the planet Mongo to ancient Thebes.



DIRECTOR *Pietro Francisci shows Steve Reeves how to bring Carnera down.*



HERCULES *proves himself in the tiger pit of the mad Eteocles.*

If one consults the epic stories created by Alex Raymond in the ten years that he wrote and illustrated his *Flash Gordon* strip (1934–44), a far more accurate overview of the Italian *peplum* cycle is reflected than could possibly be derived from reading Greek mythology. In Raymond's stories, which were principally indebted to the knights and dragons and tournaments of Old English legends, we find all of the *de rigueur* trappings of the *pepla*: the evil sires and their luxurious palaces, the contests in the pit, the torture devices, the monsters, the tests of fealty, the surprise comrades recruited from the ranks of the alien and oppressed. In his introduction to Kitchen Sink Press' first volume of collected *Flash Gordon* stories, artist Al Williamson notes of Raymond's earliest work: "He is in control of his art, of course, but he is not yet so awe-inspiringly great that one ignores the story, which was going to happen in about 1937."[5] The *pepla* would also experience a period of style over slippery storytelling, which is perhaps best exemplified by Bava's own *Ercole al centro della terra* (1961), which was produced three years after *Ercole e la regina di Lidia* and thus precisely parallels the time frame measured by Williamson. This parallel relationship is further supported by the fact that, after more than a decade of inactivity, the Italian *peplum* cycle was reactivated in 1983 with Luigi Cozzi's *Hercules* (starring Lou Ferrigno), following the Italian release of the Dino De Laurentiis-produced revival of *Flash Gordon* (1980).

The Eteocles/Polonices portion of the film is fairly straightforward, very much in keeping with the classical approach taken by Francisci in *Le fatiche di Ercole* and his earlier works: heroic, political, full of good horsemanship and fluffy clouds in bright summer skies—but it accounts for less than half of the picture. This material is overwhelmed, visually and dramatically, by the *Flash Gordon*-influenced Omphale material, which is dark, erotic, fatalistic, and drenched in saturated gel lighting, and otherworldly atmosphere. Its guiding hand was clearly that of Mario Bava, who later confessed to being the *de facto* director of approximately 70% of the picture. Francisci's films sometimes touch on dark subjects, like Machiavellian politics and the conflicting tugs that can beset the human heart, but the darkness never gains a foothold, is never contaminating. This film is the exception to that rule; it's the darkest, and perhaps the most heartfelt film Francisci would ever sign as director.

From the very beginning, its prevalent theme is separation, as Hercules, Iole, and Ulysses part from family and friends on their journey to Thebes. Ostensibly moving toward a homecoming, Hercules finds himself alienated from his homeland, its gates open to him only on condition, and the mission he accepts in the name of home and country results in his unwitting betrayal of both. As Hercules is sexually compromised by his deluded dalliance with Omphale, so is Iole at least threatened with rape by Tifi. The way the scene is



LOPEZ AND REEVES *hit the Roman nightclubs with Sylva Koscina, unhappily in tow.*

4 Dante Matelli, *L'espresso*, May, 1979.

5 Al Williamson, "On Mongo with Alex," introduction to Raymond Alex, *Flash Gordon 1: Mongo, The Planet of Doom* (Princeton WI: Kitchen Sink Press, 1990), 6-8.



ITALIAN *due-foglia, art by A. Biffignandi.*

interrupted at the point of transgression with an arbitrary cutaway to trumpets sounding atop the gates of Thebes, and then cuts back to Tifi nursing scratches on his cheek while Iole pants decorously on the floor, one senses that the general's violation of our heroine might have been successful—at least by implication—in an earlier cut. But the ambiguity cuts deeper. Certainly, the final shot of Hercules and Iole reuniting is charged with mutual feelings of shame and sexual compromise, and Iole's closing words imply that they can only move ahead together by forgiving one another. Unlike *Le fatiche di Ercole*, which was primarily a rousing entertainment with some mild politico-sociological underpinnings, *Ercole e la regina di Lidia* has the feel of a deeply personal statement, as plaintive as a repentent adulterer's plea for forgiveness.

The film's dark edge is present from the very beginning, resulting from some unusual cinematographic choices made by Bava. The film's pre-credits sequence introduces Omphale and her unsentimental approach to sex while keeping her face averted throughout. We first see her sitting cross-legged on an ornate bed—sporting fine heels, black stockings, a tight-fitting black skirt and bodice, and a lacy cape that flounces as she passes a nameless lover who has outlived his usefulness and descends a stairwell to meet her returning guard and their latest male captive. The camera looks over her shoulder and a cascade of fiery red hair as she kneels over the stranger and raises her hand in a silent signal. The guards converge on her screaming lover and thrust a dozen swords into him; there is no blood, but as the soldiers form a wall of violence between the man's tender abdomen and the camera lens, their capes fill the screen with a scream of red. Omphale's face is withheld from our view, as is the meaning of this introductory scene, until she resurfaces in the narrative 20 minutes later. Audiences must have been confused, being thrust into a storyline with no Hercules in sight. Just as the villainess' identity has been kept from us, Hercules is also kept from view until he appears—almost like the punchline of a joke—at the end of the main titles. Only when Pietro Francisci's directorial credit spreads across the screen does the hero make his amusingly overstated entrance, carrying a massive boulder over his head and letting it plunge into the sea as an anchor for the Argos.



THE FILM'S *most iconic moment, as Omphale pleads with Hercules not to leave her.*

Apart from the sense of mystery that the film generates between these unrelated principal characters, what is immediately apparent is the new, no-holds-barred approach to the film's decor, overseen by Flavio Mogherini and his assistant Giorgio Giovannini, which is as indebted to Alex Raymond's Mongo as to ancient Greece. Omphale's bedchamber appears to be housed within the glacéed walls of a cave—blue, green, amber, lavender—but her bed is a plush canopy type from the 18th or 19th century, the doors are veiled in red velvet opera curtains, the floor is vast and scarlet and waxed to a high Hollywood polish, and this Queen's attire would not look at all out of place at the Foliés-Bergère. Eclipsing everything else, but having nothing directly to do with the narrative, an immense Indian head fashioned from metal or stone, roughly as large as the face of the Statue of Liberty, stares partially excavated from a wall. Any other art director would have constructed a simple falls to dispense the Waters of Forgetfulness, but Mogherini gives us a rock in whose tortured contours we can distinctly see the lines of an agonized human face. His work is a veritable fever dream, an outstanding chapter in the history of Italian production design that considerably predates Fellini's own turn toward the baroque.

Working in perfect concert with Mogherini, Bava produces some of the most memorable scenes of his career. A case in point is Hercules' first conscious encounter with Omphale. After seeing her bathe nude with a flock of swans (the Cascate di Montegelato once again providing the perfect Elysian setting),



WITH THE HELP *of Ulysses (Gabriele Antonini), Hercules recovers his memory and legendary strength.*

the amnesiac hero pursues the Queen of Lydia into her private sanctum by passing through the cleft in a pointedly Freudian waterfall, beyond which he finds a sugar-walled domain frosted with female flesh, tinsel and pageantry. The nymphomaniac Queen, decked out in Barbarella finery, reclines on a chaise longue in the shape of a swan (a favorite disguise of Jupiter/Zeus, when seducing mortals). Behind her, a wall of forget-me-nots forms a poignant, thematic drape. In a brilliant lighting adjustment, the flowers turn as blue as a wife's offended blood as Hercules bends over Omphale in a kiss.

But as usually occurs in Italian fantasy, behind the mask of love lurks the skull of death. Like the early sequence of Iole's childhood flashback in the previous film, with its silhouetted nightmare decapitations, frightened faces, and pools of blood, *Ercole e la regina di Lidia* contains a sequence that shows Bava's affinity for horror in full bloom: Ulysses' discovery of Omphale's embalming chamber. As he enters the cavern area, Ulysses is started by the figure of a man aiming a spear, seemingly at him, and he recoils against a rocky wall painted in icy blue light. Realizing that the figure is immobile and poised on a pedestal, he regains his composure and presses on—until he sees, on a lower level, a group of men toiling around a vat brimming with undulating smoke and magically alternating washes of color, three flames dancing in the background. The workers then raise an inert figure from the vat, the motion of the upright body releasing a macabre aftergush of coiling, backlit smoke. The scene has tremendous impact, not only because of its masterful choreography of color, dry ice, fire, and shadowplay, but because it is at once so personalized and yet devoid of personality. By not showing us the faces of the workers, that of the body they are preserving, or that of the preserved exhibits of Omphale's museum, Bava pushes the impressionist qualities of the *mise-en-scène* to the fore, along with Ulysses' own sense of fright and discovery. There is nothing shown to distract us from the broadstrokes of horror; the subtleties are conveyed through the emotional values of color. Knowing what we do about Bava, the scene can also be read as autobiographical, based on his own childhood explorations of his father's workshop, an exotic and intimidating place of strange chemicals and beautiful colors and lifeless, lifesized bodies. In the context of another man's film, this is undoubtedly an *auteur* sequence.

In addition to the advancing complexity of its imagery, *Ercole e la regina di Lidia* exhibits a new sense of grace in its camera movements. This is partly due to the success of the previous film, which made certain new technical comforts possible, but it also pertains to an important change in Bava's camera team. After *La morte viene dallo spazio* (not a very smoothly operated film), Corrado Bartoloni—Bava's camera operator since 1949—decided to strike out on his own. Inheriting his position was graduating camera assistant Ubaldo Terzano. Terzano's work was immediately marked by a greater fluidity of movement, and in the eight years he had been part of Bava's camera team, he had also learned a great deal about lighting. When he found himself overwhelmed by fulfilling Francisci's and his own various duties on the set, Bava was now able to relegate some of his responsibilities to Terzano and accept the results with little or no personal modification.

Though *Ercole e la regina di Lidia* extends the visual and emotional vocabulary of the *peplum* to thrilling new heights, it is also a structural failure. The conflict between Eteocles and Polinices doesn't have the necessary dramatic authority to assert its primacy in the storyline; Palmara is miscast as Polinices and given very little screen time, and while Fantoni cuts a strikingly decadent figure as Eteocles, we never see him commit the kind of heinous act necessary for him to earn his stripes as a great villain. The diversion to Omphale's domain is so much more involving that, when Hercules and Ulysses are rescued and sail for home on the Argos, the movie feels prematurely primed for an end credits scroll . . . yet it continues for another 20 minutes, through the anticlimactic duel between the brothers and a confoundingly lame reunion for our hero and heroine, unimaginatively modelled on the last shot of the previous film.

Special Effects

It was during the filming of *Ercole e la regina di Lidia* that Bava made the acquaintance of Massimo De Rita, an associate producer at Galatea who would become an important ally in

the years ahead. De Rita's earliest recollection of Bava involves his invisible ingenuity as a special effects artist on the picture: "When I arrived on the sound stage at Scalera, I came upon the following scene: a rather worn and patched-up blue screen and, positioned in front of it, a wagon carrying Steve Reeves and Sylva Koscina, who was pantomiming to a playback: 'For Iolco's civilization . . .' Really shitty! I looked at Bava, who smiled back and said, "We're in bad shape, aren't we?" But when I saw the scene in dailies, this scene seemed real, magical . . . everything had acquired a sense of realism and elegance."[6]

To an even greater extent than he had salvaged *Le fatiche di Ercole*, Mario Bava's uncanny talent for in-camera optical trickery made a sumptuous feast of its sequel. Omphale's pagoda-like dwelling was a glass matte built around a *National Geographic*-type clipping, with a blacked-out extension on the right—that was later filled-in with a silhouette pausing to peer from a bright yellow window. When Omphale walks down her impressive stairwell to meet the new arrival, Bava films the scene in long-shot through a glass matte that fills in the ceiling area of the studio with rock, and extends the set walls on either side with various Greek-styled *bas-reliefs* and adornments. Bava also added some columned buildings to the (extreme screen left) background of the scene of Laertes receiving the pigeon carrying Ulysses' call for help, and likewise painted the Argos anchored at a small distance from shore, visible through an opening in the cave wall (extreme screen right) as Hercules and the men flee Omphale's domain. (An inopportune splash of sea water gives away the shot, leaping into the air *in front* of the ship . . . only to be blocked from view *behind* it.) When Hercules is shown fighting the tiger in Eteocles' pit, Reeves (and his stunt double Sergio Ciani) grappled with a drugged animal as well as a stuffed one, but it proved impossible to use either of these to produce the necessary image of an alert tiger lunging through the air at the hero. To achieve this, Bava came up with a staggeringly simple *trompe-l'oeil.* Based on the evidence of the footage itself, he painted a speed-blurred tiger (not even a particularly good one) on a transparent disc of glass or plastic and rotated it manually in front of the camera lens, so that it appeared to dive from the upper left of frame. Examined frame-by-frame, the effect is almost laughable; it's more than half-sold by the surprise of the moment and the sound of the tiger's roar. Bava's genius was in knowing how little the eye needs to see, and how much of what we see is predicated in sound and assumption.

The film also includes some nearly flawless blue screen shots, allowing Bava to combine elements of two unrelated locations. One such instance can be seen after the Argos docks near Thebes; as his fellow warriors cross swords with the Theban guards, Hercules runs up a large white stairwell. The stairwell were an actual location, but the climb was half as long; Bava filmed the stairs twice, once nearby with the upper frame masked, and once again from a greater distance with the lower frame masked, each time with Reeves selling the illusion by racing stealthily up the steps on cue. (There is a short cutaway to the action below to conceal the lack of continuity from Reeves' ascent from one exposure to another.) The finished components were then used to fill in the background of the swordfight, which was filmed in the studio. Likewise, the scenes filmed outside the gate at Thebes were also an optical conglomeration of the real and unreal. In reality, the entrance to Thebes was a dirt road situated between two hills. The vertical sides of the gate were erected on location, while the whole parapet section holding the actors was shot in the studio and later optically joined to the location footage.



IOLE, *held hostage by Eteocles and assaulted by Tifi, awaits her fate with other captive women.*

Music

Much of Enzo Masetti's score for this sequel was carried over from *Le fatiche di Ercole.* Its memorable romantic theme was reorchestrated to deeper, richer effect under the main titles, and at the request of the producers, Masetti also wrote new lyrics to convert his melody into a popular song, which Iole sings early in the film. The original Italian vocal of *"Per l'eternità"*("For Eternity") was sung by Marisa Del Frate (b. 1931, herself an actress who appeared in Mario Costa's *Addio per sempre!*, 1958) and subsequently lip-synched by Sylva Koscina. When the film was

6 Manlio Gomarasca and Davide Pulici, "Il Talento di Mr. Bava," *Nocturno Dossier* 24, July 2004, 6–32.



dubbed into English, new lyrics were written around Koscina's lip movements by Mitchell Parrish (the lyricist of "Stardust"), and thus *"Per l'Eternita"* became "Evening Star." The voice on this version belonged to June Valli (1930–93), a Bronx-born singer who had started out in commercial jingles (she was the original voice of Chiquita Banana), before becoming a featured vocalist on television's *Your Hit Parade* in its 1952–53 season, and in 1957, the co-host of *The Andy Williams & June Valli Show*. The original song was issued in Italy as a 45 rpm single on the Cetra label.

The most important new piece of music in the film is a theme for Omphale, which opens ominously with soft pattering kettledrums, evoking a feeling of space and darkness, from which a spirit of hauteur is aroused, signalled by a fluttering murmur of woodwinds, and then a tense arpeggio for strings whose crescendo introduces a severe theme, played first by the strings and then by flaring flutes, that is distinctly Spanish in character. The theme, which underlies the pre-credits scene, is mysterious and provocative, full of exoticism, color, and dread; one couldn't ask for more appropriate music.

Release

First released on St. Valentine's Day 1959, *Ercole e la regina di Lidia* proved even more successful at the Italian boxoffice than its predecessor, earning almost 900 million *lire*—roughly, $560,000. That was just the beginning, but it was enough to elevate Nello Santi's Galatea to a new position as one of Italy's foremost production companies. Surprisingly, Santi celebrated his newfound success by announcing that he would undertake no more Hercules pictures.

Pietro Francisci made it known that he, too, wanted a vacation from Hercules. As for Hercules himself, Steve Reeves was perfectly willing to make a third film in the series, but he lost his enthusiasm when a new producer (Achille Piazzi) and director

TURKISH *poster, art by Emal.*

(Vittorio Cottafavi) were proposed.[7] "I wanted to make a third Hercules, but only with Francisci—not with another director," the actor stated. "When I refused to do another Hercules, I got a lot of different proposals. They asked me to play Maciste and Ursus. I turned them all down. I didn't want my public to see me doing second-rate imitations and parodies."[8]

Joseph E. Levine, who bought the United States theatrical rights to both Hercules films shortly after the second completed production, flew to Rome and met with his new star in the hopes of changing his mind, but Reeves stood firm in his resolve. When the sequel went through the roof in America, Levine would return to Rome and work with Reeves on his own terms.

Bava's long working relationship with Francisci was dealt a mortal blow by the experience of the Hercules films. While Bava would continue to accredit the 1950s Italian renaissance to Francisci for the rest of his life, Francisci never reciprocated by acknowledging the importance of Bava's contributions to his two Hercules triumphs. When the films had their premieres in Rome, Francisci basked entirely in the limelight, barely saying hello to Bava, refusing to introduce him to the film's investors, and arranging for him to be seated outside the "inner circle." It was during this period that Bava confided his feelings of hurt and neglect to Riccardo Freda.



BELGIAN *poster.*

"One day, Bava complained to me that, although he had devised the look of those movies, had staged them, and captured them on film to be shown in theaters, his director was getting all the glory," Freda remembered. "Then, at the film premiere, [the director] did everything possible to confine and isolate him in the balcony of the film theater, so that all the compliments and praises fell only on him, the director. I remember [Bava] telling me this at a bus stop, about the premiere of a film he had made for Francisci, 70% of which had been his doing. This made me angry, and I gave him an ultimatum: if he didn't stop collaborating with this so-called director, I would never work with him again. He listened to me, as always, with a slightly mocking smile. But he never worked with Francisci again, though he wanted him for *Archimede*. And God knows he needed him: the film was a frightful flop!"[9]

Bava was not the kind of man to take Freda's advice and break off with Francisci in any kind of or confrontational manner; instead, he passive-aggressively withdrew, managing to be busy whenever Francisci needed him. When Francisci approached Bava to shoot and provide special effects for *Archimede*—ultimately released under the title *L'assedio di Siracusa/The Siege of Syracuse* (1959)—Freda gave him the job, and distraction, of photographing his own next movie, *Agi Murad il diavolo bianco/The White Warrior.*

L'assedio di Siracusa—made with Carlo Carlini (*I vitelloni*) behind the camera and with Joseph Natanson[10] handling the trick shots—is in some ways the perfect proof of who contributed what to the Hercules films. It is a very lightweight film, with some pretty scenery and ideas, but it feels clumsy and half-baked. The principal actors (Rossano Brazzi, Tina Louise) are poorly suited to costume drama, and Louise is photographed like a tart. In a supporting role, the wondrous Sylva Koscina is rendered almost unrecognizable with a blonde dye-job and unflattering makeup. Natanson's mattes are either too rigid or transparent, and Carlini's photography has neither elegance nor muscle; it looks very chop-a-block, with no lighting continuity to blend the various scenes into a whole. The unsatisfying film was not released in the United States until 1962.

Without Bava functioning as his rod and staff, Pietro Francisci found himself working irregularly. After *Saffo, venere di Lesbo/The Warrior Empress* (1960), which Derek Elley aptly describes as "attractive fun," he would not direct another film for four years, at which time he made *Ercole sfida Sansone/Hercules, Samson and Ulysses* (1963), a failed attempt to reclaim the franchise he had started. His penultimate feature, the science

7 Cottafavi's film was eventually made with New York bodybuilder Lou Degni making his screen debut as Hercules, under the pseudonym of "Mark Forest." The full story will continue in this book's chapter on *Ercole alla conquista di Atlantide/Hercules and the Captive Women* and its sequel, *Ercole al centro della terra/Hercules in the Haunted World*.

8 Piazza, 11.

9 Riccardo Freda, *Divoratori di celluloide—50 anni di memorie cinematografiche e non* (Milan, Italy: Emme Edizione–Il Formichiere, 1981), 80–130.

10 Joseph Natanson was, after Mario Bava, Italy's foremost matte painter of the 1950s and '60s. Born Joséf Natanson, he got his start in films as a key member of the "special painting" crew on Powell and Pressburger's *The Red Shoes* (1948), for which he executed numerous glass paintings and painted backdrops for the eponymous dance sequence. From there, Natanson relocated to Rome and availed his services as a matte painter to various Italian films, working at first on many films for director Carmine Gallone: *Puccini* (1952), *Casta diva* (1954), and *Casa Ricordi* (1954). His later assignments—sometimes credited to Josef Natansen or Joseph Nathanson—include *Nel segno di Roma/Sign of the Gladiator* (1959, indicating that he sometimes worked side-by-side with Bava), Vittorio Sala's *La regina delle amazzoni/Colossus and the Amazon Queen* (1960), Umberto Scarpelli's impressively designed science fiction *peplum Il gigante di Metropolis/Giant of Metropolis* (1961), Michael Curtiz' *Francis of Assisi* (1961), Edgar G. Ulmer's *The Cavern* (1964), and Federico Fellini's short film *Toby Dammit* (1967, for which he painted the impressive collapsed bridge). His last known screen credit for "optical effects and miniatures" appeared in Lucio Fulci's *I guerrieri dell'anno 2072/The New Gladiators* (1983). He died in Rome on September 13, 2003.



FRENCH *affiche, art by Georges Allard.*

fiction film *2+5: Missione Hydra* (1966), was filmed using redressed sets and leftover costumes from Bava's *Terrore nello spazio* (1965), and it was not given an American release until 1977—three years after Francisci's death—at which time it was rechristened as *Star Pilot*, the first of the *Star Wars* rip-offs. Francisci evidently spent the last eight years of his life out of work; he returned to the director's chair one last time in 1973 with *Simbad e il califfo di Bagdad* ("Sinbad and the Caliph of Baghdad"), which featured *Le fatiche di Ercole*'s Arturo Dominici in a supporting role.

Pietro Francisci died two years later, in 1975, but his death is not known to have been reported by any cinema publications at the time. Indeed, the fact of his death has not—until now—been recorded in any reference book about the Italian cinema, and my own research was unsuccessful in discovering the exact date of his passing. It should not be forgotten—as Mario Bava was always the first to admit—that Pietro Francisci was, in many ways, the man responsible for breathing commercial life back into Italy's national cinema, a breath that would sustain it for the better part of the coming decade.

Hercules Unchained

When Joseph E. Levine released this opulent sequel in America as *Hercules Unchained*, history was made. Warner Bros. once again handled the distribution, as Levine once again poured over $1,500,000 into a publicity engine of unprecedented range.

In theaters, audiences were treated to both teaser *and* production trailers. Stunning, full-page color ads were placed in mass-market publications like *Life, Look* and *Ebony*, as well as in the best-selling movie, romance, and adventure fan magazines. forty full-page color ads were placed in different daily and Sunday newspapers. Immense banners were made to hang from theater marquees, and Levine made deals with other companies to take pioneering steps in the direction of motion picture merchandising with Hercules bicycles, T-shirts, and even a Dell Comics "movie tie-in" adaptation.



However, Levine's greatest brainstorm in the promotion of *Hercules Unchained* was his unprecedented use of television advertising. 6,360 "TV spots" were booked on 212 different stations across America prior to the film's opening, so that it was virtually impossible to be unaware that "The Mightiest of Them All" was coming to your local theater. Prior to this, the motion picture industry had regarded television as a threat to its primacy in the entertainment world, but Levine showed the business how to take advantage of the new medium's popularity to generate interest and big profits. I've been unable to ascertain exactly how much money *Hercules Unchained* generated, but its social impact was unforgettable to those who witnessed it. It certainly made millions for Levine, who pooled a portion of its profits into the founding of his own distribution empire, Embassy Pictures—which, in time, financed such major motion pictures as *The Graduate* (1967), *The Lion in Winter* (1968) and *Carnal Knowledge* (1971).

Although *Hercules* and *Hercules Unchained* were booked together by enterprising local theaters across the country in the early 1960s, the two films were not officially combined on a double-bill until 1975, after Levine sold his interests in the company that subsequently became known as Avco-Embassy Pictures. Avco-Embassy decided to acquaint a new generation with the films that gave rise to the company by releasing the Reeves film together with an entirely new ad campaign ("It Took Two Colossal Movies to Tell the Whole Incredible Story!"). Unfortunately, the films had become overly familiar via television showings during the preceding decade, and it was not commonly understood as yet how much these widescreen epics lost when translated to the small screen, so the combo package did not perform well enough in its initial bookings to encourage a wider release. It was the beginning of the end for Avco-Embassy, which would not last another decade, succumbing to bankruptcy in 1982.

US *half-sheet.*

In subsequent years, with both Avco-Embassy and Galatea defunct, *Hercules* and *Hercules Unchained* fell into the public domain. While this is a good thing for some orphaned films, at least in terms of their continued availability, the Reeves films have not been so fortunate. Of the two, only *Hercules* has surfaced on the American market in a proper widescreen transfer, but even this edition is hardly definitive in terms of restoring the picture's former visual opulence. The more baroque *Hercules Unchained* benefits most from widescreen presentation, but for the two decades in which the home video business has been in full force, it has been available only in ruinous pan-and-scan transfers. Indeed, pan-and-scan transfers are, in some ways, the least of the problems faced by these important pulp adventures. In 1997, scenes from *Le fatiche di Ercole* and *Ercole e la regina di Lidia* were shuffled together and redubbed to create a comedic variant for the direct-to-video market, entitled *Hercules Recycled*. According to an online pitch, the plot is as follows: "After World War III, Herc must find a secret formula to restore the Earth to the more pleasant pre-WWIII condition, while battling a dinosaur, fast-food mutants, and an insurance man! You can get this $9.95 video by calling (800) 367–8437 . . ." Both films have also been held up as objects of ridicule on the cult television series *Mystery Science Theater 3000*.

If the mishandling of these films has resulted in their becoming something of a joke in camp-conscious America, they are still respected abroad as the beautiful mythological epics they are. When and if they become available for viewing again in their original widescreen ratios, with their color and sharpness digitally restored, with their dubbed soundtracks digitally synchronized, the Hercules films will be ripe for more sober rediscovery. As much as *I vampiri* would prophesy the Gothic chiaroscuro of *La maschera del demonio*, the Hercules films showcase the complete crystallization of Bava's unique conceptual approach to color—a personal style that would distinguish not only his later *pepla*, but also his greatest works of horror and science fiction. In terms of their combined impact on the basic characteristics of what would become known as Italian fantasy cinema, the value of *Le fatiche di Ercole* and, especially, *Ercole e la regina di Lidia* is impossible to overestimate.



SPANISH *poster for AGI MURAD IL DIAVOLO BIANCO, art by Macario Gomez.*

Back with Freda and Reeves

Nel segno di Roma
Agi Murad il diavolo bianco
Gli ultimi giorni di Pompei

THE FILMING OF *Ercole e la regina di Lidia* signalled a new era in Italian film production, as Steve Reeves himself noticed early in the shooting. "Just after I arrived in Italy to begin filming *Hercules Unchained*, we began noticing other crews like ours, two and three beaches down from us, setting up cameras and filming Hercules films just like ours," he told his biographer, Chris LeClaire. "It was unbelievable. They were using the same costumes, plots, and even [the same] ideas as Francisci. I guess it was like anything else in life: once someone gets a great idea, everyone wants in on it."[1]

As the official sequel to Pietro Francisci's hit went into production, the race was on—among other hopeful projects—to beat the sequel into the theaters the following summer. The need to work quickly may well have been the reason why Francisci had given his cameraman so much creative leverage with the sequel: to ensure its timely release.

Certainly the Hercules phenomenon also increased the demand for Mario Bava's services, and while Riccardo Freda was setting up his next production (which would also prove to be Steve Reeves' first post-Hercules movie), the cameraman kept himself busy with uncredited work.

Nel segno di Roma

In the autumn of 1958, Mario Bava came to the rescue of this troubled production, directed by his friend Guido Brignone—for whom Bava had anonymously photographed earlier films dating back to the late 1940s, whose titles have yet to come to light. It tells the story of Marcus Valerius (Georges Marchal), a consul of Rome and the most brilliant general of the Roman army, who is captured by the troops of Queen Zenobia of Palmyra (Anita Ekberg) and consigned to the dungeons. With the help of a secretly Christian guard, he escapes, but determines to return to Palmyra and arrange the enemy's downfall from within. He goes back and throws himself on the Queen's mercy, telling her that his previous capture has left him reviled in his homeland and that is now without a country. He promises to avail her of his military skills in exchange for refuge. To his surprise, he falls in love with the lonely and vulnerable Zenobia, and after discovering that her chief military advisor, Semanzio/Semantius (Folco Lulli), is planning to turn her kingdom over to King Sapur of Persia (*I vampiri*'s Paul Müller), he becomes conflicted between his allegiances to heart and country.

The unspecial screenplay was credited to five different contributors, including an early byline for Sergio Leone. Late in the schedule, Brignone fell seriously ill and was replaced by Michelangelo Antonioni—who took no credit for the assignment, and in fact directed the remainder of the picture in strict accordance with Brignone's instructions, which Antonioni received at the end of each day while visiting his sick bed. Antonioni, however, was not up to the task of directing the masses of stunt riders and extras required to make a battle scene, so Riccardo Freda was hired to take charge of these. (Freda may have been suggested for these duties by Georges Marchal, who had starred opposite Gianna Maria Canale in his *Teodora imperatrice di Bisanzio*.) At the time, Freda was in the process of setting up his next film in Yugoslavia, where the *lira* went a great deal further; it was therefore mutually convenient that he shoot the battle scenes there.

The credited cinematographer of *Nel segno di Roma* was Luciano Trasatti, A.I.C. (1921–99), but in a memoir written for the book *La città del cinema*, Bava made casual reference to shooting some scenes for the picture, saying that he used the same "banged-up" Ferraniacolor camera he had used to film *Mio figlio Nerone*—working here in Technirama, as apposed to the earlier production's CinemaScope. Bava may have photographed Freda's battle scenes, as some have speculated (their collaboration on *Agi Murad il diavolo bianco* took place during this same, approximate period), but if he did, there is nothing to distinguish them as Bava's work. Bava was only able to achieve work of signature quality in the studio, where he was in more complete control of light and atmosphere.

As one watches the film, some of Bava's contributions to other scenes are quite obvious and often feature actors with whom he had worked on *Le fatiche di Ercole*: the scene of Marcus Valerius, tied to a cross in the scorching sun, being tormented with a cup of cool water by a sadistic guard (Arturo Dominici)—which includes a delirious POV shot utilizing Bava's "water glass"; the sequence of the secretly Christian guard Lator (Mimmo Palmara) slipping Marcus the key to his chains, effecting his escape from Zenobia's dungeon—which opens with a fabulous shot of Lator emerging through a tell-tale whorl of emerald green smoke at the entrance, stepping into a hot-red cavern with a cool blue, barred window; the subsequent fire sequence, which provides cover for Marcus' escape—where the predominant reds are beautifully tempered with blue smoke, lime-green accents, and flames of luminous orange; another dungeon scene in which Semantius questions and punishes a soldier overcome by rebel forces—most of which is viewed from behind an ominously lit stone column, limned in lime-green light; insert shots during a banquet scene of Semantius, who is shown talking to Zenobia and Marcus (whose own close-ups and medium shots have a blander, contradictory lighting style and a completely different approach to color temperatures); a filler shot of Marcus reading a secret message fired at him on an arrow from the Romans; an insert showing Erika's horrified reaction to the stabbing death of Semantius as she cowers beside an idol, and so forth.

Trasatti's eye for color was not as skilled as Bava's, and his scenes have a tendency to pair pastel colors (sky blue and aqua, for example) that offer no contrast, only conflict, resulting at times in "vibrating" color combinations. In a critical scene staged in Zenobia's bedchamber, the eye is actually distracted from the bountiful Ekberg by a glaringly red coverlet that screams from the center of an otherwise pastel composition. The same thing occurs when the exotic dance of Erika (Foliés Bergère dancer Chelo Alonso in her first *peplum* role) at the banquet is initially upstaged by having the background dancers dressed in the same, overly assertive red. Fortunately, those other dancers leave the floor, granting Alonso our full attention as she erupts into a frenzied hula that lingers in the memory as one of the mostly lethargic film's best scenes.

Remarkably, *Nel segno di Roma* proved almost as popular at the Roman boxoffice as *Le fatiche di Ercole*, raking in nearly 715 million *lire* [$446,000] after its March 6 release. In 1959, it became the second Italian film acquired for US release by

Nel segno di Roma

"Under the Sign of Rome"
First released: March 6, 1959
Technicolor, Technirama, 2.35:1, 100 minutes

Production: Glomer Film (Rome), Societé Cinématographique Lyre, Lux Compagnie Cinématographique de France (Paris), Telefilm (Monaco). Distributor: Cinemaproduzioni Astoria.

France: *Sous le Signe de Rome*, 5/18/60
Germany: *Im Zeichen Roms*, 10/2/59
Spain: *Bajo el Signo de Roma*, 4/2/62
UK: *Sign of the Gladiator*, Anglo Amalgamated via Warner Pathé Ltd., 5/60, 85m 15s, Certificate "U," passed with cuts
US: *Sign of the Gladiator*, American International Pictures, Colorscope, 9/23/59, 86m

Agi Murad il diavolo bianco

"Agi Murad, the White Devil"
First released: June 21, 1959
Eastmancolor, Dyaliscope, 2.35:1, 91 minutes

Production: Majestic Film (Rome), Lovcen Film (Bulgaria). Distributor: Lux Film.

Belgium: *Die Kozakken vallen Aan*
France: *Les Cosaques Passent e l'Attaque*
Germany: *Hadschi Murad—Unter der Knute des Zaren*, "Agi Murad—Under the Whip of the Tsar," Panorama, 1/15/60
Spain: *El Diablo Blanco*, 6/26/61
UK: *The White Warrior*, 1961, 85m 44s, Certificate "U," passed with cuts
US: *The White Warrior*, Warner Bros., 2/10/61, Technicolor
Yugoslavia: *Bijeli djavo*, 12/11/59

Gli ultimi giorni di Pompei

"The Last Days of Pompeii"
First released: November 12, 1959
Eastmancolor, SuperTotalScope, 2.35:1, 100 minutes

Production: Cineproduzione Associate (Roma), Procusa Films (Madrid), Transocean-Film (Munich). Distributor: Filmar.

France: *Les Jours Dernière de Pompei*
Germany: *Die Letzten Tage von Pompeji*
Spain: *Los Ultimos Dias de Pompeya*, 2/29/60
UK: *The Last Days of Pompeii*, United Artists, 7/60, 94m 41s, Certificate "U," passed with cuts
US: *The Last Days of Pompeii*, United Artists, 7/17/60, 95m

American International Pictures—making the company, for the first time, truly international. But the film's title posed some commercial problems for AIP's James H. Nicholson (1916–72) and Samuel Z. Arkoff (1918–2001).

Arkoff explained: "We didn't know what we were going to do with a title like [*Under the Sign of Rome*], so we dubbed a gladiator into the picture . . . and called it *Sign of the Gladiator*. The story of the piece was, originally, that back in the days of the Roman conquest, the Roman legions conquered a domain under the rule of Anita Ekberg and her big bosoms. At the same time she was sleeping with the Roman leader, she was leading a secret revolt against Rome! So we took basically the same story, but made the head of the Roman legion a former gladiator who, in the dying days of Rome, took the gladiators who survived their contests in the arena and put them into the Roman army, Roman blood getting thin as it were. The Roman marshall was a former gladiator and, if he didn't put down that revolt, he'd be sent back to his death in the arena—follow the pattern? In the ads we had this gladiator—even though in the picture there were no gladiators at all!"

Nel segno di Roma had been found and screened for Arkoff and Nicholson by an Italian agent, Fulvio Lucisano, (b. Rome, August 1, 1928)—"a man who looked exactly like Julius Caesar," in Arkoff's estimation—who became AIP's Roman contact, occasional co-producer, and later the president of his own production company, Italian International. Lucisano translated the film's Italian dialogue for them in the screening room as they watched. AIP bought the English-language rights to the film for twenty-five years, motivated by the success of the Hercules films, but also the even greater public reception accorded to William Wyler's Oscar-sweeping *Ben-Hur* (1959) and the high anticipation for Stanley Kubrick's recently announced *Spartacus* (1960).

The English version was created at Titra Sound Corporation in New York City, once again under the direction of George Gonneau. At Arkoff and Nicholson's insistence, Gonneau essentially junked the first reel, eliminating all the early dialogue scenes that saw Marcus delivered into Zenobia's custody, which were condensed under an umbrella of new narration, explaining that "officers and generals of the army were often recruited from the gladiators"—a preposterous idea, not unlike recruiting plantation owners from the ranks of slaves. Gonneau himself dubbed the role of Marcus Valerius, Paul Frees dubbed Folco Lulli's Semanzio, and a crooning theme song—"Xenobia" [*sic*], composed by Dominic Frontiere and Milton Raskin, sung by Bill Lee—was added to the end titles, which were reshot by AIP.

The "face lift" that was *Sign of the Gladiator* marked the beginning of a collaboration between AIP and Titra Sound that would last throughout the 1960s, exercising a near-total influence over the way the popular Italian cinema was perceived (and misperceived) in America and other English-speaking countries throughout its golden years.

Agi Murad il diavolo bianco

In later years, Mario Bava would develop a reputation as someone whose intense dislike of travel bordered on phobia. While this legend certainly adds color to his fearful character, his son Lamberto begs to differ: "My father actually *loved* to travel," he told the Italian magazine *Nocturno*. "He wasn't afraid to fly; it's just that he wasn't thrilled about spending six months in some foreign place."

Bava's next film assignment—as the cameraman of Riccardo Freda's *Agi Murad il diavolo bianco* ("Hadji Murad, the White Devil," 1959)—was one of his earliest assignments to require him to spend an extended period away from home and family. For this production, Bava agreed to cross the Adriatic Sea and spend the first three weeks in December 1958 near Zagreb, Yugoslavia (now Croatia). The bylaws of Italo/Yugoslav co-production required him to use two local camera assistants, Secula Banov and Kreso Grcev, but he was assisted by the steadfast Ubaldo Terzano when the production returned to Rome to shoot various interiors—notably those of Prince Sergei's palace; the climactic shots of Hadji Murad riding a stallion through a ballroom were filmed inside the same villa that provided the interiors of Cristiana Haute Couture in Bava's seminal giallo thriller of 1964, *Sei donne per l'assassino/Blood and Black Lace*. Frano Vodopivec (later the cinematographer of Fielder Cook's 1971 film *Eagle in a Cage*) headed the second unit camera crew, which was directed by Leopoldo Savona.

To Freda and Bava's mutual delight, the screenplay of *Agi Murad* had attracted Pietro Francisci's trump card to be its star. After the second Hercules film, Steve Reeves began to make known his interest in establishing his versatility onscreen as soon as possible. An expert horseman, Reeves



MARCUS VALERIUS *gets the upper hand against a sadistic guard (Arturo Dominici) from a scene photographed by an uncredited Mario Bava.*

1 Chris LeClaire, *Worlds to Conquer: An Authorized Biography of Steve Reeves* (South Chatham MA: Monomoy Books, 1999), 178.



STEVE REEVES *as Hadji Murad, snuggling with his fiancee Sultanet, played by Giorgia Moll.*

was attracted to Freda's project because it would allow him to show how well he could ride, while the Russian setting made it necessary for him to remain not only clothed, but bundled-up for most of the picture, permitting him to flex his dramatic muscles for a change.

Completed in only eighteen days, *Agi Murad il diavolo bianco* is a handsome but overly dry adaptation of Leo Tolstoy's story "Hadji Murad" (written in 1904, following his conversion to Christianity), about the conflict between Tsar Nicholas I (Milivoje Zivanovic) and the mountain peasants of the Caucasus, circa 1850:

The mountain folk are ruled by the aging Prince Shamyl (Nikola Popovic), but it is to their rebel hero Hadji Murad (known as "The White Devil") whom they look for leadership. After the brutal and fiery raiding of a Caucasus village by Russian troops, the soldiers receive their comeuppance at the hands of Hadji Murad (Reeves) and his men. Nicholas I is so scandalized that his national defense has been bested by rural rebels that he fires all but one of his military advisors; the remaining one, Prince Sergei Vorontzov (Gérard Herter), is spared only because the Tsar lusts for his wife Princess Maria (Scilla Gabel), who has diplomatically deflected his advances. To spare himself continued humiliation, he sends the Prince and Princess to St. Petersburg, where the Prince is empowered to negotiate with the enemy. En route, Maria's coach is met by Cossack robbers, but Hadji Murad intercedes and has her jewels returned to her. They discuss their differences, which Hadji Murad boils down to this: "We only kill soldiers; they [the Russian soldiers] kill women and children."

Hadji Murad is the widower of a woman who died in childbirth. His young son, Yusep, is cared for by Sultanet (Giorgia Moll)—the daughter of Aslan Bey (Jovan Gec)—to whom Hadji Murad is engaged. His right to her hand is endangered by the attentions of the political scoundrel Akmet Khan (Renato Baldini), who seeks to take advantage of Hadji Murad's frequent absences by claiming Sultanet for his own. After scoring an important military coup by dynamiting the Russians' stronghold at Fort Tavarasan, Hadji Murad returns home triumphant, with a string of hostages, whose lives he promised would be spared. While distracted by the ensuing celebrations, Akmet Khan authorizes the killing of the prisoners, whose bodies are dragged into the midst of the festivities. Hadji Murad is expectedly outraged, which Akmet Khan uses to his advantage, suggesting that he must be in collusion with the Russians to want to spare their lives. The aging King Shamyl reluctantly agrees, and Hadji Murad criticizes him as old and feeble-minded if he can't recognize Akmet Khan's political maneuvering for what it is. Refusing to apologize for speaking the truth, the rebel leader rides out of town and elopes with Sultanet along the way.

They awake the next morning in the woods, surrounded by Russian soldiers. In an attempted escape, Hadji Murad is shot while Sultanet makes a successful getaway to the Caucasus. The hero is taken to hospital in St. Petersburg, where he is treated before meeting Prince Sergei—a wiry, monocled autocrat who takes sadistic pleasure in watching the truth being extracted from people. ("The King has lost all faith in humanity . . . he now believes only in me," he boasts.) Hadji Murad makes a nearly successful escape, but loses consciousness in the arms of Princess Maria, who comes to admire him. ("I believe you're a generous man, ready to sacrifice everything you believe in, and that," she sighs, resting her head on his massive chest, "is so fine . . .") Prince Sergei cruelly forces his captive to accept his terms by holding breakfast on a patio overlooking a firing squad trained on the hero's right hand man, Eldar (Mavid Popovic). Hadji Murad agrees to sign a peace treaty, but later reneges on his promise and is tortured—also because Sergei knows that his wife has fallen in love with the rebel leader. The hero agrees to sign the treaty, but only if Eldar is freed first. Prince Sergei agrees, but the two freedom fighters combine forces to make an escape on horseback—Hadji Murad heroically riding his stallion through the palace ballroom, where a party is in progress, to throw the tribute of a yellow rose into the hands of the surprised Princess Maria.

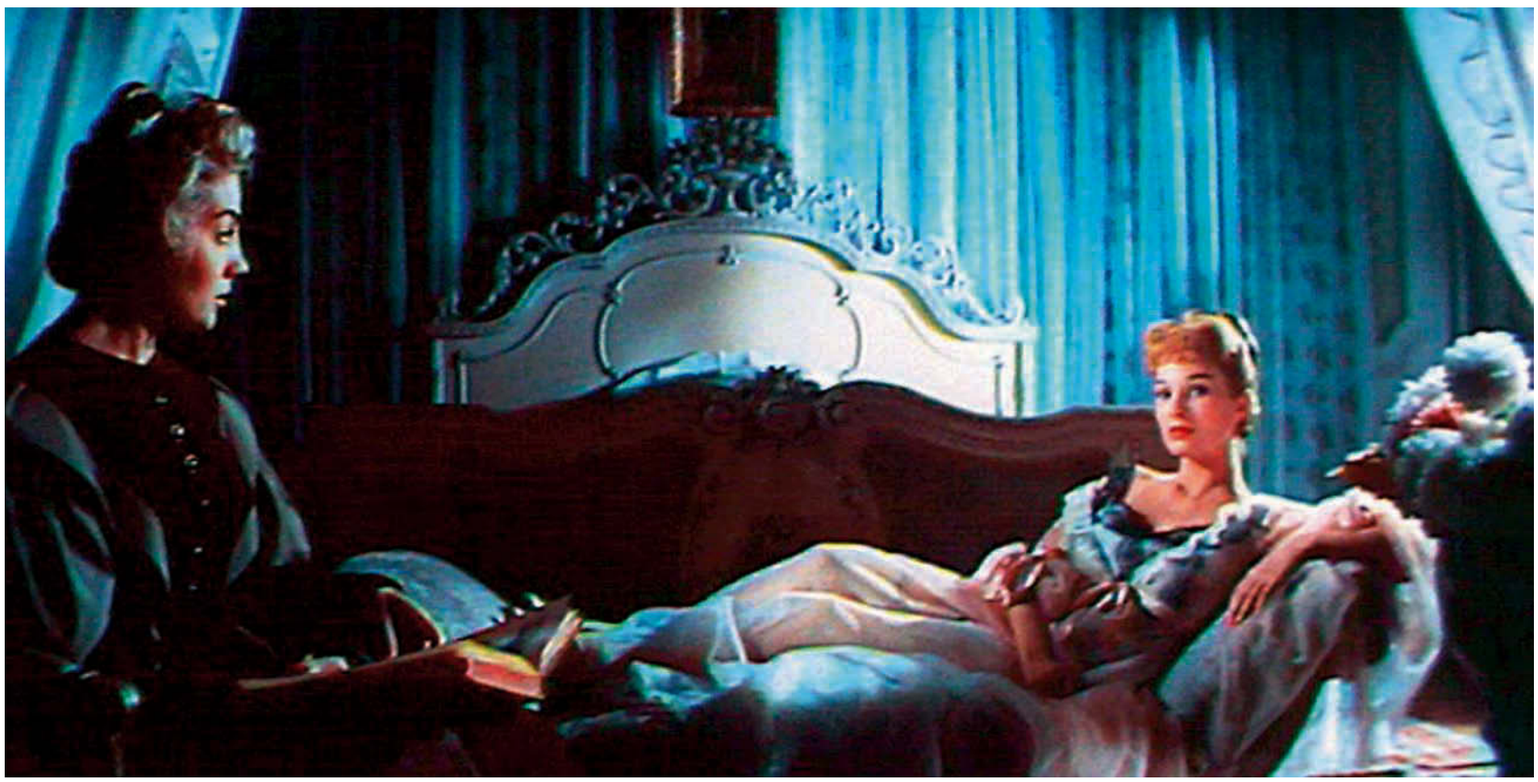
Meanwhile, back in the Caucasus, Akmet Khan has taken control after the death of King Shamyl. Sultanet has agreed to marry him in order to prevent the execution of Yusep, Hadji Murad's son. As the time of the ceremony nears, Hadji Murad rides into town with a small army he has gathered along the way. He slays Akmet Khan and the townsfolk gather around Hadji Murad and Sultanet in their moment of reunion and victory.

The screenplay of this lavish-looking production was written by Akos Tolnay and Gino De Santis. Tolnay was a Hungarian screenwriter of more than twenty years' experience, with such pictures as Zoltan Korda's *Elephant Boy* (1937), numerous 1940s films for director Ladislas Vajda, and G. W. Pabst's *La concienca acusa* (1952) among his credits. De Santis was newer at the job, but also had some fine accomplishments behind him, including Dino Risi's *Viale della speranza* (1953, which Bava had photographed) and Romolo Marcellini's *Il tesoro di Rommel/ Rommel's Treasure* (1955). De Santis would subsequently co-author Anton Giulio Majano's *Seddok (L'erede di Satana)/Atom Age Vampire* (1960), a film often incorrectly attributed to Mario Bava.

Tolnay and De Santis' script has only the broadest strokes in common with Tolstoy's novella, which was the renowned author's last work of fiction and his avowed favorite. The story opens with Hadji Murad already a fugitive from his homeland, a noble savage who prays regularly and swears vengeance on Shamil, an evil man closer to the character of Akmet Khan in the film, who has taken his wife and children hostage. Hadji Murad surrenders himself to Prince Vorontzov, and much of the story details the human relationship between the Cossack warrior and the Prince's family, which here includes a son. When the boy admires Hadji Murad's dagger, he makes an immediate gift of it to him. (In response, Princess Maria wittily observes that, if everyone were given what they expressed admiration for in St. Petersburg, the institution of marriage would be in a shambles.) There is no Sultanet, no romance angle, only a remarkable treatise on the horrors of war. It's easy to visualize Steve Reeves as the story's central character, and it would have been fascinating to see him portray the role as written, as someone savage and inarticulate, whose first request upon surrendering to the Prince is to be shown to someplace private where he may undress and pray—a sincere man trapped between the political intrigues of two warring countries, his intelligence and his fears expressed only through his eyes and through translators.

The story's most memorable scene occurs in the final chapter, as a pair of Cossacks arrive at Prince Vorontsov's fortress bearing a sack containing the severed head of Hadji Murad. As the head is lifted from the bag, Princess Maria runs in horror, while her young son insists on his right to kiss it, remembering the gift that Hadji Murad had once given him. The downbeat ending would have been considered unacceptable in the late 1950s, but Mario Bava may well have filed the scene away for his own future use, as it recalls an horrific highlight of his 1963 film *I tre volti della paura.*

Bava's admirers, and admirers of Steve Reeves, tend to dislike *Agi Murad* because it doesn't deliver very much of what we expect from these men. The film is colorful enough, if seen in a well-preserved print, but overly poised and restrained; it's a wedding cake of a movie—sweet, heavy, and ornately decorous, filling but unfulfilling. The assertive presence here is undeniably (and appropriately) Freda; *Agi Murad* is absolutely consistent with his other works, being a kind of outwardly formal, inwardly smoldering waxworks on the theme of thwarted desire. While not a correct adaptation of Tolstoy, it feels faithful simultaneously to the spirit of the author's writings and to the requirements of matinee entertainment; indeed, the only mistake it makes is trying to satisfy adult, rather than juvenile, audiences. There is far more talk than action, and seldom does Reeves strip down to flaunt his prize-winning physique. Despite Freda's renowned expertise with battle scenes, the ones found here have the impersonal feel of second-unit stuff, though Massimo De Rita confirms that Bava was behind the camera at all times during the Yugoslavian shoot. "Bava was extraordinary regarding the details,"



BAVA *helps actress Scilla Gabel to make the most of scope framing.*



PRINCE SERGEI *(Gérard Herter) asserts his cruel affections for wife Princess Maria (Scilla Gabel).*

he enthuses. "He had a creative approach to the type of scene that he wanted to get. When these were complex, he showed us the way to realize them with storyboards. He was the first in Italy to work with storyboards, and they helped him determine precisely what he would need for the editing. When we were shooting battle scenes in Yugoslavia and there were [supposed to be] 500 horses, he drew exactly what he wanted; the black ones riding from left to right, the white ones from right to left. Everything was accurate. What a director usually did in ten days, Bava could give you in three. He used a very small quantity of film; all the directors at that time did an average of eight takes or more; Visconti sometimes shot as many as thirty, while Bava did four! He had an honest relationship with the producers, and didn't want them spending money that might be used for another film."[2]

Though Bava was always on hand for the battle sequences, the film's star—though an able horseman—had little active participation in any of them. Reeves' stunts, including Agi Murad's climactic fight with Akmet Khan, were performed by his *Ercole e la regina di Lidia* stunt double, Sergio Ciani.

Reeves looks splendid in the picture, sporting a trimmed Van Dyke beard—and a healthy tan, which he attributed less to sunbathing than to his fondness for eating carrots and raisins, which gave him a naturally red/orange complexion—but his performance as Hadji Murad is smug and overly mannered. From Reeves' performance, one can easily believe Akmet Khan's accusation that Hadji Murad is less interested in fighting for freedom than in promoting his own legend. Watching a wrestling match held in his honor, he immediately challenges the victor and pins him down. As an actor, Reeves had not yet learned to modulate his performance between close-ups and long-shots, and much of his dialogue in close-up is delivered with far too much emphasis. Still, it's hard to imagine a presence that could have better represented this mythic character onscreen. Though he is given few opportunities to be his best, Reeves is probably more essential to this film than any of its other components, especially as Bava's camera ennobles him. Stanley Kubrick's *Barry Lyndon* (1975) may be the definitive example of this kind of adaptation, but for all his faults, Steve Reeves is a more compelling central figure than was Ryan O'Neal.

"Freda was a very good director," Reeves considered. "He explained every scene perfectly, like he was a friend instead of a director."[3] He liked working with Freda so well that, when he was organizing his first and only film as a producer, the Western *Vivo per la tue morte/A Long Ride From Hell* (1968), Reeves offered him the director's chair. Freda's asking price was reportedly too high, and the film was ultimately directed by Camillo Bazzoni.

Giorgia Moll (b. January 14, 1938) is well cast as Sultanet, her dark hair and eyes and pronounced cheekbones perfectly suiting the exotic geography of the story. Prior to this film, she had played a Vietnamese girl in Joseph L. Mankiewicz' film of Graham Greene's *The Quiet American* (1958). Moll's most indelible moment in *Agi Murad* is her donning of a wedding veil on the night that Hadji Murad has promised to elope with her, according to their people's custom; she wraps herself like a gift. She and Reeves worked so well together that they were later reteamed in Arthur Lubin's juvenile fantasy *Il ladro di Bagdad/The Thief of Baghdad* (1961).

A more obvious attraction is represented by Scilla Gabel (born Scilla Gabellini in Rimini, ten days before Giorgia Moll, on January 4, 1938), who got her start in films as a swimming double for Sophia Loren in the ultimate "wet T-shirt" movie, *Boy on a Dolphin* (1957). One of the most haunting beauties of the Italian popular cinema of this period, Gabel had acted in a few earlier films, but *Agi Murad* was her first to gain a wide international release, and her performance helped her to gain sufficient recognition to be cast in John Guillermin's *Tarzan's Greatest Adventure* (1959), opposite Gordon Scott, Anthony Quayle, and newcomer Sean Connery. Though her screen career would ultimately encompass such films as *Sodom and Gomorrah* (1962), *Modesty Blaise* (1966), and a turn as Helen of Troy in Dino De Laurentiis' TV miniseries *Odissea* (1968, for which Bava would co-direct and design special effects sequences), her most impressive showcase was Giorgio Ferroni's delirious horror film *Il mulino delle donne di pietra/Mill of the Stone Women* (1960).



HADJI MURAD*'s strength is not enough to break the bonds that tie him to a Russian infirmary bed.*



FOREGROUNDING *sells the illusion once again, as Reeves and other actors appear to ride toward this burning fortress—actually a glass matte construct of photography and painting, with smoke effects later added optically.*

Stealing the film is Gérard Herter (real name: Gerhard Haerter) as Prince Sergei. Clearly Freda's favorite character, we understand Sergei even before we meet him, when his wife's beauty saves his status and position from utter ruin. In the next scene, he is introduced—in full uniform and monocle—trying to train a poodle by bullying it into obedience. He is an arch weakling, empowered by his wife and uniform, who lives to lord his ineffective power over the defenseless (his dog, the men in his torture chamber); indeed, he is aroused by weakness and suffering, as when he offers slimy comfort to his wife, who has fallen in love with Hadji Murad ("I envy him, he seems to have upset you . . ."), and in the final reel, he is deposed by a single punch. Freda was delighted by Herter's performance and would invite him back for a prime role in his next picture.

In his private life, Mario Bava was a bookish man, and an avid devotee of classic Russian literature, particularly the works of Dostoevsky and Gogol. At the time he shot *Agi Murad*, he had already read most of Leo Tolstoy's great works and clearly relished the opportunity to capture the pictorial essence of Tolstoy's clean, spartan yet scientifically precise prose. *Agi Murad* finds Bava moving resolutely toward the hyper-romantic Technicolor style he would perfect in 1963's *La frusta e il corpo/The Whip and the Body*, and delivering a picture that compares well even with Jack Cardiff's work on King Vidor's *War and Peace* (1956). He utilizes very little colored gel lighting—only indigo gels for studio night "exteriors," which he contrasts with soft amber gels to suggest the subtle tensions between coolth and warmth, harsh nature and comfortable shelter. He lights the actors principally from behind, from low angles, or from the side, limning them in strong white light and leaving their faces in some degree of sculpting shadow. Such chiaroscuro somehow heightens the film's heroic dimension, likening the characters to engravings, and his painterly application of strong delineating backlight and buttery, diffuse key lighting renders Scilla Gabel impossibly beautiful in her first scene, as Maria politely fends off the bearish advances of Nicholas I. An even more fascinating visual innovation here is Bava's use of ambient smoke to soften or diffuse the backgrounds of interior shots, in order to bring the actors into bolder relief compositionally. The use of smoke as a diffusion tool would not become widely embraced by other cameramen until the 1970s and '80s, when cameramen like Douglas Slocombe (*Close Encounters of the Third Kind*) and Jordan Cronenweth (*Blade Runner*) discovered how useful it could be in terms of defining beams of light. Today, after decades of running riot



2 Manlio Gomarasca and Davide Pulici, "Il Talento di Mr. Bava," *Nocturno Dossier* 24, July 2004, 6–32.

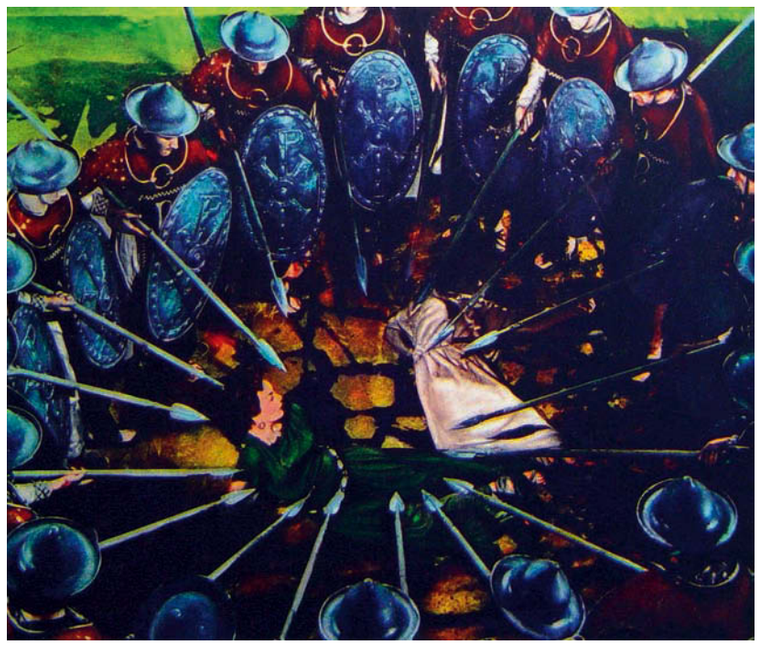
3 LeClaire, 190.

in music videos, ambient smoke diffusion has become a veritable cliché of cinematography, but this film identifies Bava as one of the technique's earliest innovators.

The film is well-stocked with widescreen shots of beautiful women in reclining poses, but the great cinematic setpiece is Hadji Murad and Sultanet's awakening in a woods teeming with Russian soldiers. Bava was usually at his weakest when shooting on location, but here he managed the unexpected, if not the impossible, by creating the film's most purely visual sequence out-of-doors. The scene opens with a shot of autumn leaves falling slowly to the ground, waking the two lovers as they settle softly on their faces. (In retrospect, the moment mildly recalls Elke Sommer's nude awakening under a blanket of leaves during the finale of Bava's 1973 film *Lisa and the Devil*.) Once the confrontation between the soldiers and the lovers begins, Hadji Murad's shooting of a Russian soldier is depicted with a very obvious nod to Sergei Eisenstein's *Bronenosets Potyamkin/Battleship Potemkin* (1925). When the camera pulls back far enough from the ensuing action to show tall, diagonal sheets of morning light shimmering through the trees, this background lighting effect—assisted once again with ambient smoke—remains constant for the duration of the sequence, which ends with the overcome Hadji Murad lying on the ground, surrounded by a circle of lowered bayonets—an image which quotes a shot found in Freda's *Teodora imperatrice di Bisanzio*, a shot which Bava may have photographed. What is most fascinating about this image is not the coincidence that a similar composition appeared in an earlier Freda film, but with a scene that would take place in Bava's own life in the near future, during the filming of *Le meraviglie di Aladino/The Wonders of Aladdin* (1961)—his next trip out of town.

An important member of Freda's crew on this picture was Filippo Sanjust, an unusual case of a screenwriter who doubled as a costume designer. Sanjust started out in movies writing dialogue for Lionello de Felice's comedy *I tre ladri* ("The Three Thieves," 1954), starring Totò. That same year, he contributed to the script of Giacomo Gentilomo's *Le due orfanelle* ("The Two Little Orphans"), based on the novel by Alexandre Dumas, which Riccardo Freda would remake in 1965. Sanjust's wardrobe design for *Agi Murad* is truly eye-popping, and Steve Reeves—seen here in everything from sheepskin turbans to fur coats and black satin tunics—was also apparently impressed by the glamor and fit of his work; Sanjust would design the costumes for his next several pictures. In 1971, Sanjust illustrated an edition of W. H. Auden's *Academic Graffiti*, and today, he is regarded as one of the world's most admired visionaries in the field of opera. For over thirty years, he has directed, designed, and wardrobed over 100 productions, which have been presented on all the great opera stages of the world—including a number of historic collaborations with Luchino Visconti.





HADJI MURAD *is captured by the Russian Army (above) in a composition that strongly recalls the climactic defeat of Theodora (Gianna Maria Canale) in Riccardo Freda's earlier TEODORA IMPERATRICE DI BISANZIO, a scene possibly photographed by Bava.*

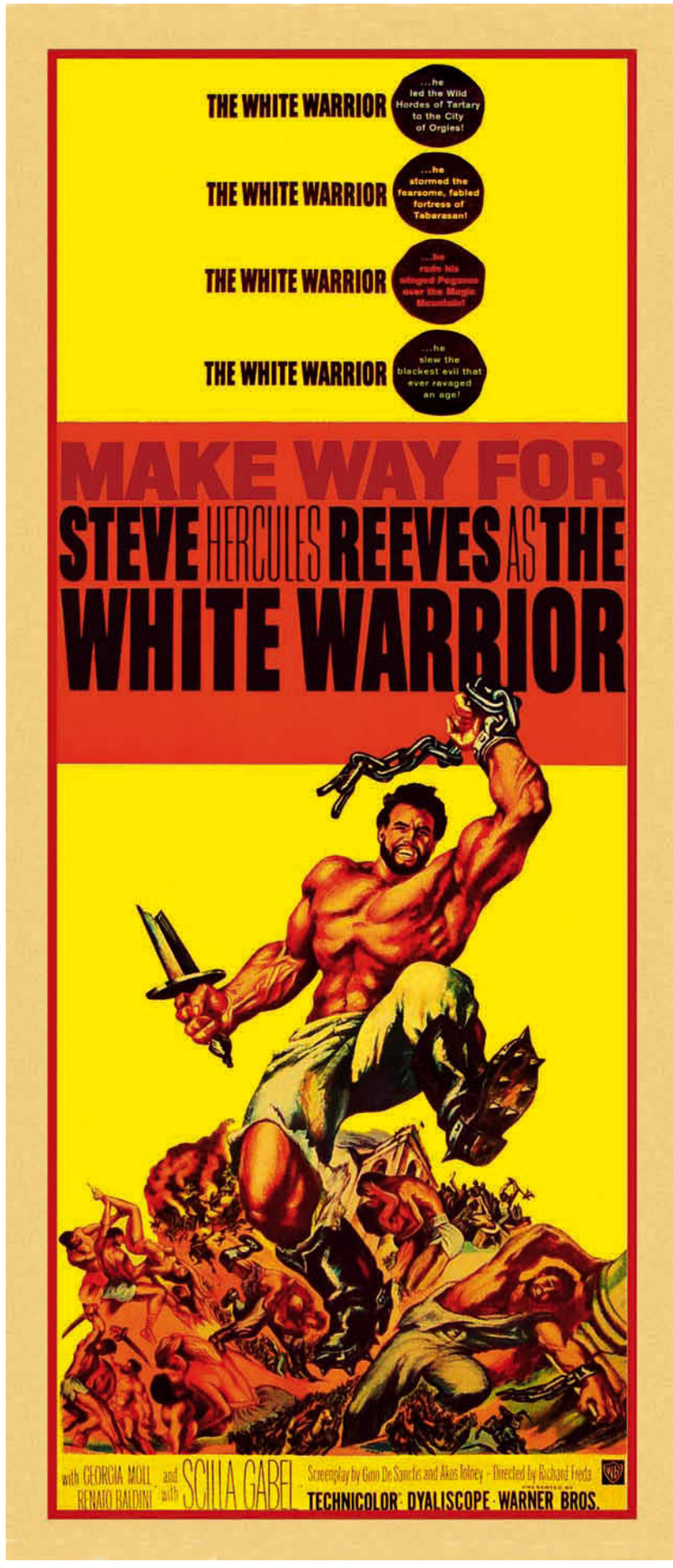
Agi Murad is also noteworthy for its bravura score by Roberto Nicolosi (credited in American prints as "Roberto Nicolsi"), who would later score Bava's first several films as a director. Nicolosi was born in Genoa, Italy, on November 16, 1914. As a boy, he studied piano and violin, and added trumpet to his repertoire in 1936. Breaking into the entertainment business as an arranger, Nicolosi made his first impressions as a member of a jazz trio that also featured Armando Trovajoli, and in the 1950s, he made a series of cool jazz and bop recordings based on his own arrangements for the Columbia label, including a 1953 recording entitled *Morbido*. He also made himself known as a music critic, documenting concerts and new recordings for the journals *Illustrazione italiana* and *Settimo giorno*. He started scoring motion pictures in 1954. At this point in his career, all of his previous films had featured actors with whom Bava had closely worked: Carlo Lizzani's *Lo svitato* (1955; Giorgia Moll), José Antonio de la Loma's *La morte ha viaggiato con me* (1957; Lidia Alfonsi), Carlo Ludovico Bragaglia's *La Gerusalemme liberata/The Mighty Invaders* (1957; Rik Battaglia, Gianna Maria Canale, Sylva Koscina), and *La rivolta dei gladiatori/The Warrior and the Slave Girl* (1958; Gianna Maria Canale, Georges Marchal). The last film, particularly, sharing two of Freda's recurring stars, indicates a

sure path to Freda's attention and his subsequent hiring for this production.

Extravagantly budgeted at $500,000—nearly five times the cost of each of the Hercules pictures—*Agi Murad il diavolo bianco* earned less than half of the individual take of those blockbusters at the Italian boxoffice when it was released on June 21, 1959. It was not acquired for US release until Warner Bros. picked it up for off-season distribution in 1961; it also opened that same year in Great Britain and Spain. It performed extremely well in America, even without the involvement of Joseph E. Levine who was, by now, producing new Reeves films on his own. As *The White Warrior*, the film recouped $768,000 in domestic rentals—more than three times the profit it enjoyed elsewhere around the world. Contrary to the film's much faded reputation, it was a bigger US boxoffice hit than Bava's own directorial debut, *Black Sunday*, which earned slightly less when it opened in America that same year.

The English-language version of the film features many of the voices familiar from the Levine dubs of the Hercules pictures: Reeves is once again dubbed by George Gonneau (as is Prince Sergei), Brett Morrison dubs Akmet Khan and Prince Shamyl, and in a bit of unfortunate retrospective casting, the voice of Hadji Murad's young son Yusep is provided by June Foray, who uses the same voice she gave to Jay Ward's cartoon character Rocky the Flying Squirrel! Foray's instantly recognizable voice makes the scenes with the boy play to American audiences today as unintentionally comic—as does Reeves' unfortunate line, "We've been lucky . . . We've had several skirmishes with the Russians—and we've taken much booty."

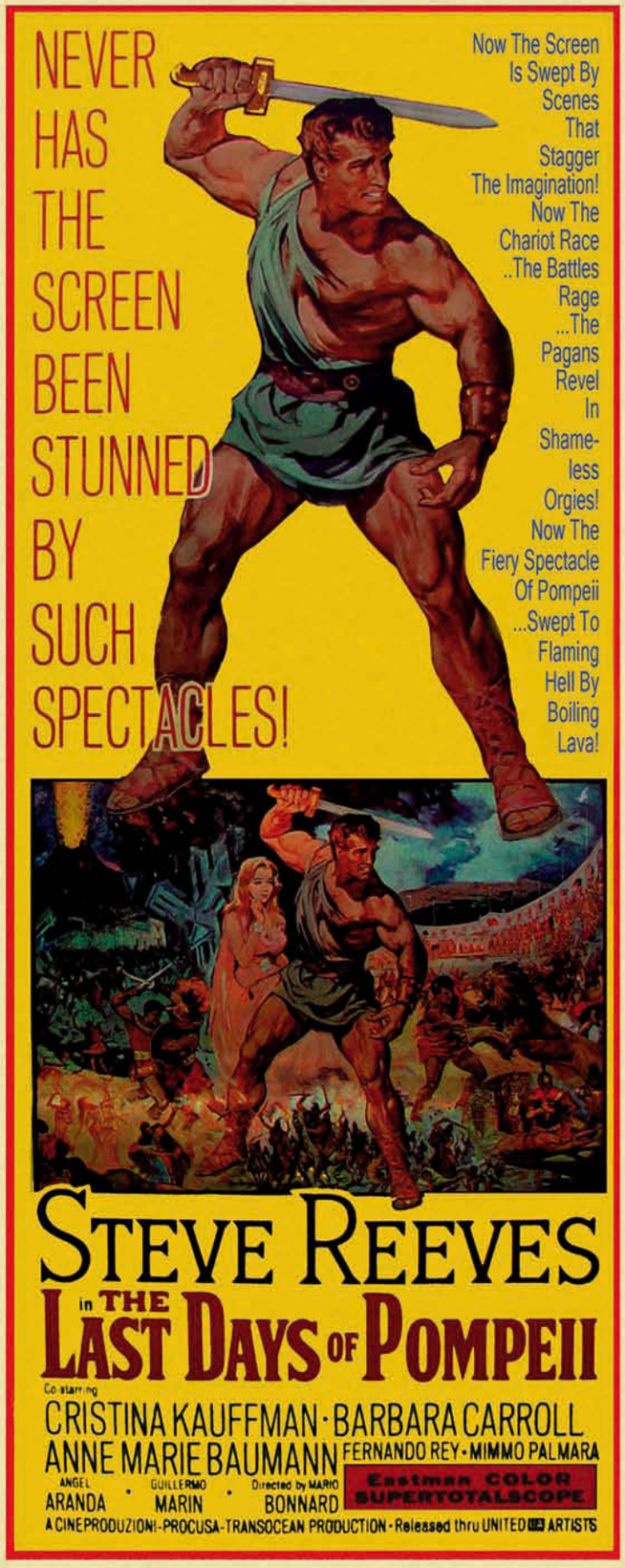
Targeting young audiences with *The White Warrior*, Warners cut the film from its original length of 98 minutes to 86 minutes. Among the cuts were a good deal of historical exposition, some explicit brutalities during the opening village raid, some punishments in the torture chamber, and the decapitation of one of Hadji Murad's men. New inserts of handwritten letters and hand-drawn maps, both in the English-language, were also shot and added. In the hope of restoring (or imposing) some narrative clarity, recurring narration was added by Marvin Miller (1913–85), best remembered as the voice of Robby the Robot in *Forbidden Planet* (1956) and as the star of the US television series *The Millionaire* (1955). During his long and varied career, Miller provided narration for a number of movies, including such disparate works as *Gerald McBoing-Boing* (1951), *Godzilla, King of the Monsters!* (1956, the US version of Ishiro Honda's *Gojira*), *The Day the Earth Froze* (1959, the US version of Aleksandr Ptushko's *Sampo*), Walt Disney's *Sleeping Beauty* (1959), and the African adventure film *Maya* (1967).



US *insert poster.*

Agi Murad il diavolo bianco marked the onset of an identity crisis that would plague the rest of Steve Reeves' film career to some extent. He wanted to try his hand at other roles, but the fact that he followed *Agi Murad* with Carlo Campogalliani's *Il terrore dei Barbari* ("Terror of the Barbarians," 1959)—virtually a Hercules film, albeit set in a more down-to-earth, contemporary *milieu* (568 A.D. in Northern Italy)—suggests that there may have been something more to his break with Pietro Francisci and the character of Hercules than was ever admitted, possibly something to do with Bava's assumption of many of the directorial duties on *Ercole e la regina di Lidia*. The Italian release of *Il terrore dei Barbari* actually earned about 150 million *lire* [$94,000] less than *Agi Murad*, but it would enjoy a much greater success in the international market.

Il terrore dei Barbari was the first Italian film acquired for US distribution by American International Pictures, which they bought in a package with *Nel segno di Roma/Sign of the Gladiator*. The fact that Reeves played a character named "Emilio" had not prevented the film from being released in Germany as *Herkules, die Schrecken der Hunnen* ("Hercules, Terror of the Huns"), but AIP showed uncommon tact by not following suit. They certainly would have been within their rights to do so. "Hercules was a public domain figure," Arkoff acknowledged, "but we didn't want to come out with another



Hercules picture with the same star," out of loyalty to AIP's former Boston office manager, Joseph E. Levine. Therefore, when *Il terrore dei Barbari* was delivered to Titra Sound Corporation in New York, it was decided that Reeves' character would be rechristened with the Biblical name "Goliath" and that the English version would be called *Goliath and the Barbarians*. My research was unable to uncover any evidence or suggestion of Bava's clandestine involvement in *Il terrore dei Barbari*, which would make it the first of Reeves' Italian films to be made without him.

Gli ultimi giorni di Pompei

After his Yugoslavian stint, Mario Bava returned to Rome in time to spend the holidays with his family. His next credited project would not begin shooting until the following summer, which leaves his first five months of 1959 officially unaccounted-for.

Considering the crucial role Bava had played in Steve Reeves' earlier Italian pictures, one naturally suspects that he must have played some covert role in the making of Reeves' next picture, *Gli ultimi giorni di Pompei/The Last Days of Pompeii* (1959). This was the latest film version of Edward Bulwer-Lytton's best-selling novel, which had been previously filmed in 1897 and 1900 (in Britain, as short films), 1913 (Italy, directed by Mario Caserini), 1926 (Italy, co-directed by Carmine Gallone and Amleto Palermi), and 1935 (US, by *King Kong* director Ernest B. Schoedsack). Reeves was cast as Glaucus, a centurion who returns from victorious battle to Pompeii, where he discovers his ancestral home ransacked and his father the latest of many Pompeiians murdered by masked assassins who sign the scenes of their crimes with Christian crosses. Subsequently, the government rounds up local Christians as lion fodder, including Ione (Christine Kaufmann), the beloved of Glaucus. With the help of a charming thief named Antonius (Angel Aranda), Glaucus discovers that the Christians have been framed for political reasons by Arbacès (Fernando Rey), the devious High Priest of Pompeii, who has been working in league with the ambitious Julia (Barbara Carroll). Glaucus escapes their death trap to defend the Christians against the lions in the arena, with some last minute help from Antonius and friends.

Gli ultimi giorni di Pompei was a transitional title in the history of the *peplum* because it was the first of the international co-productions to emerge in the genre, pooling monies and talent not only from Italy and America, but also from Spain, West Germany, France, and Monaco. This simplified the film's financing but complicated everything else about it. The direction was credited to Mario Bonnard, working from a script by Ennio De Concini,[4] Sergio Leone, Luigi Emmanuele, Duccio Tessari, and Sergio Corbucci. The script is very tired, a sort of compendium of scenes from other *pepla* written by these men, rather than a proper adaptation of the novel. The undisguised lifts from Reeves' own small body of work are particularly grating; to list the similarities to *Le fatiche di Ercole* alone, Glaucus meets Ione while rescuing her from a runaway chariot; the villainous Arbacès is in league with the thone; Glaucus is wounded and nursed back to health by a woman (Julia) later revealed as sinister; and the last reel finds Glaucus imprisoned in chains, which he manages to rip from the walls after intense effort to effect an escape and topple the idols of the evildoers High Priest. The picture was lensed by cameraman Antonio López Ballesteros mostly in Andalusia and Madrid, where troubles quickly set in. Bonnard fell ill shortly after filming began, leaving his assistant Sergio Leone to take over. Reeves did not appreciate Leone's argumentative, dictatorial approach to directing, and the two men did not get along. While Leone supervised the main unit in Spain, Sergio Corbucci was hired to direct second unit action scenes back in Rome at Cinecittà, with Enzo G. Barboni behind the camera. Reeves, accustomed to more genial directors, was offended by Leone's loudly autocratic, insistent style of directing;

US *insert poster.*



POMPEII *is seen intact at the foot of Mt. Vesuvius in this glass matte painting created for the film by Mario Bava.*

the two men did not get along, and the flustered Reeves also had to contend with the additional challenge of acting opposite German and French voices.

To make matters worse, early in the filming, Reeves suffered an accident that limited the physicality of his performance and would indeed impact the future course of his movie career. While filming a scene in which he was required to jump from horseback onto a runaway chariot carrying co-star Christine Kaufmann and drive it to a safe halt, he dislocated a shoulder. Reeves snapped it back into place himself, hearing "a loud thump." Things were okay until the next day, which called for Reeves to swim twenty yards under water set aflame with diesel fuel.

"I used the breast stroke, but found halfway through the stunt that with each stroke I could hear shoulder ligaments crunching and ripping," he remembered. "For obvious reasons, I couldn't surface and couldn't stop, so I miraculously forced myself to complete the swim. The damage to my shoulder was massive." [5]

Such problems ran rampant behind the scenes, and it shows onscreen. *Gli ultimi giorni di Pompei* may be more superficially entertaining than the overly stoic *Agi Murad il diavolo bianco*, but the film has little other than familiarity going for it. It's neither particularly scenic nor well-designed, the voluptuous Barbara Carroll appears to have been cast solely for her ability to fill Anita Ekberg's old *Nel segno di Roma* wardrobe, and the movie has little truth to offer about life in ancient Pompeii or the full, horrific extent of its destruction. Instead, it plays like a daisy chain of archetypal scenes and characters reprised from earlier *pepla*, staged without any of the excitement, charm, or the soufflé-light pageantry of the Francisci-Bava collaborations.

Mario Bava's only contribution to the picture—probably no more than a day's work on location—is the matte painting of Pompeii that Glaucus and his fellow centurions view from a distance, about 7 minutes into the picture. "You would never think that a volcano would mean anything to a man," one of them says sentimentally, as the camera cuts away to a panoramic glass matte of the fabled city, nestled intact in the valley at the foot of Mt. Vesuvius. It's a brilliant collage effect—part painting, part clip-art, and part genuine foliage—occupying only the top half of the frame; the painting cleverly incorporates unpainted areas, allowing actual cypresses to spring up amid the brushwork, helping it to more convincingly inhabit the location. Would that the production had obtained Bava's services to supervise the climactic eruption of Mt. Vesuvius! As is, the much-awaited sequence is quite pathetic, consisting of stock footage of the actual location overlaid with a fireworks optical, followed by cutaways to hapless extras scurrying among toppling, obviously lightweight set pieces, as sparklers shower down upon their heads. There is only one token shot of what we assume to be lava, looking more like raw sewage as it feebly engulfs a fleeing man's dropped personal treasures.

The main titles on United Artists' English-language prints of *The Last Days of Pompeii* are a madhouse of misinformation, crediting Leone only with second unit direction, billing the assistant cameramen below the camera operators, and attributing the special effects to "Magasoli" and "Erasmo Bacci." The former likely refers to one of two Spanish cinematographers, Augustín or Antonio Macasoli, both of whom were active at the time of filming. The latter was surely Eros Bacciucchi, who specialized in weapons and pyrotechnic effects. The *Dizionario del cinema italiano* additionally credits Cataldo Galliano with the film's special effects. If the formally uncredited Galliano was involved, it would have been in a minor capacity, as he had no previous screen credits.

Throughout the shooting of his next picture, and for years to come, Steve Reeves would suffer chronic shoulder pain from the accident he suffered while making this picture. More in demand than ever, and poised to sign an important contract with Joseph E. Levine, Reeves was beginning to ask himself how much longer he would be able to continue as an action star.

4 De Concini's involvement in this, and many other scripts written in the wake of the worldwide success of *Hercules* and *Hercules Unchained*, may be merely figurative. He admitted: "I [later] became a kind of honorary signatory for these [*peplum*] films, because everyone who made these *sandaloni* came to me to sign their scripts. Even if I had not written them, they paid me to sign them since, in a certain sense, I was regarded as the father of this type of film." In the same article containing this quote is another from Duccio Tessari, who reveals that De Concini also actively worked on several scripts at once: "Ennio at that time was like a magician. In each room of his house there was a producer waiting for his scripts, and he would move from one room to another, with the greatest of ease, in order to sort out each of these projects in turn." [Franca Faldini and Goffredo Fofi, "The Fofi Papers," *Spaghetti Cinema* 72, July 2000, 2–12.]

5 LeClaire, 197.



ITALIAN *due-foglia, art by Valcarenghi (Studio Favalli).*

CALTIKI

IL MOSTRO IMMORTALE

Caltiki the Immortal Monster

JUST AS *Gli ultimi giorni di Pompei* ends with a cataclysmic volcanic eruption, so would Mario Bava's next project begin. Though less expensively achieved than the explosion that showered Pompeii in the Bonnard/Leone film, the eruption that opens *Caltiki il mostro immortale* is by far the more memorable spectacle—and it is but one facet of a masterful procession of pre-titles illusions.

The sequence begins with three panning (right to left) shots of three panoramic glass mattes, each filmed separately. They are: (1) a twilight view of a Mayan plaza with a pyramid and towering sculpted columns, rising against a secondary rear matte of cloudy, airbrushed sky; (2) a view of an abandoned Mayan temple, adorned with stone idols, all riotously overwhelmed by plant life, with a background of actual fronds visible through the bare portions of the glass, as well as a backdrop of airbrushed storm clouds; and (3) a deeper jungle view consisting of a static lizard, more dense wilderness, and a carved leonine idol, again with real plant life and painted storm clouds visible on a layer behind the glass.



NIETO *(Arturo Dominici) startles John and Ellen Fielding (John Merivale, Didi Sullivan) with his sudden, hysterical return to their Mayan campsite.*

These individual shots are followed by an astounding, deep-focus, multiplane arrangement of all three glass mattes, further amended by an actual foregrounded tree branch and a new glass matte in the far background depicting a mountain capped by an active volcano. Monstrous clouds of roiling smoke begin to gush from the crater—a "cloud tank" effect produced by releasing a steady flow of white leaded powder into a water-filled aquarium placed directly behind the volcano matte. Since the powder would be dropped into the water tank from above, this means that this shot had to be achieved either by (1) positioning the tank behind the glass mattes and photographing them with the mattes and camera *upside-down*, or (2) by photographing the water tank effect upside-down and using the footage as a background plate to be inserted behind the mattes optically. (A later shot will disprove the first explanation.) There is a quick cut to a closer view of the activity, replacing the other layers with a single new foreground, which frames the volcanic action with a photo clipping of a stone Mayan deity, while adding additional verisimilitude with a foregrounded plant frond; the volcano's anger is now at its height, with someone's offscreen hand (possibly Bava's) adding a sense of thunder to its effusions by waving madly between the cloud and its diffuse backlighting. On cue, the camera begins to zoom in, and the film's title appears, over a closer background shot of the volcano, its smoke allowed to retain its momentum by editing together a total of five different pieces of film, consisting of cycled footage and outtakes; the cuts are mostly concealed by the scrolling main titles.

If *La morte viene dallo spazio* was "the stock shot film *par excellence*," *Caltiki il mostro immortale* afforded Bava an almost unprecedented opportunity to carry a film almost entirely with his illusions—it is "the low-budget special effects film *par excellence*." Its eponymous, immortal monster was nothing more than a heap of tripe, animated by various crude means. "It was summertime," Bava remembered jovially, "so the big problem was keeping the flies away from it!" [1] (Flies would certainly have caused some problems with scale.)

Amorphous, protoplasmic monsters like Caltiki had become very popular in the 1950s. They seem to have come into fashion when the public's increasing demand for realism in their postwar entertainment caused classic monsters like Dracula and Frankenstein to be temporarily retired. These shapeless, shuffling horrors were an acceptable substitute because they resembled what people now knew to be the essence of humankind under the lens of a microscope; they were as without form as the things that lurked in our subconscious, and could be an expressive metaphor for our unresolved fears about space travel as well as more earthly concerns, such as atomic power and nuclear radiation.

Caltiki il mostro immortale

"Caltiki the Immortal Monster"
Filmed at Titanus Studios (Scalera Film) and on location
January? – June 1959
First released: August 8, 1959
B&W, 1.66:1, 76 minutes

Production: Galatea (Rome) and Climax Films (Paris). Director: Robert Hamton [Riccardo Freda] and Mario Bava (uncredited). Screenplay: Philip Just [Filippo Sanjust], "based on an ancient Mexican legend." Director of photography: John Foam [Mario Bava]. Special effects: Marie Foam [Mario Bava]. Costume design: Philip Just [Filippo Sanjust]. Choreography: Paolo Gozlino. Production supervisor: Max De Ryte [Massimo De Rita]. Editor: Sir Andrews [Mario Serandrei]. Music: Robert Nicholas [Roberto Nicolosi]. Sound Effects: Carlo Rustichelli (uncredited). Distributor: Lux Film.

John Merivale (John Fielding), Didi Sullivan [Didi Perego] (Ellen), Gérard Herter (Max Gunther), Daniela Rocca (Linda), Gay Pearl (the dancer), Daniel Vargas [Daniele Vargas] (Bob), G. R. Stuart [Giacomo Rossi-Stuart] (lab assistant), Victor André [Vittorio André] (Prof. Rodriguez), Black Bernard [Nero Bernardi] (police commissioner), Arthur Dominick [Arturo Dominici] (Nieto), Daniele Pitani, Rex Wood.

Additional US credits: Producer: Samuel Schneider.

Belgium: *Het Onsterfelijk Monster,* Cosmopolis–Melior Films, 1962
France: *Caltiki, le Monstre Immortel,* Les Films Marbeuf, 1960
Germany: *Caltiki Rätsel des Grauens*, "Caltiki—The Mysterious Horror," Constantin Film, 5/6/60
UK: *Caltiki the Immortal Monster,* Warner Pathé Ltd., 1962, Certificate "X," passed with cuts
US: *Caltiki the Immortal Monster,* Allied Artists Picture Corporation, 9/20/60, 76m

Blobs had been a recurring motif in science fiction literature since the early 1920s, when Anthony Melville Rud's novella "Ooze" was published as the cover story of the March 1923 issue of *Weird Tales* magazine. In the late 1940s, James Blish published the story "Surface Tension," in which a group of miniaturized humans find themselves under attack by swarming amoebas. This situation was later explored in more detail by the Richard Fleischer film *Fantastic Voyage* (1966, based on a story by *It! The Terror From Beyond Space* author Jerome Bixby). 1953 was the breakthrough year for blobs, as three different stories appeared coincidentally in three different media, each with its own memorable, amorphous threat. The first was Joseph Payne Brennan's novella "Slime" (another *Weird Tales* cover story), about an ocean-dwelling blob that launches a reign of terror on dry land, after being propelled there by an undersea earthquake. In *Danse Macabre*, his overview of horror in media, Stephen King praised "Slime" as one of the best short horror stories of all time. (Had Bava encountered this classic story in Italian translation, it might well have caught his attention by having his own name for a title, since "bava" is the Italian word for "slime" or "drool.") A short time later, a Bill Elder story called "Outer Sanctum" appeared in the fifth issue of EC Comics' *Mad*, about a crazed scientist who dumped all of his liquid experiments into the Okeefenokee Swamp until there emerged "a horrible standing glob of swamp thing" called Heap.[2] In Great Britain, the summer of 1953 witnessed the true moment of galvanization: the live BBC broadcast of a six-part teleplay by Manx writer Nigel Kneale entitled *The Quatermass Experiment*, about the disastrous effects of "waves in space" on the passenger of England's first manned experimental rocket. In Kneale's serial, the astronaut returned to Earth in human form, but possessed of a reconfigured alien intelligence and metabolism that, by the serial's climax, had him physically absorbing anything he touched. In the amazing final broadcast, the tragic hero was shown slithering into Westminster Abbey as an immense, tentacled hodge-podge of plant fronds and protoplasm.

The Quatermass Experiment had a profound cultural impact in Britain. As it aired live on the BBC each Saturday night of July and August 1953, it proved so popular that streets throughout England were all but vacant during each weekend broadcast. In retrospect, it seems a bit mad that the BBC would have undertaken such an elaborate story without a special effects budget—remember, this was still the dawn of television drama—but Kneale and Company made do with what few resources they had.

"The monster's appearance, swollen to a hundred-foot mass of undulating fronds, presented problems," Kneale confessed in his Foreword to the published teleplay. "In the end I had to do it myself. Stuck through holes in a [photographic] blow-up of Poets' Corner were my own two hands in rubber gloves liberally stuck over with vegetation. I had prepared this model the night before, with my girl friend's help, in the crumbling studio where rain water dripped on us through the ceiling. Against the odds, it worked. The fuzzy cameras helped and the audience's imagination did the rest."[3]

Mario Bava would have approved. In fact, he would imitate these same rudimentary techniques in *Caltiki il mostro immortale*, though *Caltiki* had actually been inspired by a somewhat more polished example: Hammer Films' 1955 feature film *The Quatermass Xperiment*,[4] which was released in Italy in early 1959 as *L'astronave atomico del Dott. Quatermass* ("The Atomic Spaceship of Dr. Quatermass").[5]

Bava admitted in later years that *Caltiki* had been deliberately undertaken as "a take-off on *The Quatermass Experiment*."[6] However, by the time it was made, the world had been engulfed by several other examples of blobbery, including Hammer's *X the Unknown* (1956) and *Quatermass 2/Enemy From Space* (1957), and also the American film that



ITALIAN *locandina, art by Valcarenghi (Studio Favalli).*

1 Luigi Cozzi, as quoted in Mark Frank, "Emanations," *Photon* 26, 1975, 4.

2 *Mad* 5, EC Comics, June/July 1953, 1–8. *Mad*'s very first issue (titled *Tales Calculated to Drive You Mad*) in October – November 1952 had sported a front cover showing a family with backs up against the wall of a castle, asking "That Thing! That slithering Blob coming toward us! What IS it?" The issue also contained a Wallace Wood comic story titled "Blobs," but its content does not pertain to the subject under discussion.

3 Nigel Kneale, *The Quatermass Experiment*, (London, UK: Arrow Books, 1979), 7.

4 After the film (originally titled *The Quatermass Experiment*) received X certification from the British Board of Film Censors, Hammer struck upon the publicity value of retitling the film *The Quatermass Xperiment*. Prints exist bearing both titles. The film was subsequently released in America by United Artists as *The Creeping Unknown*, minus some footage.

5 In later years, after the Italian horror boom, it was reissued there as *I vampiri dello spazio* ("The Vampires From Space").

6 Cozzi, as quoted in Frank, "Emanations."

introduced actor "Steven McQueen"—Irwin S. Yeaworth Jr.'s *The Blob* (1958), which received Italian distribution in 1959 under the provocative title *Fluido mortale* ("Liquid Death").

The title *Caltiki* may have been inspired by inverting the syllables of the story's chosen location of Tikal. Another source could be the name of the Mayan sun god whose name was borne on Thor Heyerdahl's best-selling book *Kon-Tiki* (1950); this story of Heyerdahl's 1947 voyage by raft across the Pacific, from Peru to Tahiti, was made into an Oscar-winning documentary in 1951.

Caltiki's grounding in a nonexistent "ancient Mexican legend" about the imminent awakening of a long-dormant, ancient monster god also suggests the partial influence of the writer whom Bava would later declare his favorite: H. P. Lovecraft. The first official film adaptation of a Lovecraft story would not occur until Roger Corman's *The Haunted Palace* (1963, adapted from "The Case of Charles Dexter Ward" by Charles Beaumont), but Lovecraft's influence was apparent in earlier films, notably in William Cameron Menzies' haunting 3-D horror film *The Maze* (1953), about a woman who unknowingly marries into a family whose shut-away patriarch was born a frog. As mentioned earlier, Lovecraft's influence was also apparent in *I vampiri*, so it may also be the doing of screenwriter Filippo Sanjust, who also scripted the earlier picture. It isn't known to what extent Bava contributed to the story and script, but considering his absolute lack of credit for the departments he is known to have supervised, it is possible that the story of *Caltiki* was developed by Freda and Bava before Filippo Sanjust was brought in to actually put it all down on paper.



DIDI SULLIVAN *and Gérard Herter collaborated on a set of promotional photos for* CALTIKI *that attractively combined cheesecake and looming menace.*

Synopsis

British archaeologist Dr. John Fielding organizes an expedition to Tikal—a once-great Mayan city whose entire population (a narrator informs us) fled it under mysterious circumstances, never to return, circa 607 A.D. Fielding's campsite is disrupted one evening when Nieto, one of the expedition members, returns from an exploratory visit to a nearby cave in an hysterical state, crying out the name "Caltiki!" He has returned without his partner, Ulmer, so Fielding—along with his associates Bob and Max—go to the cave in search of their missing colleague. They find no trace of Ulmer, but his movie camera is retrieved at the edge of a sacrificial pool, where—centuries before—the pre-Columbian inhabitants of Tikal were bludgeoned and drowned in sacrifice to their goddess Caltiki, a carved likeness of whom overlooks the site. The statue is accompanied by a tributary inscription that reads, "Caltiki is One—the only immortal god—and when her mate appears in the sky, her power will destroy the world!" On the ground, Max finds a priceless golden bracelet encrusted with jewels, and the team resolve to return the next day with diving equipment to explore the bottom of the pool in search of other treasures. They leave the cave without discovering the horribly mutilated body of Ulmer, which lies undetected behind a pile of rocks.

That night, as Nieto sinks further into delirium, John has an argument with his wife Ellen, who is feeling ignored and impatient with this "second honeymoon." Max later makes an unwelcome pass at her, which is noticed by his girlfiend, the lovesick "halfbreed" Linda. "I didn't think you set out to capture that poor little millionairess," she sulks, making the film's only reference to the Fielding fortune. Meanwhile, Bob follows the sound of voodoo-like drums to a secret Mayan ceremony and decides to tempt Linda's warnings of "bad fortune" by sneaking a photograph; at the height of the ritual, he is seen by the principal dancer, who screams in violation.

The next day, the team returns to the cave. Bob's brief exploratory dive to the bottom of the pool confirms that there is much more treasure below for the taking, scattered amid the skeletons of the dead Maya. Going back below to retrieve as much treasure as possible, Bob is frightened by something (bad fortune?) and hauled back to the surface—his face eaten away by intense radiation. At that moment, an enormous blob rises from the lake, frightening the men from the cave. Max drops the treasure collected by Bob; then, going back to retrieve it, his right arm is engulfed by the monster. Unable to extract Max, Fielding grabs an axe and hacks off that section of the creature, which remains tight around Max's arm like a corrosive cast. The monster follows the fleeing men outside, and Fielding succeeds in destroying it by driving a truckload of gasoline into it. The flames reduce it to nothing, as Fielding looks on, aghast.

Back in Mexico City, after the death of Nieto, the monster's flesh is surgically removed from what is left of Max's arm; its corrosive effect has left the tissues mummified, and something alien has been introduced into his bloodstream that slowly begins to affect his sanity. John takes the fragment of the monster to the scientific

institute of Prof. Rodriguez, where it is determined to be a unicellular organism "approximately 20,000,000 years" of age. (The next day's newspaper headlines round off this figure to "Billion Year Beast Discovered in Tikal!") Further experimentation establishes that the flesh-eating tissue increases dramatically in size and activity when exposed to radiation, but these deadly changes can be reversed by removing the radiation. Feeling guilty over the death of Nieto and Max's disfigurement, John takes a portion of the fragment home, where he hopes his study of its apparent immortality will somehow benefit humankind. Meanwhile, at the hospital, madness begins to seep into Max's brain. His rantings, shared with the doting Linda, are only obliquely threatening at first ("We were crazy to enter that cave . . . and now we'll all have to pay for it. All of us!") but soon grow frighteningly direct ("Now there's a power in me . . . I want to hurt Ellen! The way she talked to me, like spitting at me! You'll be hurt too, if you tell her . . . My fate is to bring force into the world!") Seeing how upset she is, Ellen invites Linda to be a guest in the Fielding home, where she and John live with their young daughter, Jenny.

That night, Max's madness reaches a fever pitch. He bludgeons his attending nurse to death and escapes the hospital to commence his reign of terror. Before this is discovered, a quiet night at the Fieldings' is disrupted by a call from the Institute—reason unknown, the monster is growing to enormous proportions and destroying the lab! Prof. Rodriguez—recalling the inscription found near the statue of the goddess Caltiki—has formulated a theory about the identity of her "mate in the sky," which is confirmed by a visit to the local observatory. In an outrageous coincidence, Rodriguez is told by Mexico City's leading astronomer that the conditions of that evening's sky are identical to those in place in the year 607 A.D. when the population of Tikal abandoned their city en masse. Currently in its closest approximation



to Earth is the comet Arsinoe, which attains this proximity every 1352 years (!), bombarding our outer atmosphere with its radiation. Arsinoe is the "bridegroom"—the catalyst—Rodriguez has been dreading. Bathed in radiation that cannot be dispersed, Caltiki is now on a rampage!

As John surveys the damage at the Institute, Max (on the run from police) arrives at the Fielding home and tears out their telephone connections. Unable to reach John by phone, Rodriguez drives back to the Institute and, distracted by his thoughts of Arsinoe, veers off a narrow road to his death. Meanwhile, Linda takes food to Max in the cellar, foolishly believing that her love for him will wean him away from his hateful threats. Across town, John is informed about Arsinoe by the Observatory, and he realizes that he has left samples of the monster in his home laboratory. As he races back home to save his family, Max confronts Ellen; when Linda intervenes, Max shoots her in the stomach. At that moment, a crash is heard from the lab—Caltiki is growing and dividing into an army of blobs! As Max makes his move on Ellen, one of the creatures bursts through the door and engulfs him, dissolving the flesh from his screaming skeleton.

Ellen grabs Jenny from her room and tries to escape the house but the multiplied creatures have blocked all exits. In his rush to get home, John has been arrested for speeding by the Mexican police, who do not put much stock in his story about needing to save his family from giant monsters. Locked in a room, he breaks a window and fights his way to freedom. He is pursued by the police to his home, where the situation is quickly assessed. The army is summoned with flame throwers, while John uses a ladder to retrieve his wife and daughter from a window ledge. Finding the bottom rungs quickly engulfed by Caltiki, he tips the ladder and the three of them tumble safely to freedom. The monsters are quickly cowed by the flames, and the danger is soon ended.

Production

Riccardo Freda acknowledges in his foreword to this book that *Caltiki il mostro immortale* "should be regarded as Bava's first true film as a director," but *La morte viene dallo spazio* aside—the truth is somewhat more complicated.

"It wasn't really my film," Freda insisted to Luigi Cozzi. "It was about monsters, Medusas from space, and that's Bava's line of work; it's his genre. The film was born almost by accident, to help Bava. You see, during that period, Mario was a director of photography, both for my films and those by Pietro Francisci. It was truly his work that made Francisci a success, because that director would sit on the set and fall asleep . . . I insisted to Bava, for the sake of our friendship, that he break off with Francisci—and he did . . . but times were tough. His dog was sick, there were terrible taxes due . . . In essence, he had to work in order to live. So I met with him at his father's house and I proposed that we make *Caltiki* together; he accepted. I abandoned the film a couple of days before it was finished. I directed it, but it was more typical of Bava; I don't claim it as my own. The only aspect I remember with any fondness were the statues on the set, which I sculpted myself."[7]

To clarify these remarks, Freda abandoned the film a couple of days before its *dramatic scenes* were completed; after this, there remained two or three weeks of filming devoted entirely to special effects, which in this case amounted to over 100 individual effects shots for the 76-minute production. Bava was responsible for directing some of the film's most memorable dramatic scenes—including the opening sequence with Nieto in the Mayan ruins, which is as finished and identifiable an example of Bava's directorial technique as anyone could

7 Luigi Cozzi, *Il cinema dei mostri* (Rome, Italy: Fanucci Editore, 1987), 251.

hope to find. He also oversaw the final editing of the picture with Mario Serandrei, furthering a creative bond which had begun with the Hercules films and would continue for years yet to come.

Contrary to Freda's account, most of the dramatic scenes in *Caltiki* are very much in tune with his other work. *Caltiki* is Bava's film, roughly, to the same extent that *La morte viene dallo spazio* was a Bava film; the two movies actually have a good deal in common, and even share some of the same glass mattes (the giant observatory telescope, for example), stock footage (newspaper presses and headlines, radio operators, soldiers being mobilized), and sound effects (courtesy of the uncredited Carlo Rustichelli). In both cases, another director was responsible for the bulk of the dramatic/dialogue scenes, while Bava mostly supervised the extensive special effects shooting, the overall look of the picture, and the final editing. Of the two movies, *Caltiki* is vastly superior; if we excuse some painfully contrived plot twists and unkept promises, it is a very good example of this kind of monster movie. It is also distinguished by some of Bava's most impressive in-camera special effects, and—unless I am mistaken—his earliest use of the zoom lens. Zoom lenses were first developed at the turn of the century, but they remained complicated and cumbersome devices ill-suited for easy on-set adjustment. Zoom shots can be found in movies dating back to the silents, but in many cases, they were achieved optically or with heavy camera accessorizing and tremendous difficulty. It was only in 1959 that a lightweight and easily manageable zoom was introduced for 35 mm use in Italy, and Bava made the most of it, so much so that it would become something of a signature (and often criticized) touch in his later work as a specialist in the horror genre. Bava used the zoom to make his camera eye literally flinch from the shocks he staged in front of it.

The exact circumstances of *Caltiki*'s production have remained something of a mystery—perhaps because Freda, having learned from his mistake with *I vampiri*, was determined to give the film every opportunity to be mistaken for a British or American picture. Beginning with this film, Freda adopted the pseudonym of "Robert Hamton," which he would augment to "Robert Hampton" on such future films as *L'orribile segreto dal Dr. Hichcock/The Horrible Dr. Hichcock* (1962) and *Lo spettro/The Ghost* (1963). Only on his horror films did this pseudonym appear; Freda continued to direct swashbucklers and period dramas under his own name.



BRITISH *actor John Merivale won star billing for the first and only time playing second fiddle to a heap of tripe.*

Very few credits actually appear on prints of *Caltiki*, which only adds to the murkiness surrounding the production. For example, the film contains no producer's credit. European sources list the picture as a co-production of Galatea (Rome) and Climax (Paris), but on Italian prints, Galatea's company credit appears only at the very end, tacked-on as an afterthought—yet production assistant Massimo De Rita confirms that the film was principally produced by Nello Santi of Galatea. Some sources list Samuel Schneider as the Climax production executive, though his name does not appear on French prints. Only the American prints distributed by Allied Artists bear the additional credit "A Samuel Schneider Presentation," which is as it should be, because Schneider was not actively involved in the film's production; he was the Allied Artists executive who acquired *Caltiki* for US distribution. His presentational credit also appears on other Italian imports picked up by the company, including *Herod the Great* and *Son of Samson*.

Another mystery surrounds Mario Bava's credits on the picture—namely, the complete and utter lack of them. Whenever *Caltiki* is discussed in print, it is always mentioned that Bava was credited as "John Foam" (for his camerawork) and "Marie Foam" (for his special effects), that editor Mario Serandrei was credited as "Mark Sir Andrews," and so on; however, these departments receive no onscreen credit whatsoever in the Italian, French, or American prints, nor do they appear anywhere in Allied Artists' sparse press materials. I have been unable to determine where these pseudonyms originated, but they can be traced back to the cast/credit information that accompanied *Monthly Film Bulletin*'s condescending review of the film (as distributed in the United Kingdom by Golden Era) in March 1962.

Another curiosity is that various sources have attributed the film's score to two different composers, both previously associated with Freda: Roman Vlad (who scored *I vampiri*) and Roberto Nicolosi (*Agi Murad il diavolo bianco*). Though it is possible that cues written by both composers are heard in *Caltiki*, the bulk of its music is clearly Nicolosi's. It is melodically and rhythmically consistent with the lumbering Hans J. Salter-inspired work he would soon pen for *La maschera del demonio*.

As the screenplay is credited to Filippo Sanjust, we can assume (from his previous credits) that he was also in charge of the wardrobe department, and perhaps even supervised the production design—which is also otherwise uncredited.



FIELDING *prepares to loosen Caltiki's unrelenting grip on Max's (Gérard Herter) arm with a hatchet.*

Another source of confusion is the true chronology of production. Bava personally recalled working on some of the special effects in the summertime, but in one exterior shot during the climax, actor John Merivale's breath is clearly visible in the chill of night. Therefore, the live action portions of the film may have been shot much earlier in the year, or even prior to *Agi Murad il diavolo bianco* in November 1958; the live action of *Caltiki* looks more closely allied to the vintage of *La morte viene dallo spazio*. What we know for certain is that, regardless of when it was undertaken, *Caltiki* was completed by August 4, 1959, when it was delivered to the Italian censor board, who approved it for release through Lux four days later.

Cast

The film's casting was certainly supervised by Riccardo Freda, and it follows his traditional pattern: an aloof leading man and a voluptuous starlet, surrounded by a mysterious cortége of grotesques.

Cast as Dr. John Fielding was Canadian actor John Merivale. Born in Toronto, Ontario, on December 1, 1917, Merivale moved with his family to Los Angeles as a youngster and began his movie career in James Whale's *The Invisible Man* (1933), playing a newsboy. He later resurfaced as the pilot of the HMNZS Achilles in Michael Powell and Emeric Pressburger's *The Battle of the River Plate/The Pursuit of the Graf Spee* (1956), and had his most memorable roles as Robbie Lucas in Roy Ward Baker's film of the Titanic disaster, *A Night to Remember* (1958), and as the eponymous character in John Huston's *The List of Adrian Messenger* (1963). His screen credits come to an end in the mid-'60s with Stanley Donen's *Arabesque* (1966). He died of kidney failure on February 6, 1990, in his adopted city of London, England.

Merivale's appearance in *Caltiki il mostro immortale* was a career anomaly; he made no other Italian pictures, and he doesn't particularly shine in this one. A competent actor though lacking charisma, he seems to fade into the woodwork even during his heroic scenes and takes no relish in his "love" scenes with co-star Didi Sullivan—young enough to be his daughter, actually—planting all of his kisses paternally on her cheek—even during their "second honeymoon."

Didi Sullivan was a pseudonym used by Italian actress Didi Perego in her earliest screen appearances. Born Aida Perego in Milan on April 13, 1937, Didi was a model before she turned to acting in 1959. In addition to *Caltiki*, she also made Jean Boyer's *Le Confident de ces Dames* (with Ugo Tognazzi and Sylva Koscina) and Gillo Pontecorvo's *Kapo* (with Emanuelle Riva and Susan Strasberg) that year, the latter marking her first appearance under her "serious" name. She had a long, low-profile yet notable career that managed to dodge "lower" Italian genres like the *pepla* and Spaghetti Westerns in favor of more "respectable" international cinema assignments. Among her films are such highlights as René Clement's *Che gioia vivere/The Joy of Living* (1960, with Alain Delon), Gianni Puccini's *Amore facile* (1964, with Barbara Steele), Steno's Diabolik spook *Arriva Dorellik/How to Kill 400 Duponts* (1967), Sidney Lumet's *The Appointment* (1968), and several films for French director Philippe De Broca in the early 1970s, beginning with *Les Caprices de Marie/Give Her the Moon* (1970, with Valentina Cortese). Her biggest film was Ettore Scola's international hit *La Nuit de Varennes* (1982), with Marcello Mastroianni, and her last was the horror-themed *Cattiva/The Wicked* (1991), with Erland Josephson and Julian Sands. She was later diagnosed with cancer, which claimed her life on June 28, 1993.

Perego isn't given much to do in *Caltiki*—other than to smoke petulantly, offer sisterly advice to Linda, and proffer her cheek dutifully to her husband—but she is undeniably fetching while dodging blobs in a transparent nightgown. She has much greater impact in a series of marvelous publicity poses that were included in the film's stills sets. These are a testament to Perego's modelling skills, and in their own way, classic examples of movie exploitation art.

As in *Agi Murad il diavolo bianco*, Gérard Herter steals *Caltiki* (from everyone but Bava) with an imposing, leering, malevolently cranked-up performance. His character of Max Gunther is obviously based, loosely, on the character of the alien-infected astronaut played by Richard Wordsworth in *The Quatermass Xperiment*. But whereas Wordsworth's performance seethes with evil in its insect-like poise and passivity, Herter becomes inflamed by his infection and becomes a combination of Richard Widmark on his maddest day, and the kind of crazed, railing German maniac that we associate with Peter Lorre, Martin Kosleck, or Klaus Kinski. One of Herter's greatest gifts as an actor, at least in the context of the films he made with Freda and Bava,



was knowing how to relate to the camera, how to incorporate light and shadow into his performance. One of his most effective moments is the revelation, in his hospital bed, of the theretofore unknown damage to his neck and face—which is put before us at the precise moment he turns sharply toward Merivale and says the word "face."

Max's death was filmed with the same red/green makeup/lighting technique that Bava had used to age Gianna Maria Canale in *I vampiri.* As Caltiki's flesh-eating wattles enfold him, blood gushes from the edge of his mouth as his cheeks and eyes appear to sink in. It's a very brief glimpse, but more was apparently filmed, judging from a production still that shows Herter in an unused, intermediary pose, wearing more aged makeup and grimacing to accentuate the natural lines in his face and lips.

Caltiki also marked Bava's first experience of working with actress Daniela Rocca, with whom he would work several times on various Galatea productions. Born September 12, 1937, in Catania, Sicily, Rocca started acting in Franco Brusati's *Il padrone sono me . . .* and Giuseppe Vari's *Addio sogni di gloria* (both 1955), rose to main roles in Robert de Nesle's French production *Marchands de Filles* (1957), and played her first *peplum* role of Naomi in Fernando Cerchio's *Giuditta e Oloferne/Head of a Tyrant* (1958). In 1959, she made her first films for Galatea, *Caltiki* as well as Mario Mattoli's *Non perdiamo la testa*, and the affiliation would continue for most of her career. A very glamorous woman, Rocca would give her finest performance as the bovine, mustached wife of Marcello Mastroianni in Pietro Germi's Galatea-produced *Divorzio all' italiana/Divorce Italian Style* (1961). In *Caltiki*, Rocca is badly cast as the dejected Linda, and she responds to the role accordingly, looking appropriately bored and embarrassed throughout. Her only concessions to her character's heritage are a stereotypical, double-braided hairstyle and stoic attitude, and her prominence in the plot only serves to make her appear more ridiculous

US *one-sheet poster.*



than the paunchy Italian extras darkened-up to play the Fielding expedition's native guides.

Vittorio André, who plays Prof. Rodriguez, had previously worked with Bava in Luciano Emmer's *Terza liceo* (1954). Sometimes credited as "Victor André," he also worked with Emmer in *Il momento bello* (1957), and later appeared in a select number of horror and fantasy films, including Giulio Questi's *La morte ha fatto l'uovo/Plucked* (1967), the Dario Argento-scripted *Probabilità zero/Probability Zero* (1968, directed by Maurizio Lucidi), and Antonio Margheriti's juvenile fantasy *L'inafferrabile invincibile Mr. Invisibile/Mr. Superinvisible* (1970). He has only a few scenes in *Caltiki*, and what is most mysterious about his participation is the extreme suddenness of his exit—one of the most abrupt dismissals of a character since Bela Lugosi walked offscreen into the path of an unseen car in *Plan 9 From Outer Space*. As we see Rodriguez' roadster take an unexplained swan dive off the shoulder of a narrow road, the viewer can only surmise that the actor was prevented from completing his role by illness, or lack of funds, and had to be removed from the story by drastic measures.

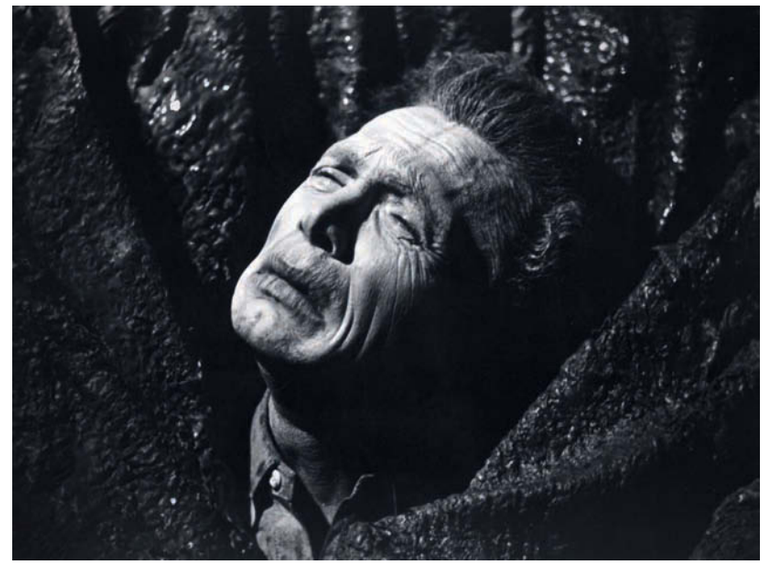
Also on hand are Giacomo Rossi-Stuart—still in the early "lab assistant" phase of his career, but handling his role with efficiency—and Arturo Dominici, whose opening scenes in the film are a *tour de force* demonstration of Bava's ability to create horror and spectacle with little more than an actor, a camera, and his own two hands.



Commentary

The first image in *Caltiki il mostro immortale* (after the volcanic prelude described above) shows Nieto's (Dominici's) hands reaching up—seemingly out of the ground, but actually scrabbling for a handhold to pull himself onto higher ground. This shock image was meaningful enough to Bava that he would quote it a few times in the course of his later career, most famously in the introduction of Dominici's character Javutich in *La maschera del demonio*. After a glimpse of Nieto's frightened face, we cut to a pyrotechnic explosion of showering sparks, followed by a backlit view of Nieto stumbling in silhouette over a few scattered rocks, enveloped in darkness. In the next shot, he is frightened by the sight of a human skull in his path, a large snake slithering through its open jaws. The cut-away shot is bracketed by a zoom out from Nieto's face and a zoom in, which perfectly imitates the involuntary tendency of the eye to leap toward a shocking image, to "capture" it, as the body simultaneously recoils. (This shot demonstrates Bava's remarkable mastery of his new zoom lens.) Nieto moves on, and there are two more brief shots of him, viewed from different angles, as he passes by an arrangement of rocks, piled and placed differently within the frame to suggest his progress; it seems like he's walking and walking for miles, but Dominici himself has scarcely taken more than a few steps in the entire sequence. Next, in a perfectly realized in-camera interfacing of actor and matte, we see Nieto stagger through the Mayan plaza that provided the first image in the movie; Dominici stays strictly below the matte line of Bava's impressive panoramic view, and with the two elements viewed through a common day-for-night filter, he is absolutely, convincingly *there*. Next, topping even this shot, we cut to Bava's multi-plane matte shot, and Dominici appears at a believable distance through an unpainted area of the matte; he moves on, disappearing, and then reappears in close-up—crossing the frame between the foremost layer of the matte and a bare, foregrounded tree, cleverly placed there to lend a persuasive dimension of reality. In the background of the shot, throughout the take, the volcano continues to spew a lazy plume of smoke from the cloud tank behind that rearmost matte, so that the entire shot consists of a total of six layers, spanning from the tree to the tank. This entire sequence depicts nothing that

MAX *(Gérard Herter) corners Ellen (Didi Sullivan) alone at home, only to become engulfed in the radioactive folds of Caltiki.*







CALTIKI: *A sampling of Italian fotobuste.*

exists outside reality, but up to now, virtually all that we have seen has been an elaborately staged illusion.

Tikal (the supposed location of this sequence) is the oldest and largest of the ancient Mayan cities, located in north-central Petén, Guatemala—and an inspired choice of alternative location for an Italian horror movie. Like Rome, Tikal is an ancient city covering a hilly landscape with great monuments dating back to pre-history—temples, pyramids, palaces, and, above all, ruins. The difference is that, after 600 years of extraordinary advancement in the realms of mathematics, agriculture, astronomy, and art, 90% of Mayan civilization would abandon its major cities and die out by 1100 A.D. *Caltiki* speculates on the cause of this mass exodus, but it remains one of the world's great mysteries. The mystery appeals to us all, but particularly to a Roman sensibility, a ghost town like Tikal must embody the saying, "There but for the grace of God go I."

Caltiki might have had more resonance, in hindsight, had Dr. Fielding brought the living samples of the monster back to a home in Rome, rather than to Mexico City. As it is, one of the movie's great faults is that its later scenes in Mexico City in no way attempt to create an illusion of that metropolis that would match, or perhaps top, its early recreations of Tikal. Since the dawn of giant monster movies, beginning with Willis O'Brien's stop-motion brontosaurus raid on London in *The Lost World* (1925), audiences have been conditioned to expect an inevitable conflict between the respective collossi of antiquity (monster) and modern civilization (city). The American advertisements for *Caltiki the Immortal Monster* also actively encouraged such expectations, boasting a "Slimy Glob of Death Engulfs the World!" over artwork depicting skyscrapers being toppled and crushed by Caltiki's awful tumult. Instead, the movie gives us only the attack on the isolated Fielding home, which is nevertheless well-done. In their rush to an early ending, the filmmakers conveniently forgot to track the fate of the other blob that grew and broke free from the scientific institute, presumably somewhere near the heart of Mexico City. Perhaps it's just as well; as it is, the film reveals only the most cartoonish awareness of the reality of Mexican or even Mayan life in the 20th century (the Maya were not erased from the Earth, and still number over 4,000,000 people today). The "halfbreed" character of Linda is such a broad stereotype she might have been modelled on someone's doll of a Native American woman; the Mayan religious ceremony which Bob surreptitiously views is more akin to a Caribbean voodoo dance out of *I Walked With a Zombie*; and Fielding's arrest for speeding by the Mexican police is a TV sitcom *cliché* all the way.

Caltiki is also severely weakened by its penchant for soap opera, which is forever digressing from the increasingly cosmic problems at hand to ponder the dreary and unoriginal amatory lives of its principals. Regardless of the steps taken to dissociate the film from its Italian origins, these scenes betray the filmmakers' inescapable rooting in the tastes and traditions of their own national cinema. *Caltiki* may deny being Italian, but it is clearly reaching out to an Italian audience. Uncertain of winning them with its homespun science fiction, it also reaches out to them with the one-dimensional complexities of its cast of melodramatic stereotypes (the "distracted scientist," the "ignored wife," the "jealous rival," the "devoted, moping masochist," etc.), and in these departments, it fails miserably. Fortunately, the rest of the film has more than sufficient value to make the rest worth enduring.

When Bava referred to *Caltiki il mostro immortale* as a "take-off" of Hammer's *The Quatermass Xperiment*, he may have meant that it was literally written from the earlier film's template, because the two stories share a number of corresponding points in common. In most cases, such studied imitation would result in redundancy and tedium, but in this case, the filmmakers were inventive enough to build on the previous film's ideas with new twists of their own. Victor Caroon, the returning astronaut of *The Quatermass Xperiment*, is similar to *Caltiki*'s Max Gunther: both are cold men doted over by women characters despite their lack of reciprocation; both are hospitalized after suffering injuries to their hands; both escape violently from hospital; and both elude manhunts by police to have close encounters with children that the audience worries will be fatal. Both men are subsumed into the ultimate horror that confronts the films' respective heroes, and whereas *Caltiki* opens in a temple, *The Quatermass Xperiment* concludes in one: Westminster Abbey. The most arresting of the films' similarities, however, is their shared use of *faux* documentary film footage to trace the moment of origin for their respective horrors.

In *The Quatermass Xperiment*, Dr. Bernard Quatermass (Brian Donlevy) learns what the sole survivor of his three-manned rocket flight is unable to tell him by viewing a silent filmed record of the voyage. Thus, documentary footage reveals that the rocket was bathed in a series of unexplained "space waves." In *Caltiki*, the untold story of Nieto and Ulmer's initial expedition to the cave is told when their 8 mm movie camera is found at the edge of the sacrificial pool. Once developed, the film (we're told that it was photographed by an Indian guide)

shows the two men descending the hill from the encampment toward the cave, where they discover a priceless Mayan bracelet, and then react in horror to an offscreen threat that cuts the footage short. What is most impressive about these two sequences—the one in *Caltiki* especially—is that they represent possibly the earliest examples of *faux* documentary footage in the horror genre. Like the faked newsreels that open Orson Welles' *Citizen Kane* (1941, for which the original footage was deliberately scratched and abused to make it look more believable), *Caltiki* accentuates the "reality" of its monster's first appearance by depicting the event—not on film, but in a film-within-a-film, artlessly photographed with wobbly hand-held shots, imperfect focus, and other sly imitations of amateur handling.

This is a milestone sequence in the history of horror cinematography; with it, Bava founded a new, previously uncharted dimension in cinematic fright. Possibly rooted in literary antecedents like Daniel Defoe's "found manuscript" novel *A Journal of the Plague Year*, or Lovecraft's own apocryphal devilbook *The Necronomicon*—but most certainly informed by Bava's past experience in forging wartime newsreels at the Istituto LUCE—the deliberate "home movie" sloppiness of this sequence effectively removes the perceived barrier of safety which had always existed up to this moment between a horror film and its audience. Viewed in the context of Bava's always impeccably stylized black-and-white photography, the sheer *artlessness* of this 8 mm fragment catapults the film into an alarming tense of heightened reality. It's hard to convey to a contemporary reader the impact that this now-mild-looking sequence had when *Caltiki* was new; audiences had never before seen a movie lose control of itself, supposedly as the cameraman was being eaten alive—by something we hadn't seen yet! The footage isn't at all graphic—it offers far more fear than violence—but its abrupt violation of motion picture etiquette was a stunning visual coup. At the time, it was the closest thing to a snuff reel ever dared in a horror movie; even Michael Powell's *Peeping Tom* (1960) was still a year away. With this one sequence, *Caltiki* points the way to such celebrated later examples of *faux* horror documentary as Ruggero Deodato's *Cannibal Holocaust* (1980) and Daniel Myrick and Eduardo Sanchez' shot-on-video phenomenon, *The Blair Witch Project* (1999).

Despite the restraint of this sequence, elsewhere *Caltiki* is surprisingly graphic. If one accepts the common wisdom that all that is needed to make a horror movie memorable are three good scares, *Caltiki* more than qualifies. The images of Bob being rescued from the sacrificial pool, his scuba mask pulled away from a fleshless face, its glistening skull with staring eyes still intact; the slow, sticky, surgical peeling of the blob's tissue from Max's arm, revealed as an ugly, mummified shrivel; and of course, Max's reduction to a struggling skeleton as he is enfolded one last time by the monster—these moments are as grisly as any attempted in horror movies up to this time. They showcase a level of special makeup effects expertise that would not begin to inform the horror cinema of other countries until the early 1970s. No makeup artist is credited, but considering the special effects nature of their application, it is almost certain that Bava supervised these illusions, as well.

Riccardo Freda also lent his sculpting skills to the production. He not only carved the idol of Caltiki found inside the cave, but also the mummified body of Ulmer glimpsed (only by the camera) behind a pile of rocks near the sacrificial pool—a construction of hair and *papier maché*, not unlike the deteriorated remains of the Duchess Du Grand seen at the climax of *The Devil's Commandment,* the US release version of *I vampiri.*





Special Effects

Lamberto Bava remembers that all of the miniature special effects sequences of the blobs attacking the Fielding house were shot in the house of his grandfather, Eugenio. These sequences, then, represent a new collaboration between Mario and his father, who was at the time preparing to retire from his long-held position at the Istituto LUCE. In recent years, Eugenio had not only been accepting occasional active jobs in the commercial cinema, but was going against his previous credo by accepting onscreen credit for them.

In 1957, Eugenio had accepted a rare screen credit as "technical consultant" to Giacomo Gentilomo's *Sigfrido*, an elaborate remake of Fritz Lang's *Die Niebelungen* diptych, whose fabulous dragon introduced to the world a new mechanical genius of Italian special effects: Carlo Rambaldi. Born in Vigarano Mainarda in 1925, Rambaldi's comparative youth and ambition would eventually present him with important invitations that Mario Bava refused, and his willingness to relocate to California in the 1970s allowed him to achieve the international recognition and high rewards that Bava reflexively shunned. But in 1957, though already in his early 30s, Rambaldi was still a tyro in the film business, regarded by many of his colleagues as a kind of mad scientist. Producers did not know what to make of his progressive ideas, without a track record of success to support them, and he was often forced to prove his abilities on less-than-supportive income.

"I met Eugenio Bava during the first two or three months of my stay in Rome," Rambaldi recalls. "I moved to Rome because of this project, *Sigfrido,*



BELGIAN *affiche.*

which involved the creation of a big dragon—the dragon Fafner, whose blood makes Siegfried invulnerable. The dragon was built at the Spes Studios of Catalucci, and Catalucci had given his personal assurance that this job would be carried out with the greatest professionalism. It was on that occasion that I met Eugenio Bava, who used to come on the set as production consultant to make sure that things were . . . [going well], because I was not known in Rome at that time. They didn't know what I could do. He would come every day to check how we were making molds, how we were planning the mechanics, and so forth. I saw at once that Eugenio, who was a very kind man, was very experienced in this field. Sometimes he would advise me about which materials to use, on the types of mechanics to adopt, on long distance transmission of movements, and so forth—and we became friends. He was always happy, always in a good mood, always ready to give advice. It was good to be in his company; in fact, the atmosphere would became cheerful during his visits."[8]

Rambaldi's relationship with Eugenio continued after the completion of *Sigfrido*—which was later released in the United States under the title *Dragon's Blood*—when the elder Bava continued to drop by Rambaldi's workshop. "He would come, stay a couple of hours, and talk to me about his past. He used to tell me things about his life, about his youth . . . unfortunately, things which I don't remember any more. He told me that he had a son who was a director of photography, and later, that his son had started to work as a director."

During this period, Eugenio Bava's preferred mode of transportation was a beaten-up Topolino, a budget car manufactured by Fiat that resembled a smaller kind of Volkswagen with an elongated front. One of Eugenio's stories, which likely dates from the period when Mario was working on the Hercules films, involves the Topolino and sheds interesting light on the father–son relationship of Eugenio and Mario.

"Eugenio had a Topolino, which he used for his travels, to go with his wife to Frascati or the Castelli Romani," Rambaldi explains. "Once he said to me, 'I went to see my son at Cinecittà and when he saw me, he asked where I had parked the car.' And I said, 'Well, there was a free space near the studio, so I parked it there.' And my son told me, 'You mustn't come here with the car.' Do you know why, Carlo? Because my car has a fault: the back of the passenger seat collapses, so I have to prop it up with a plank. And my son says, 'It isn't very prestigious for me to have my father seen going around in a car with its seat propped up with a plank of wood!' But [Eugenio] just laughed about it," Rambaldi continues, "and said, 'I will go on just the same . . . even if he . . . [doesn't like it], and I will tell him, I parked it right out front!'"

In *Caltiki*, the special effects for the monster itself were impressively humble in origin. For most of its scenes, Caltiki (the name Bava used for the amorphous mass, though the film itself refers only to the idol of the Mayan goddess by this name) was

composed of nothing more than tripe—the cheap kind sold as cat food in Italian markets. Bava later estimated that the production used 100 kilograms (roughly 220 pounds) of tripe, each and every day. "The guy whose job it was to buy the tripe once decided to save some money by reusing the same tripe over a span of three days," he winced. "After three days, that tripe was killing everybody for real, with its unbearable smell! [Gérard] Herter, the German actor who had to be engulfed by the monster, nearly died from it! When the movie was shown in Tunisia, the scene were Caltiki appears made such an impression on the audience that they literally ran out of the theater . . . and it was nothing but tripe!" [9]

Mario, who was prone to exaggeration in interviews, told Luigi Cozzi that the eponymous *mostro immortale* "was nothing more than a lot of cow's entrails with a man—poor man!—hidden inside to make them move." [10] A close study of *Caltiki* gives one reason to doubt that such a crude method of animating the monster was actually used. The largest form of Caltiki to interact onscreen with a live actor appears during the cave scene, when Max stumbles too near the monster and has to be cut free from its mass. The long and medium shots of this scene, and the pertinent still photos, appear to support the theory of Bill Warren, who—in his book *Keep Watching the Skies!*—points out that Caltiki looks more like heaps of wet canvas than tripe—though tripe was certainly used for the insert shots of the meat Fielding tries to hack away from Max's trapped arm. For the later shots of Max being eaten to death, various sheets of tripe appear to have been arranged in layers over some kind of frame, allowing actor Gérard Herter (who does look truly nauseated onscreen) to stand behind them and still appear to be surrounded. Caltiki's smaller incarnations, as seen in the glass box at the science institute, appear to be a mass of pulsing liver, pudding or polenta sewn inside cheesecloth, animated manually from below. Only in instances like this, or in the film's climactic moments, does the tripe appear to be covering a human element, but probably nothing more than a human hand. When they worked together in the late 1960s, Bava confided to actress Laura Betti that electrical current was also sometimes used to goad the organic matter through a labyrinth of scale model sets: "half a pound of tripe, animated at a distance by two electrical wires, resulted in the most terrifying monster climbing up model stairs and [bursting through] walls." [11]

Massimo De Rita, who by now had become a personal friend of Bava, remembers him filming some of the special effects at the Scalera Film studios, as well. "On the sound stages at Scalera, which were very small indeed, he had constructed the scale model of a house," De Rita describes. "Then the monster made of tripe reproduced and multiplied, came down the stairs, devoured people, was destroyed. Mario was limited in the way he could manipulate the tripe through holes that were cut into the floor beneath it, but he produced effects that were terrifying on screen. He could work only for 3–4 hours because [under the hot lights] the tripe began to stink. The miniature effects were extraordinary: [he would film the tripe], then rewind the camera and film the tiny flamethrowers, because the monster was destroyed by fire." [12]

De Rita's comments testify to the observation that Caltiki puppeteered by human hands secreted beneath its rancid flesh, making it pulse and throb, forcing it through miniature doors and up scale model stairwells. His recollection of the camera being rewound for double exposures points out the necessity of black (unexposed) areas of the frame, in which manipulating hands could have actually appeared on screen in black gloves, filmed against a black backdrop. (It was in this manner that the famous Italian mouse, Topo Gigio, was brought to life on stage.)

More remarkable than the monster itself are the various miniature sets to which Caltiki, and its divisions, lay waste. Not only are the miniature recreations of the sets flawless, but they are also perfectly lighted according to scale—the kind of detail that can make or break such shots, and one which the majority of miniature effects artists working in this period overlooked. The film also includes a briefly glimpsed miniature night shot of Fielding's car as he speeds toward home to save his family, but it is onscreen so briefly I am not convinced that it was created for this film. As with *La morte viene dallo spazio*, Bava cut some corners in *Caltiki* by using stock footage. For example, the inexplicably gratuitous accident that claims the life of Prof. Rodriguez—his car shown flying off the edge of a narrow road, sailing in a long, graceful arc to the rocks below, and exploding a second later into flames—was a miniature effects shot by Howard and Theodore Lydecker, culled from Chapter 1 of the 1946 Republic serial *The Crimson Ghost*!

Variants

The American version of the film, *Caltiki the Immortal Monster*, is basically identical to the Italian original with no missing scenes, despite its short "B-picture" running time. When I first saw the Italian version, I was struck by the superiority of the sound effects mix—particularly the ambient bat squeaks in the cave scenes, which make them much creepier—but I later discovered that the sound effects are basically the same on the English version, though you need a good print to hear them. (To date, *Caltiki* has not been given an authorized home video release in America, though it has been shown in an excellent print on cable's The Movie Channel.)

The English-dubbed version—released in America in 1960, and in Great Britain in 1962—was produced at Titra Sound Corporation in New York, and this time their work warranted onscreen credit for the English version's director (Lee Kresel), editor (Salvatore Billitteri) and sound recordist (Maurice Rosenbaum).

Lee Kresel (1918–80) was one of the first American actors to seek work in Italian films after the war; he played the role of King Louis XVI in Gregory Ratoff's *Black Magic* (1949). Kresel found more work offscreen than on, dubbing European films into English for export (Jean Renoir's *Le Carrosse d'Or/The Golden Coach* is one example), and he took this skill with him when he returned to New York in the late 1950s. Over the years, primarily at Titra, Kresel would write and direct a number of English versions of films produced in Italy and Japan, including such far-ranging titles as Yoshimitsu Banno's *Gojira tai Hedorah/Godzilla vs. the Smog Monster* and Vittorio De Sica's *Il giardino dei Finzi-Contini/The Garden of the Finzi-Continis* (both 1971). He would also direct the AIP-commissioned re-recording of an English-language soundtrack for Mario Bava's official directorial debut, *Black Sunday*. He worked as a film acquisitor in later years, "presenting" George A. Romero's *Code Name: Trixie* (1973) as *The Crazies* via Cambist Films. *Caltiki the Immortal Monster* features an opening narration by George Gonneau, who also provided other voices; Brett Morrison and Peter Fernandez are also heard on the track.

One of the common misconceptions about the origin of Italian horror is that *I vampiri* was unsuccessful because its Italian cast and crew were honestly identified, while *Caltiki il mostro immortale*—credited mostly to pseudonyms—was a popular success in Italy. On the contrary, the record shows that *Caltiki* earned less than 95 million *lire* [$59,000] upon its release—more than a quarter of a million less than *I vampiri*, and even more amazingly, nearly half a million less than *La morte viene dallo spazio!* It is unlikely that it made back its initial investment in domestic release. However, its roster of English names did make it an easier product to sell abroad, and being such an inexpensive production in the first place, *Caltiki* surely multiplied its original investment quite a few times over in international release.

Bava had made several resourceful attempts to extend the variety of the popular Italian cinema, but so far, the only sure-fire formula for boxoffice success continued to be Steve Reeves.

8 Carlo Rambaldi, *Mario Bava Maestro of the Macabre* interview transcript, 2000. All Rambaldi quotes are from this source unless otherwise noted.

9 Dante Matelli, *L'espresso,* May 1979.

10 Cozzi, as quoted in Frank, "Emanations."

11 Laura Betti, letter to the author, April 23, 1985.

12 Manlio Gomarasca and Davide Pulici, "Il Talento di Mr. Bava," *Nocturno Dossier* 24, July 2004, 6–32.



SPANISH *poster, art by Macario Gomez.*

La battaglia di Maratona

The Giant of Marathon

MARIO BAVA'S NEXT assignment was another Steve Reeves spectacle, this time entrusted to a director who, by all accounts, should have been a kindred spirit.

Born in Paris, France, on November 12, 1904, Jacques Tourneur was—like Bava—a son of a great luminary of the silent cinema. Tourneur's father was French producer–screenwriter–director Maurice Tourneur (1873–1961), who among many other accomplishments was responsible for early screen adaptations of the works of Edgar Allan Poe (*Le Système du Docteur Goudron et du Professeur Plume*, 1913), George Du Maurier (*Trilby*, 1915), and Jules Verne (*The Mysterious Island,* 1929). Before turning to the cinema, Maurice had been a hopeful young painter, and Jacques once reminisced (in terms that will sound very familiar to readers of this book) "His studio was a big, mysterious room that filled me with fear." [1]

In 1913, Jacques relocated from Paris to Los Angeles with his family, with whom he did not enjoy a very warm relationship; he stayed behind when his mother and father returned to France in 1928. He floundered as a bit player at MGM and rejoined his parents overseas, working for his father as assistant, script clerk, and finally editor. He edited eight of his father's pictures before directing his first movie in 1931. He directed four French films of no particular importance before returning to MGM, where he worked with Val Lewton in the staging of the French Revolution scenes of Jack Conway's *A Tale of Two Cities* (1935), and he directed second unit on Charles Reisner's *A Winning Ticket* (also 1935). MGM finally allowed him to direct a number of short films in his own right (under the name "Jack Turner"), including entries in the "Pete Smith Specialties," "A Historical Mystery," and "John Nesbitt's Passing Parade" series, some of which—"The Face Behind the Mask" (1938) and "The Incredible Stranger" (1942), in particular—featured elements of the strange and macabre. He directed his first feature *They All Come Out* for MGM in 1939, which was followed by two entries in the "Nick Carter" series starring Walter Pidgeon: *Nick Carter, Master Detective* (1939) and *Phantom Raiders* (1940).

Much as Mario Bava would do in later years, Jacques Tourneur found his creative niche in 1942 as a director of stylish, atmospheric, low-budget thrillers. His greatest films were made for RKO, including three classic horror films for his old colleague Val Lewton, who had become a B-level producer (*Cat People*, 1942, and *I Walked With a Zombie* and *The Leopard Man*, both 1943) and later, the evocative *noir* masterpiece, *Out of the Past* (1947). It took him ten years to achieve another film as memorable, *Night of the Demon*/ *Curse of the Demon* (1957), a suggestive occult chiller that was taken out of his hands and subjected to some (he thought) ruinously straightforward post-production inserts by its producer.

Tourneur's horror films were among the first films to portray scenes of horror and death in a subtle, poetic way, a method that Bava was later to make his own. In future years, Bava would direct several scenes that demonstrated a fond familiarity with Tourneur's *oeuvre*, notably the red carpet of blood that seeps out from under the door to herald the resurrection of Otto von Kleist in *Baron Blood* (1972), which quotes the most shattering moment of *The Leopard Man*.



STEVE REEVES *receives a stereo kiss from co-stars Mylène Demongeot and Daniela Rocca.*

In 1959, Tourneur's best days were over. Disheartened, relegated all too often to a choice between trash and inactivity, obese and prematurely aged at 55, he eagerly accepted an invitation from Galatea producer Nello Santi to direct "a jock-strap and sandal thing" (as he termed it) called *La battaglia di Maratona*.

Tourneur, who had made films in Italy before, was hand-picked for the job by Steve Reeves himself. "You see, I had made a picture with Burt Lancaster called *The Flame and the Arrow* [1950]," the director explained. "It was filled with action and very exciting. Well, Reeves had done two Hercules pictures in Italy that were making all kinds of money. They

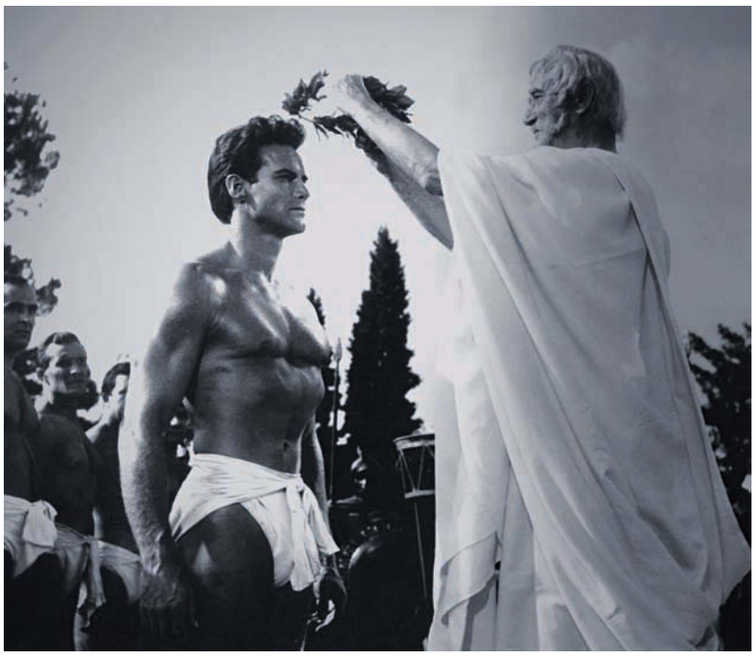
La battaglia di Maratona

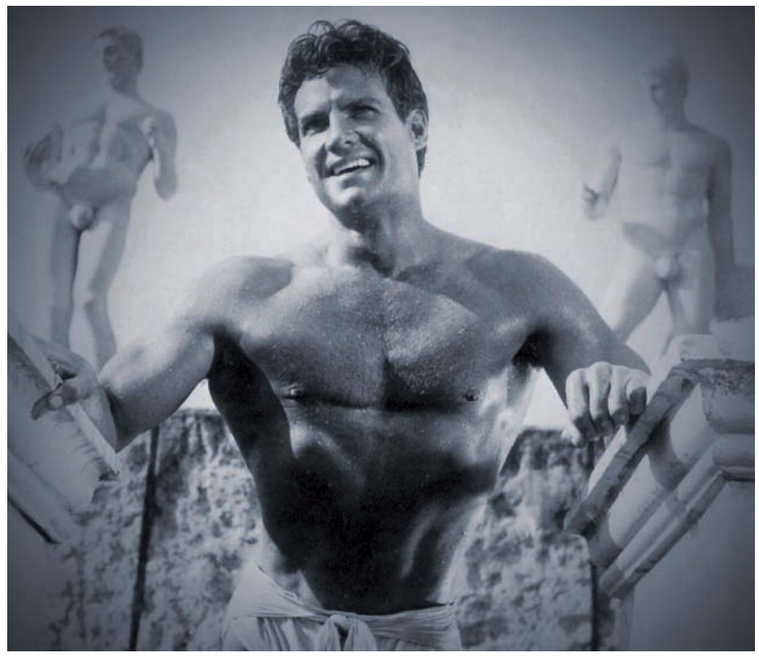
"The Battle of Marathon"
Filmed at Cinecittà and on location in Rome and Yugoslavia
September – October, 1959
First released: December 3, 1959
Eastmancolor, Dyaliscope, 2.35:1, 87 minutes

Production: Titanus, Galatea (Rome), Lux Compagnie Cinématographique de France, Societé Cinématographique Lyre (Paris). Producer: Bruno Vailati. Director: Jacques Tourneur [also Mario Bava and Bruno Vailati]. Screenplay: Ennio De Concini, Augusto Frassinetti, Bruno Vailati, based on a story by Alberto Barsanti and Rafaello Pacini. Director of photography: Mario Bava. Additional photography: Massimo [Ubaldo] Terzano, Giulio Tagliaconi. Special effects: Mario Bava. Art direction: Mario Chiari, Marcello del Prato. Set decoration: Massimo Tavazzi. Costume design: Marisa Crimi. Master of arms: Enzo Musumeci Greco. Production manager: Renato Angiorno. Production assistant: Massimo De Rita. Editor: Mario Serandrei. Music: Roberto Nicolosi, conducted by Pier Luigi Urbini. Sound: Louis Kiefer.

Steve Reeves (Philippides), Mylène Demongeot (Andromeda), Sergio Fantoni (Theocritus), Alberto Lupo (Milciades), Daniele Varga (Darius), Daniela Rocca (Karisse), Ivo Garrani (Creusus), Gianni Loti (Teucros), Philippe Hersent (Gallimaco), Miranda Campa (Karisse's servant), Anita Tedesco (Andromeda's handmaiden), Arturo Dominici (councilman), Sergio Ciani (Huros), Franco Fantasia, Carlo Lombardi, Gian Paolo Rosmino, Ignazio Balsamo, Walter Grant.

France: *La Bataille de Marathon,* Lux Cinématographique, 9/9/60
Germany: *Die Schlacht von Marathon,* "The Battle of Marathon," Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer; *Die grosse Schlacht um Hellas,* "The Great Battle for Hellas"; *Die grosse Schlacht von Marathon,* "The Great Battle of Marathon," Nobis Film, 6/14/60
Italy: *La battaglia di Maratona,* "The Battle of Marathon"
Spain: *La Batalla del Marathon,* Exclusivas Floralva Distribucíons, S.A., 11/20/61
UK: *The Giant of Marathon,* Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer, 8/60, 81m 28s, Certificate "U," passed with cuts
US: *The Giant of Marathon,* Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer, 5/25/60





IN THE FILM*'s opening montage, Philippides excels at the Olympic games.*

wanted him to do another picture, but [this time] he insisted on an English-speaking director. He said, 'I can't speak Italian and they can't speak English, so I end up looking stupid.' Then he remembered *The Flame and the Arrow* and said, 'I want *that* director; I don't know who he is, but I want him.' I was in Europe anyway, so I took the job. The shooting went on and on . . . *forever*. I got a lot of money, but little satisfaction. We shot each scene four ways—in Italian, English, French, and German—and no two actors spoke the same language. One actor would have to scratch his ear to let the other one know he was finished with his lines! I had to shoot it all in code. It's unbearable to make pictures like this. The result was horrible. We went to Yugoslavia where we had 1,200 men on horseback fighting the battle of Marathon. Some of it was fun, but it was too slow. When a picture's slow, you lose enthusiasm. You lose *élan*."[2]

Tourneur's version of the story is colorful, but alas, it is no more than a story. *The Flame and the Arrow* is a terrific action-adventure and a perfect model for what Reeves' career might have achieved with more careful handling. It is certainly true that Reeves, having now achieved stardom and its attendant leverage, began to insist on directors fluent in English. From the time his star continued its ascent, he got them: Andre de Toth would direct *Morgan il pirata/Morgan the Pirate* (1960), Arthur Lubin would direct *Il ladro di Bagdad/The Thief of Baghdad* (1961), and thereafter, he would work with bilingual Italian craftsmen like Sergio Corbucci and Duccio Tessari. Tourneur must have been a doubly attractive suggestion from the standpoint of the Italian producers, as his name would (and did) attract French co-production dollars.

Beyond this, Tourneur's account makes one wonder if he was actually present on the same set where the other crew were working. People who remember visiting the set to watch the filming of the Marathon battle sequence did not travel to Yugoslavia to do so, and a close examination of the shots composing that sequence reveal the number of actual extras to be closer to forty than 1,200. Furthermore, though actors of different nationalities did indeed share scenes together and spoke their native tongues onscreen, shooting scenes multiple times in multiple languages simply wasn't done—or necessary, given the expediency of dubbing. Having examined different versions of the film on videos from different countries, I can attest that the Italian, French, English, and German versions are basically identical, almost entirely composed of takes in which English was spoken—although the gallant Sergio Fantoni, who plays the film's villain, appears to have spoken Italian opposite Daniela Rocca and French opposite Mylène Demongeot.

Tourneur's comments are basically self-serving: he was in Europe anyway, the money was good, he was put in charge of a veritable army, he was used to doing things more professionally, it was beneath him. Fortunately, the film itself reveals some pride of craftsmanship that transcends Bava's own contribution. *La battaglia di Maratona* is one of the best examples of Italy's sword-and-sandal cycle, rich in spectacle and human convolutions, and pleasingly consistent with the prevailing themes and moods of Tourneur's own *oeuvre*.

Synopsis

The year is 490 A.D.

A common farmer named Philippides is catapulted to national fame and honor when he triumphs in multiple competitions at the Olympic games. Creusus, the head of the council of Athens, rewards the hero by nominating him to soldierhood in the Sacred Guard, who have policed the city's democratic society since the banishment of its former dictatorship. Behind closed doors, Creusus allows himself to be influenced by his prospective son-in-law Theocritus, a traitor who seeks to make Athens politically vulnerable to an invasion by Persia. Theocritus convinces Creusus that they should corrupt Philippides, who, as Athens' national hero, could be used to sway the public mood. The athlete has a chance encounter with Creusus' doe-eyed daughter Andromeda, who has been betrothed to Theocritus in an arrangement between their parents ("You are as beautiful as the statue of a goddess"); she too is attracted, but knowing her obligation, refuses to encourage their mutual feelings by revealing her name. But one of her handmaidens informs the hero that he can see her dance at the Temple on the road to Pareus.

1 Chris Fujiwara, *Jacques Tourneur: The Cinema of Nightfall* (Jefferson NC: McFarland & Co., 1998), 20.

2 Joel E. Siegel, "Tourneur Remembers," *Cinefantastique*, 2:5, 1973, 25.

That night, while en route, Philippides is briefly shanghaied by Karisse, a dark-haired seductress in the employ of Theocritus. She attempts to amuse him with dancers and wrestlers, but he disapproves of the latter ("They're no more than animals . . . butchers, is what they are"). Noting the lateness of the hour, he prepares to leave, but is attacked by one of the insulted wrestlers. Philippides bests the brute in no time, but arrives at the Temple too late to meet the anonymous woman he loves.

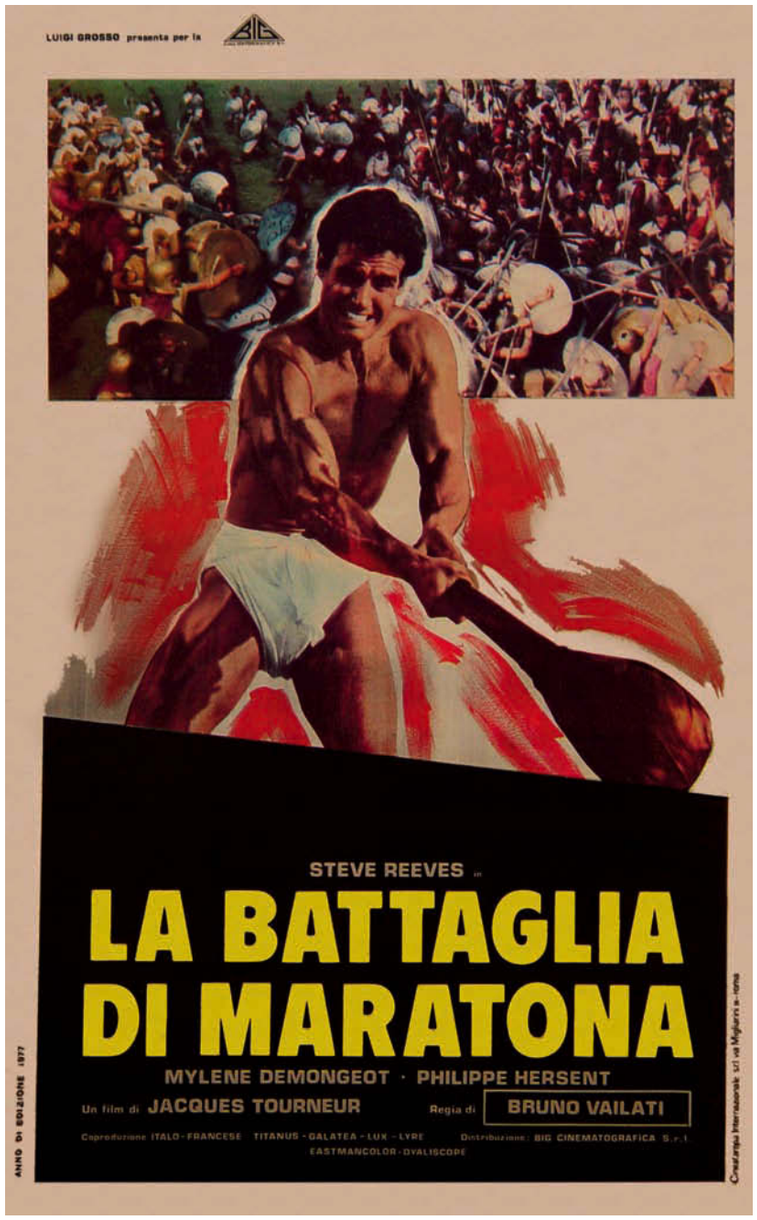
Philippides begins his training for the Sacred Guard under the supervision of Milciades. When he chances to see Andromeda drive past in her chariot, he impulsively pursues her. She continues to discourage his interest without explanation, but she can no longer lie about her feelings when he kisses her. Theocritus accidentally witnesses their first embrace; he is not jealous, but instead sees an opportunity to exploit the situation. He arranges a meeting that reveals Andromeda's identity to Philippides, and offers her as a prize if the hero will enlist in their cause. Angered to think that the innocent Andromeda would consent to such an arrangement, Philippides strikes Theocritus and resigns from the Guard to return to farming, an embittered man.

The moping hero is visited by a conciliatory Milciades, whose pleas are without effect until a runner appears with the news that the Persian fleet, led by Darius and the Athenian traitor Hippaeus, has landed at Marathon. The two men return to Athens. The Athenian council meets to declare war on Persia, but with fewer than 100 soldiers on hand, they require help from Sparta to assemble an effective defense. Philippides is sent to appeal to the council at Sparta, where he finds valuable support from Huros, a talented wrestler whom he bested at the Olympic games. Sparta reluctantly agrees to assist Athens in their struggle, but cannot join them until the New Moon, for religious reasons. As Philippides prepares to leave for Marathon, Karisse kisses him farewell as broken-hearted Andromeda—who doesn't know the cause of his changed feelings for her—looks tearfully on. Creusus finds his daughter, recognizes her love for the good soldier, and realizes the wrong he has done.

On the first day of war, the Athens soldiers confront Darius' troops on the battlefield at Marathon without Spartan assistance and barely survive. At the Persian camp, Karisse overhears Darius and Theocritus discussing a surprise rear attack on the Athenians; she is discovered running away and shot in the back with an arrow. She manages to reach the Athenian camp in time to inform Philippides of Persia's surprise attack and Theocritus' treason before she dies. Without the Spartans, Athens has only one hope for victory: Philippides must run all the way from Marathon to Athens on foot and fetch the Sacred Guards of the Temple of Athena. He swims upstream (losing his horse over a waterfall), crosses mountainous terrain, cuts through forests, and finally arrives in Athens at daybreak on the point of physical collapse. Minutes earlier, Theocritus arrived at the Temple, found Creusus unwilling to advise his council to surrender to Persia, and kidnapped Andromeda after clubbing her father unconscious.

The Sacred Guard join Philippides in booby-trapping the floor of the Aegean Sea with spikes to ram the hulls of Persia's invading fleet. Many die gruesomely in the ensuing battle, but Philippides succeeds in rescuing his beloved Andromeda from the clutches of Theocritus, who plummets to his death from the prow of his ship before the Persians can reach the Athenian shore. The battle continues on land, but Spartan reinforcements—led by Huros—arrive in time to carry Athens to victory. The hero returns to private life on his farm with Andromeda by his side.

ITALIAN *reissue locandina—"a film of Jacques Tourneur... directed by Bruno Vailati."*



Cast & Commentary

After the unevenness of *Agi Murad il diavolo bianco* and *Gli ultimi giorni di Pompei*, *La battaglia di Maratona* represents a splendid return to form in the filmography of Steve Reeves. From the opening montage, which shows the clean-shaven Philippides emerging victorious from the varied competitions at the Olympic games and championed by the public and his opponents alike, the film exhibits a profound understanding of Reeves' persona—and the truism that a champion is not solely defined by victory, but also by the extent to which he/she is championed by others. The great appeal of Steve Reeves was that he embodied an ideal that few of us could match, but to which all of us aspired in our heart of hearts. Therefore, his triumphs onscreen were also ours, and by cheering for him, we cheered for what is best about ourselves as a species and what is possible for all of us, if we follow his example of vision, discipline, and hard work.

The screenplay by Ennio De Concini, Augusto Frassinetti, and Bruno Vailati takes the expected liberties with history. Philippides was not an Olympic athlete, but a professional runner who did indeed communicate Athens' pleas for military assistance to Sparta. Sparta's response was briefly postponed by a religious lunar observation, but they did ultimately manage to join Athens



MYLÈNE DEMONGEOT *as Andromeda in a lovely shot very expressive of Bava's contribution to* LA BATTAGLIA DI MARATONA.

against the Persians at Marathon. The script's secondary "attack from the rear" is a confused reference to Persia's response, which was to double-back and sail south to conquer Athens before its male citizens could return. The Athenians managed to outrace the Persian fleet, which came, saw, and sailed away in defeat.

In rewriting the character, the script tailors the lead role specifically to the personal mythology of Steve Reeves. Philippides is a farmer (Reeves was born and raised on a farm in Glasgow, Montana) who wins a series of athletic contests (Reeves was a former Mr. America, Mr. World, and Mr. Universe) and achieves the kind of fame that can be manipulated to influence others. (Unlike Charles Atlas, his most famous predecessor, Reeves became an international movie star—an unparalleled success that encouraged more men to enter the world of body-building than ever done before.) The film can therefore be interpreted as a response, reward, and genuflection to the man whose image had saved the Italian film industry.

Throughout the making of *La battaglia di Maratona*, the 33-year-old Reeves was still suffering from a painful shoulder injury incurred during the filming of *Gli ultimi giorni di Pompei*, but it doesn't show at all in his work. Knowing of his injury makes his stunt swim across the rapids, in the early stages of Philippides' run, agonizing to watch—and the production is even more merciless to its horses, which are tripped, dropped into pits, crashed into chariots, and seemingly allowed to drift downstream to be flung over waterfalls. Working with a director of his own choosing, and one at ease with communicating in English, also seems to benefit Reeves' performance; he is still a bit wooden, especially when gestures are called for, but it's one of his most natural screen appearances and, considering its close ties to his personal life, probably also one of his most heartfelt. Appropriately, his physique is pared down quite a bit from its supernaturally outsized dimensions in the Hercules films, but he is still in superb condition; the scene in which Philippides commences his run, after surviving the rapids, by tearing off his breastplate and revealing his powerful physique in resolute preparation for the task ahead, was met with resounding cheers when the film played in American theaters.

Andromeda, Philippides' blonde and innocent love interest, was played by Mylène Demongeot, a French actress approximately ten years younger



ANDROMEDA *lends comfort to her conflicted father Creusus (Ivo Garrani).*



KARISSE *(Daniela Rocca) is prepared for her assignation with Philippides.*

than her leading man. After making her acting debut in *Les Enfants de l'Amour* (1953), Demongeot participated equally in French and English productions, including *It's A Wonderful World* (1956, as "Mylène-Nicole") and *Bonjour Tristesse* (1958). *La battaglia di Maratona* was the actress' eleventh film—making her already a more experienced performer than Reeves—and her previous experience with English dialogue was no doubt as instrumental in landing her the role as were her beauty and French citizenry. Demongeot brings a subtle, tender, yet conflicted dimension to Andromeda that humanizes her character, and her slender vulnerability complements Reeves' strength in ways that more Amazonian co-stars like Sylva Koscina and Scilla Gabel could not. The only trivializing aspect of her performance is a tendency—surely encouraged by her director or cameraman—to show a little leg whenever she's in danger. On the whole, though, the love story between Philippides and Andromeda is one of the sweeter and most sincere relationships to be found in the Italian *pepla.*

Of the Galatea regulars, Sergio Fantoni gives his usual strong villainous performance as Theocritus, but the film curiously divests him of opportunities that could have given his role greater impact. His quest is more intellectual than sadistic, and though we see him slap Karisse repeatedly in one scene, she is a character written to take such abuse; the script doesn't present the necessary opportunities for him to tease Andromeda cruelly. Even her abduction seems cut-and-dried. Theocritus is also deprived of a memorable death, though he is certainly set up for one; riding the pincered prow of his warship, he is ultimately toppled overboard by Philippides into the waiting jaws of his own secret weapon—but falls *across* them, not *into* them. Consequently, Theocritus' stance in the material is weakened by an equal lack of demonstration and comeuppance.

As Creusus, Ivo Garrani is cast in the latest reprisal of his trademark role: a misguided politician whose opportunism and self-absorption have left his family and country vulnerable to danger. An unbilled Arturo Dominici appears as an Athenian council member in a scene filmed so hastily that it consists of a single extended take in long-shot. The hissable villain of *Le fatiche di Ercole*, the most commercially successful Italian film of the decade, stands to deliver a single line ("If we cannot live for freedom, we will die for freedom"), but his loyalty to Galatea would soon be rewarded with the role of his career.

A limited actress of opulent beauty, Daniela Rocca gives one of her best performances in the sympathetically written role of Karisse. It isn't known whether the part was written with her specifically in mind—considering her personal relationship with producer Nello Santi, this is certainly possible—but the scene in which Karisse is shot in the back with an arrow must have carried personal associations for the actress. Harriet White Medin, who worked as Rocca's dialogue coach on *Esther and the King* (1960), explained: "I'll never forget one day when Daniela and I were going over her lines together in her dressing room. She was getting into costume for the next scene, and of course, she didn't think anything of undressing in front of me. Anyway, as she was changing, I happened to notice this terrible *hole* in her back! When I asked about it, she invited me to take a closer look. She told me that it was a souvenir from an old flame, some man she had made jealous when she was a teenager. I was horrified, but she seemed quite proud of the fact that someone had once loved her enough to shoot her!"

The warmly written, pivotal role of Huros is played by Sergio Ciani, who had worked as Reeves' stunt double since *Ercole e la regina di Lidia.* He would continue to accept stunt work a short while longer, but as more and more bodybuilding ambassadors came to Italy from America in the hope of duplicating Reeves' success, Ciani decided to throw his own hat into the ring. In 1961, he adopted the *nom d'ècran* "Alan Steel" for a supporting role in Gianfranco Parolini's *La furia di Ercole/The Fury of Hercules*, in which Brad Harris played the character Reeves (and in some scenes, he) had made famous. He would play Hercules himself in Giorgio Capitani's *Ercole, Sansone, Maciste e Ursus gli invincibile/Samson*

and the Mighty Challenge and Piero Pierotti's *Ercole contro Roma/Hercules Against Rome* (both 1964), and Maciste in *Maciste e la regina di Samar/Hercules Against the Moon Men* (1964, which featured some uncredited work by Mario Bava). Sometimes acting under the name "John Wyler," Ciani continued to star in miscellaneous thrillers, Westerns and softcore erotic films through the late 1970s.

Though Jacques Tourneur did not speak entirely well of his experience directing *La battaglia di Maratona*, it retains a healthy share of his personal style. While it is primarily an action film, the characters are frequently delineated through moments of introspection and intimacy, or in the gentle notation of intangible places where characters *almost* meet.

One of the most arresting images of the opening montage shows Philippides besting another man in a wrestling competition; in a later, intimate conversation with Milciades, the hero refers to his former opponent in surprisingly sympathetic terms: "Huros . . . a good man; he might have won." A simple statement, but it throws an entirely unexpected light on Philippides' personal ethic, which takes a pure and uncomplicated approach to competition. Unlike Theocritus, he is not a man who would trade on his personal relationships in pursuit of a goal, or permit ambition to cloud his sensibilities with frustration and hatred. A very complex human dimension, and Tourneur is able to probe it with a simple line of dialogue.

Tourneur also embraces an almost mystical sense of symbolism, which relies heavily on Bava's unique cinematographic sense. For example, after their first accidental meeting in a playing field, Philippides arranges to see Andromeda again that night at the temple where she and her female companions will be dancing and paying tribute to Venus. Philippides is sidetracked from keeping that important appointment by Karisse, an intervening stranger to whom he is bound by nothing more than courtesy. We cut away from this awkward social predicament to Andromeda and her handmaidens burning an offering to the Goddess of Love, in the hope she will send them their soul mates; against the opulent backdrop of a weeping tree and a hazy moon, a plume of smoke rises high to hang wistfully in the air. By the time Philippides reaches the temple, the women are gone—only the last remnants of that plume hang in the air, an unnoticed (except by us) symbol/confirmation of Andromeda's longing for him and an opportunity gone up in smoke.

The film also contains a moment that strongly recalls the penchant for epigrammatic asides found in Tourneur's work for producer Val Lewton in the 1940s. When an unsuspecting Philippides joins Creusus, Theocritus—and Andromeda—for a meal, Creusus orders music, adding, "They say music is very good for the digestion." At this point, Bava's camera pans back to a few humble musicians, one of whom stands to make a recital as the camera rises above them to rest on a mosaic mural of a Greek banquet scene: *"Fine be the pleasures of wine and drown the sorrows of life. Fine be the pleasure of company and know the beauty of life."* This moment—its sweetly unexpected adjustment from the matter-of-fact to the eternal, from the commonplace to the blessed—is the kind of aside one finds only in the work of Jacques Tourneur.

In his fine book *Jacques Tourneur: The Cinema of Nightfall*, Chris Fujiwara points out these other germane points of reference to Tourneur's earlier work: "Philippides' disillusioned retirement from Athens to the country recalls Jeff's [Robert Mitchum's] withdrawal to Bridgeport in *Out of the Past*; Karisse is functionally the same character as Boston [Ruth Roman] in *Great Day in the Morning;* the jaws of the Persian ship bear inexorably down on the camera like the teeth of the snowplow in *Nightfall;* like Molly [Debra Paget] in *Anne of the Indies,*

THE FORTY *or so extras with whom Mario Bava desperately staged the reshot battle of Marathon.*





BETROTHED *to Theocritus by her parents when she was still a child, Andromeda experiences true love for the first time upon meeting Philippides.*

Andromeda is tied to the prow of the ship."[3]

La battaglia di Maratona was very nearly the end of Tourneur's distinguished career. In addition to some excellent television drama, he would preside over only two more features, both produced by American International Pictures: the uproariously funny *The Comedy of Terrors* (1964, written by Richard Matheson) and the handsome but badly written *War-Gods of the Deep* (1964), which is redeemed only by some Bava-quality visual effects by Les Bowie. Jacques Tourneur died on December 19, 1977, in Bergerac, France, after more than a decade of professional inactivity.

Tourneur was always outspoken about his dislike for second unit reliance, which to him represented a loss of personal involvement, as well as creative control. "I've always fought second units," he once said. "Whenever I have any authority at all, I just don't have them."

Tourneur was engaged to direct *La battaglia di Maratona* for a period of eight weeks, but for some reason—which he chose to blame on the fictional rigors of having to shoot each scene four ways, in different languages—he failed to complete the movie in this allotted time. Part of the problem was the decision to shoot partially in Yugoslavia. "It was a big disaster," complains Massimo De Rita, the film's production assistant. "We could not find qualified set workers, and it eventually became too expensive for us to continue there."[4] Tourneur evidently railed against unacceptable working conditions and abandoned the picture, leaving the balance to be completed by Mario Bava and producer Bruno Vailati (who had co-written the screenplay with the ubiquitous Ennio De Concini and others, and was ultimately credited as director of *La battaglia di Maratona* on its Italian posters).[5]

Tourneur later explained the situation, as he saw it. "At the end of eight weeks, I had shot all of the dramatic scenes, but there still remained the underwater scenes to do. (For me, going underwater is impossible!) And there was also the run, the famous run which gave us the word 'marathon' to describe a long-distance race. In effect, none of those scenes were dialogue scenes, so the producers re-examined my contract and discovered that they had no obligation to keep me on, and therefore, no need to pay through the nose for me to do any further days of work. The run ended up being shot by Vailati, and all of the finale by Vailati and Bava. Why should they be obliged to hang onto me for filming those disputed underwater or running sequences? Anybody could do it."[6]

3 Fujiwara, 268.

4 Simone Venturini, *Galatea S.p.A. (1952–65) storia di una casa di produzione cinematografica* (Rome, Italy: Associazione Italiana per le Richerche di Storia del Cinema, 2001), 206. Translated by Christopher Sven Dietrich.

5 Like Mario Bava, Bruno Vailati took his first directorial steps as documentary filmmaker. Bava had been the first Italian cameraman to shoot film underwater aboard an actual submarine, but Vailati was the first director to do the job in color with the Red Sea documentary *The Sixth Continent* (1954). He subsequently co-directed *Il ladro di Bagdad/The Thief of Baghdad* (1961) with Arthur Lubin and, singlehandedly, directed the costume drama *Finché dura le tempesta* ("After the Storm is Over," 1963), as well as the documentary *Andrea Doria—74* (1968).

6 Franca Faldini and Goffredo Fofi, "The Fofi Papers," *Spaghetti Cinema* 72, July 2000, 2–12.

7 Franca Faldini and Goffredo Fofi, *L'avventurosa storia del cinema italiano—raccontata dai suoi protagonisti* (Milan, Italy: Feltrinelli Edizione, 1980).

8 Ibid.

It would take a blind admirer of Tourneur not to flinch at the self-serving bravado of his remarks. More likely, the production was slowed down by his refusal to assign work to a second unit, which he would have had to do at any rate with the underwater sequences, by his own admission. As for "anybody could do it," anybody didn't—Mario Bava did.

Asked if he remembers the circumstances under which Tourneur left the picture, Ivo Garrani responds: "Honestly, I don't—and, I must tell you, I really have no memories at all about Tourneur! I can't even tell you what he looked like! I just remember Bava literally taking a compromised movie onto his shoulders and saving it in just a few days of incredible, concentrated work."[7]

Bava described his rescue efforts on the film—which began with having to fix an unacceptable battle sequence Tourneur had supervised in Yugoslavia—in a comic tense: "I didn't want to go [to Yugoslavia]; I preferred to stay in Ponza with my home-made devices. They sent me the dailies of the big battle sequence, which I had to review and cut together. Well, there were moments when I could have passed out from laughter, the footage was so ridiculous! Four thousand extras from the Yugoslav army—wearing their sandals *over their boots!* The charioteers of the King's army driving their wagons with cigarettes hanging off their lips, followed by packs of stray dogs, which always abounded on the film sets in Yugoslavia. *All useless!* The producer wanted to commit suicide. He put the film in my hands. We had only ten days to finish. First, we went to Rome, where I shot 287 set-ups in a single week, working only with my grips. Then to Grottarossa with a hundred extras who almost died from the chill of the North wind, who I made to appear like an army of 20,000. The hand-to-hand combat, which looked more like the soldiers were hugging each other because the Yugoslav extras were so afraid of getting hurt? This I fixed by running the footage at 5 frames per second rather than the normal 24. From desperate measures like these, the battle was realized."[8]

PROMOTIONAL *shot of Steve Reeves and Mylène Demongeot.*





DETERMINED *to have Andromeda one way or another, Theocritus abducts her—but finds Philippides to be even more determined to get her back.*

There may be a hint of color in Bava's account, but what he says is essentially true. There is no question that the film's centerpiece—the battle of Marathon (which lends a title to all but the American version)—was a triumph of Bava's technical ingenuity over considerable odds. Visiting the location on the day this sequence was filmed was Ernesto Gastaldi, a young screenwriting graduate of the Centro Sperimentale di Cinematografica who would later write the screenplay for Bava's *La frusta e il corpo/The Whip and the Body* (1963).

"I first met Bava when he was shooting *La battaglia di Maratona*," Gastaldi remembers. "I was occasionally on the set because my friend Armando Govoni was working there, and I liked to watch the filming of special effects. Bava put a glass in front of the camera, completely covered by twelve black squares of paper. He removed the first square on the left and thirty soldiers formed a line on the top of the hill, exactly within this exposed square. Then Bava rewound the film, covered the first square and removed the second square of black paper; the same thirty soldiers formed another line on the top of the hill, but shifted twenty meters to the right. One after another, Bava uncovered and covered the glass, shifting the same thirty extras from



US *half-sheet poster.*

one position to another, until he had a big army!"

A close examination of the scene in question shows that Bava was supplied with approximately forty (not thirty, and certainly not Bava's avowed 100) extras. After Darius shouts "To your posts!" (with about forty spear-carrying extras lining the hill behind him), five horsemen ride onto the empty battlefield in fanning directions. Bava follows this with a long-shot of the entire battlefield, covered in the background by hundreds of guards, as each of the horsemen is followed into the open by crowds of soldiers. The shot seems to feature well over 300 extras. The illusion is flawed—apparently the wind on the battlefield picked up as the day wore on, because the black paper Bava was using fluttered in some places, resulting in visible matte lines, cropped shadows, and other imperfections. The exposed matte lines indicate that the frame was divided into approximately eight or nine (not twelve) portions: two exposures for the horizon, two exposures for the ground level background, and five exposures for the battlefield itself, which was divided into a sunbeam arrangement. For each exposure, the extras were arranged on the field in triangular formation, giving their numbers the additional illusion of receding multitudinously into the distance. For the closer shots that follow, the same plan was followed: a crowd of charging soldiers up front, the numbers seeming to trail away in numbers equally vast.

Elsewhere, Bava used mirrors and multiple exposures to create the illusion of Persians riding their horses fearlessly onto the spears of a barrier of Athenian soldiers and shields. Low-angle shots of the horses charging and rearing was married to over-the-shoulder shots of the Athenian soldiers with the *camera truca*, creating believable shots of unbelievable danger. The sequence is quite spectacular, with several tracking shots (some photographed from specially dug trenches) emulating the exciting war scenes of Bava's favorite film, *All Quiet on the Western Front*.

A veteran of such sea-faring pictures as *Uomini e squali* ("Men and Sharks") and *Pericolo negli abissi* ("Peril in the Deep"), producer Bruno Vailati took charge of directing his primary contribution to the screenplay, namely Theocritus' naval assault on the Athenian fleet. Though Bava is frequently credited with photographing the violent, surreal underwater combat scenes—in which swimming soldiers are shown being graphically lanced through the neck, eye, and chest with arrows and spears—these vicious submarine tableaux were actually photographed by Masino Manunza. Bava did, however, storyboard the entire sequence and may have been the first to suggest some of its more outlandishly imaginative details—like the hull-crunching "jaws" of Theocritus' ship. As it appears in the finished film, this sequence is an inspired marriage of lyrical, balletic imagery and startling violence.

There is no or supernatural dimension to *La battaglia di Maratona*, and since its villain is not allowed to present himself openly as such until late in the game, it also afforded few opportunities for menacing shadowplay. Accordingly, many of the usual traits of Bava's cinematography are held in check throughout, yet the film contains some of his loveliest work. The opening Olympics montage is refreshing in the austerity of its images; its brisk procession of friezes of Philippides excelling in competition go a long way toward reclaiming, at once, the heroic charisma that faltered in Reeves' work since the Hercules films. The location footage also conveys a verdant freshness, despite the reuse of familiar locations, and the studio "exteriors" filmed at Cinecittà have an indigo-tinged opulence that never fails to remind me of a line remembered from Joyce's *Ulysses*: "The sky was hung with humid night-blue fruit." The sequence in which Karisse diverts Philippides from his assignation with Andromeda is particularly delicious, with the camera snaking sensuously around the scantily clad "entertainment" on a crane.

It is to Tourneur's credit that Bava's visual imagination was never more indulged than when he was at the helm. As a result, the film looks most elegant when it is most banal—for example, as a queue of horsemen ride along the edge of a river, blocked from view by the silhouetted mountainside beyond them, so that their passage is visible only in the reflection of their own inverted silhouettes on the water. [9] When the film arrives at its "big action scenes," the results attest that Vailati and Bava were forced to produce results faster and without the same degree of finesse; consequently, the images that should have been the film's most remarkable (the trick shot of the Athenian hordes, for example) sometimes come across as rough sketches of what they might have been.

Bava's hand can also be seen in a variety of glass matte paintings: the flame-capped columns that frame the cheering crowd as Philippides is honored at the Olympic games, as well as the Olympian statue at the center of the composition; the exterior of the Temple where Philippides goes to pay his tribute to Athena, with its vast staircase crowded with onlookers, and columned structures crowning the hills in the distance on either side; the secondary ships in the Athenian fleet, augmented by foregrounded, working miniatures; and a deceptive shot of Philippides riding behind a boulder en route to Sparta, the background of which was extended by Bava's paintbrush from a small rocky hillside into a believable mountain.

In the most satisfying action films, the dramatic climax usually coincides with the death of the villain. In this case, the battle continues well past the death of Theocritus, only to fade-out after the arrival of the Spartans, accompanied by the surprise return of Huros. A flurry of crossed swords on a beachfront languidly dissolves to a subtle, bittersweet finale that once again suggests the touch of Tourneur. Philippides, dressed in a dark peplum, plants a sword up to its hilt in the soil of his farm, as Andromeda solemnly watches. Then they walk away, in silhouette, toward a farmhouse in the distance as the setting sun gleams on the handle of the planted sword with golden significance. Philippides is putting his life as a warrior to rest, to enjoy life as a man. The shot is so striking, so unusual a resolution and so rich in symbolism, that one can overlook the badly staged death of Theocritus and the fact that the final battle has not been won in any visually cemented way. Indeed, this final scene would play the same whether Philippides had emerged victorious, or had simply survived defeat. As he very likely did with *Caltiki il mostro immortale* and as he would certainly do again, editor Mario Serandrei does an exceptional job of organizing the unfinished fragments into an effective whole. We fill in the ellipses with ease, and finish the picture feeling unusually satisfied.

Aftermath

Throughout the filming of *La battaglia di Maratona*, Steve Reeves was giving one of his best performances offscreen. The damage inflicted to his shoulder muscles during the making of *Gli ultimi giorni di Pompei* caused him tremendous pain during *Maratona*, which he endured on principle without the aid of prescription drugs. He performed all of the stunts asked of him, including Philippides' agonizing swim across the rapids, and confided the facts of his condition to no one but his fiancee—Aline Czartjarwitz, a legal secretary in the European film industry whom he had met after the completion of *Le fatiche di Ercole.* (They would eventually marry in June 1963, and stay together until Aline's death in 1989.) He celebrated the completion of *Maratona* by signing an exclusive two-picture contract with American producer Joseph E. Levine, who was then pouring a fortune into the US promotion of *Hercules* and *Hercules Unchained.*

The troubled production of *La battaglia di Maratona* had encouraged producer Nello Santi to expect the worst, but such was the craft and vitality of the picture that, when it was released in Rome over the Christmas holiday, it re-energized the waning "sword and sandal" market in Europe, just when North America was about to discover *Hercules* and *Hercules Unchained* in a big way. These combined events had such impact that Steve Reeves won another competition that must have taken even him by surprise: he became the world's biggest boxoffice attraction of 1959. Grossing 690.5 million *lire* [$430,000] during its initial Italian release, *La battaglia di Maratona* earned a good deal more than *Gli ultimi giorni di Pompei*, and a *great* deal more than *Agi Murad il diavolo bianco.* Thanks to the combined efforts of Bruno Vailati and (especially) Mario Bava, Galatea had another hit on its hands.

Warner Bros.—the US distributor of both Hercules films, as well as *The White Warrior*—decided not to handle *Gli ultimi giorni di Pompei* or *Maratona*, perhaps dissuaded by the losses incurred by the Freda film. Quick to step in was Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer, who, remembering Steve Reeves' cameo appearance in *Athena*, proclaimed *The Giant of Marathon* as Reeves' triumphal return to his "home" on the Metro lot. It is exceedingly difficult to locate boxoffice results for films of this vintage, but *The Giant of Marathon* accrued domestic rentals of $1,300,000 and international rentals of $1,600,000 for a total first annual revenue of $2,900,000—a tremendous success.

MGM also thought enough of Bava's Marathon sequence to cannibalize it, making it, and its trims, available for resale as stock footage. In the early 1960s, shortly before their lives were changed forever by *Star Trek* and *Batman,* William Shatner and Adam West costarred in an unsold TV pilot called *Alexander the Great.* All of the battlefield scenes in that pilot episode were culled from *The Giant of Marathon.*

Legend has it that, after Mario Bava had saved the abandoned *La battaglia di Maratona* for Galatea, Nello Santi rewarded the resourceful cameraman by offering him any property of his choosing for his directorial debut. It's a great story, but as it goes with most stories, the truth was probably more complicated.

According to Massimo De Rita, Santi was principally a money man and never took an active interest in production. "He never helped in the production process," he said. "Sometimes we would invite him to the set; he might come, just once, and it would be great, but he was a very busy man. It was better for him to have people like me on the set instead, otherwise everything to do with the production would come to a dead halt. He invested a great deal of trust in me, in all of us . . . I never had a problem with him. He was like a father to me—a mentor, really—and I always regarded him as a prince." [10]

De Rita—who regarded Bava as "a dear friend, and also a genius"—remembered playing an important role in bringing Bava to Santi's recognition. "Bava had worked on a few different things for us; he had been the director of photography for Francisci. So I convinced Santi to give [Bava] a chance to direct for us. He began with *Caltiki il mostro immortale* . . . he worked for a month on the special effects for that movie. Afterwards, we convinced Santi to let him take charge of a bigger movie, *La maschera del demonio.* We wanted to make this a more lavish production, so we asked Santi for a budget of 107 million *lire* [$67,000], but he said he was only going to grant us 100 million *lire* [$62,000]—and that much only if he was convinced the picture could make back more than that figure at the boxoffice!" [11]

When one realizes how much money *La battaglia di Maratona* had bagged for Santi and his partners, the budget he allotted for Bava's official debut seems a bit parsimonious—and, as De Rita indicates, he had to be *persuaded* to allot even that much. This account has the unromantic ring of real business, so it probably is the more accurate of the two stories. Bava was not one to boast about how he'd had to cover for other, lazier Galatea directors, and he was not the kind of individual who would go over the heads of his directors to blow the whistle on them to the studio boss. By the same token, as an executive primarily interested in the bottom line, Nello Santi makes a far more believable boss than a creative equal. Santi had certainly seen and approved Bava's work in the past, but he left creative decisions to people like De Rita and may not have even been able, at this point, to connect Bava's name to specific work he had done for the company without someone else, like De Rita, to jog his memory.

Regardless of how these bothersome details complicate a story that has become a recognized legend in horror film circles, it was indeed Nello Santi who ultimately approved Bava's chance to direct—officially—for the first time. The result was not in the same league as *Hercules* at the boxoffice, but it has lingered a good deal longer in the memories of many movie-goers. To this day, it is a film that is remembered, loved, feared, and revered as one of the best horror films of the 20th century, and arguably the most stunning directorial debut the genre has ever hosted.

9 Bava would later reprise this shot on the same location while directing second unit photography for the miniseries Odissea in 1968.

10 Venturini.

11 Ibid.





Monsters and Heroes

"I have never taken advantage of a psychiatrist's couch—
nor crucifixes, rosary beads or cloves of garlic.
Instead, I rely on fog machines, colored filters,
and objects of deformity."
—Mario Bava

MARIO BAVA *and Arturo Dominici joke on the set of* LA MASCHERA DEL DEMONIO.





BARBARA STEELE, *the dark madonna of the Italian horror film, turns her face to the camera in a never-before-seen color shot.*

La maschera del demonio

Black Sunday

ONE OF AMERICAN International Pictures' horror hits of the 1950s, the Herman Cohen production *How to Make a Monster* (1958), was a darkly comic reflection on the waning popularity of the horror genre. In this movie, "Old Pete" (Robert H. Harris), a Hollywood makeup man specializing in movie monsters, is fired from "American International Studios" when the "studio" is taken over by new management. In a telling scene, Pete's laments about the fading genre are shrugged-off by a sympathetic director (Thomas B. Henry), who explains that it wouldn't take very much to turn the trend around: "One picture can do it—maybe one of those foreign imports—and the whole monster cycle is on its way again!"

This dialogue is prescient, not only because this is indeed what soon happened, but because the tide was turned, in no small part, by a foreign import released under the banner of American International: *Black Sunday.* Made in Italy as *La maschera del demonio,* it marked Mario Bava's official debut as a motion picture director.

Bava was 45 years old and had already spent a quarter of a century as a cameraman as he stepped onto the proving ground. It was an opportunity of which most people in his business would have been highly envious, but there is some controversy about whether or not it was an opportunity Bava had coveted for himself. "I felt I had no business becoming a director," Bava explained, "because, in my opinion, a director must be a true genius. Besides, I was quite content to be a cameraman. I made good money and, by this time, I had learned all the tricks of my trade." [1]

For his part, Mario's son Lamberto remembers that his father "was virtually forced to become a director by [Galatea producer] Nello Santi. My father told him that he had no such ambition."

Lamberto's view is somewhat contradicted by Bava's erstwhile camera operator Corrado Bartoloni, who recalls that Mario's ambitions sometimes surfaced in the form of self-reproach. "He was very shy and modest, but in truth, he was somewhat ambitious too, like anybody else," Bartoloni offers. "He often said to me, 'Why should I make entire movies for other directors and not be a director myself?'"

Ivo Garrani, who had acted in several films photographed by Bava, was one of the main cast members of this important first—did he notice any change in Bava's on-set behavior, as he made the transition from cameraman to director? "Not too much," he says, "because Mario was already a director. He had proven this in the movies we had made together before, since he always found himself directing and saving other people's movies. So it was just a natural thing to see him in the director's chair at last. But Mario was also very shy; he always tended to undervalue himself. You could never pay him a compliment. He would always say, 'C'mon, Ivo, what the hell are you saying? Be serious.' But he was unique, and we all knew it."

Here Garrani touches on the real issue. It was against the grain of Bava's character to draw attention to himself, least of all on a film set. "The truth is," Bava once admitted, "when I'm making a movie, I feel good. But I don't like to be observed while I am doing it, even if I don't happen to be aware of being watched. It also bothers me to be photographed and, as a general rule, I avoid it. When I was a cameraman, I used to hide under the black cloth of the old DeBrie model camera . . . When I am filming on location, I rope-off the area to keep onlookers away and I turn floodlights on them, so they can't possibly see anything. It's for the same reason, probably, that I use so much fog in my films! Not for the sake of style or atmosphere, but so that I won't have people gawking at me while I'm shooting . . ." [2]

This orientation might well be traceable to the incident in Mario's childhood, when his father Eugenio slapped him for proudly signing his name to a drawing. It was ingrained in his adult character to resist identification with his work, so it is hardly surprising that he found his greatest success behind the camera and designing effects whose success was qualified by how little they were noticed. Bava had worn a kind of matinee idol mustache from the early 1940s until the late 1950s, perhaps because it gave him something physical to hide behind. Some of Bava's



ONE *of the ragazzi. Bava amuses his co-workers between set-ups on one of his early 1960s assignments.*

La maschera del demonio

"The Mask of the Demon"
Filmed at Titanus Appia Studios (Scalera Film)
and on location
March 28 – May 7, 1960
First released: August 11, 1960
B&W, 1.66:1, 87 minutes

Production: Galatea, Jolly Film. Producer: Massimo De Rita. Director: Mario Bava. Assistant director: Vana Caruso. Screenplay: Ennio De Concini, Mario Serandrei, Mario Bava, Marcello Coscia, based on Nikolaj Gogol's story "Viy." Continuity: Bona Magrini. Director of photography: Mario Bava. Camera operator: Ubaldo Terzano. Art direction: Giorgio Giovannini, Mario Bava. Wardrobe: Tina Loriedo Grani. Production assistants: Paolo Mercuri, Armando Govoni. Editor: Mario Serandrei. Music: Roberto Nicolosi, conducted by Pier Luigi Urbini. Distributor: Unidis.

Barbara Steele (Asa/Katia), John Richardson (Andrej/Andreas Gorobec), Andrea Checchi (Dr. Choma/Chomas Kruvajan), Ivo Garrani (Prince Vajda), Arturo Dominici (Javutich/Javuto), Enrico Olivieri (Constantine), Antonio Pierfederici (priest), Tino Bianchi (Ivan), Clara Bindi (innkeeper), Mario Passante (coachman), Germana Dominici (innkeeper's daughter), Renato Terra.

Belgium: *Het Duivels-Masker,* Optima Films, 1961
Denmark: *Djævelens Maske,* 12/17/1962
France: *Le Masque du Démon,* Comptoir Française du Film Production, 1960. Reissue: Les Grands Films Classiques, 1979
Finland: *Paholaisen naamio,* Lii-Filmi o/y
Germany: *Die Stunde Venn Dracula Kommt,* "The Hour When Dracula Arrives," Panorama (35 mm), Atlas (16 mm), 9/29/61, 85m
Mexico: *La Máscara del Demonio,* Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer, 84m
Spain: *La Máscara del Demonio,* Ismael González Diáz, 85m
Sweden: *Djävulsmasken*
Turkey: *Seytanin Maskesi,* Ceylan Film
UK: *Revenge of the Vampire,* Border Films, 6/68, 85m 55s, Certificate "X," passed with cuts
US: *Black Sunday,* American International Pictures, 2/15/61, 83m

closest friends remember that he was insecure about his looks, and sometimes referred to himself as a *faccia stronza* ("shit face"). Some photographs indicate that he had a "lazy eye" or astigmatism that made his gaze uneven; he was far-sighted and had to wear glasses when he wrote, painted or storyboarded, but he was sufficiently vain to go without them the rest of the time. Whenever someone pointed a camera in his direction, he hexed the result by twisting his face into a comic or ironic caricature.

"My father *hated* having his photograph taken," Lamberto Bava emphasizes. "He preferred to be the one *taking* the photographs. If he had his photo taken, he liked to dress up as a mad woman or an old woman or a Turkish man. If you look at photographs of him, it is very difficult to find a 'normal' one, where he isn't pretending to be someone else."

Bava creeping lasciviously toward an amused starlet . . . wearing a footman's powdered wig . . . glowering furiously . . . smiling demurely as he stands beside a pretty girl . . . wearing a woman's nightcap and dress, as he sits covered up to his chest in a sickbed . . . wearing a fez and extending a limp wrist . . . standing in front of a round diffusion screen that forms an ironic halo behind his head, his hands crossed before him in a parody of iconic rigor—these are just a few photos that exist of Mario Bava. Looking at them now, one is impressed not only by the consistency of his subterfuge, but by what an untapped source of personality and entertainment they represent. In these poses, Bava is not unlike the "Alfred Hitchcock" that director Alfred Hitchcock became for his appearances on weekly television. These photos prove that it was not only within Bava's scope to become a major genre director, but also an engaging, tongue-in-cheek frontman for his often violent art, in the same style as Hitchcock or his downmarket impersonator at Columbia, William Castle. Unfortunately, there was no one around Bava who took note of this untapped potential, and if there had been, it is quite possible that Bava might not have been willing or able to bring that side of himself before a wider public.

"Bava had no interest in being a director, even when I was working with him," laughs Alfredo Leone, the producer of *Four Times That Night*, *Baron Blood*, and *Lisa and the Devil*. "He used to say to me, 'Leone, why don't we stop this? You can direct, and I will be your cameraman . . .'" Bava may have felt he deserved the chance to direct, but when the opportunity finally presented itself, he was reluctant to embrace it. He loved being a member of a film crew, and knew all too well that an invisible wall of status stands between even the most welcoming, good-natured director and his crew. There was also the question of failure. Bava had been in the film business long enough to know that, if he did not make the most of this opportunity, it could adversely affect the career in which he had built his success. "I knew that I had to do a good job," he said, "because, if I bungled it, I would be finished as a director . . . *and* as a cameraman!"[3]

MARIO *(with unidentified friend) in another gag shot, dating from the filming of LA FAMIGLIA PASSAGUAI (1951).*



The only way to get past his hesitancy was to plunge in straight ahead, so Bava turned his thoughts to the story he was going to tell. It wasn't always his intention to make a horror picture, but it is likely that he was persuaded to move in this direction by his affinity for special effects. "Bava had worked extensively in the field of special effects, especially visual effects," notes his friend and colleague, Oscar-winning special effects designer Carlo Rambaldi. "Obviously, this helped him to determine to continue in the field of horror films. After all, a horror film is a kind of fantasy film. It is fantasy, above all else."[4]

Bava's choice of property for his directorial debut was ultimately decided by the serendipitous arrival in Roman theaters of *Dracula il vampiro*—the Italian version of Hammer Films' *Dracula/Horror of Dracula* (1958). Under the careful direction of Terence Fisher, Christopher Lee's commanding performance as Count Dracula revolutionized audience perceptions of Bram Stoker's immortal character, which had not changed in the quarter-century since Bela Lugosi had essayed the role for Universal. Just as Fisher toyed brilliantly with his audience by alternating long sequences of calm with sudden outbursts of staccato speed and fury, Lee was introduced onscreen as a tall, urbane, civilized gentleman who could turn, with a spin of his cape, into a vicious, hissing animal with blood-gouted fangs—and just as quickly into a highly romantic, yet equally animalistic figure: a vampire movie first. Italian audiences loved the film's alternating currents of sanguinary sin and Christian purity, the latter personified by the equally authoritative Peter Cushing as Dr. Van Helsing.

"Since *Dracula il vampiro* was popular at the time, I began to think of making a horror movie," Bava later recalled. "Years earlier, I had read Gogol's 'Viy'—a stupendous tale and a film that has yet to be properly made. In the days before television, I read it to my children at bedtime. It frightened them so badly, they ended up sleeping together in the middle of my bed!"[5]

1 Alberto Abruzzese, et al., *La città del cinema—produzione e lavoro nel cinema italiano 1930–70* (Rome, Italy: Napoleone, 1979), 83–89.

2 Ornella Volta, "Conversation avec Mario Bava," *Positif* 138, May 1972, 44–48.

3 Abruzzese.

4 Carlo Rambaldi, *Mario Bava Maestro of the Macabre* interview transcript, 2000.

5 Volta.



Viy

Ukrainian author Nikolai Vasilyevich Gogol (1809–52) wrote "Viy" in 1833, at the age of 24. It first appeared in his 1842 story collection *Mirgorod*, published ten short years before his death from anemia, a condition brought on by fasting. (Something of a religious zealot in his later years, Gogol had stopped eating in an effort to purge the Devil from his being.) The story's enigmatic title refers to the iron-faced "chief of the gnomes, whose eyelids reach down to the ground," and which, when raised, expose unholy eyes capable of peering through any barrier. According to Gogol translator and biographer David Magarshack, there are no grounds for the author's introductory assertion that "Viy" was based on a Ukrainian folk legend, unchanged and "told almost in the simple way I first heard it."[6]

Considered a minor work and mentioned only in passing by most Gogol studies, "Viy" warrants a detailed synopsis to help us determine how freely it was adapted by Bava and his fellow screenwriters.

After an introductory description of the Bratsky Monastery in Kiev and the rollicking crudities that distinguish its playful seminary students, Gogol isolates three of these scoundrels as his protagonists. They are Khalyava the theologian, Khoma Brut the philosopher, and the rhetorician (and kleptomaniac) Tibory Gorobets. The trio are returning on foot to their homes for summer vacation, hiking along the open highway and enjoining villagers for handouts of food and drink along the way. Night falls swiftly over the roads and they entertain the thought of camping in the open air only briefly, as late night hunger, increasing sobriety, and fear of wolves compel them to continue walking till the next cottage appears. This is owned by an old woman who, knowing of the loutish and drunkenly ways of young students, refuses them hospitality. The three comrades swear through her bolted door that there will be no mischief and, should there be, "then may our arms be withered and

PRINCESS ASA *is fitted with the Mask of Satan in this Italian fotobusta.*

may God punish us as only He knows how." At this oath, the crone lets them in, but only on the condition that they sleep apart to insure that no schemes will be concocted between them.

The rhetorician is roomed in the cottage, the theologian is locked in a closet, and the philosopher is bedded down in the barn among the sheep. (This is the last we hear of Khalyava and Gorobets until the tale's final paragraph, some thirty-five pages later.) The philosopher, Khoma Brut, is soon joined in the barn by the old hag, who initially seems determined to rape him, but then leaps onto his back and, in a nightmarish scene, rides him like a pony to the edge of her haunted forest. There, on its outskirts, the aged witch collapses from apparent exhaustion and, before Khoma's eyes, becomes a beautiful young corpse. The philosopher wastes no time in putting as many miles as possible between himself, the corpse, and the episode.

Continuing on his merry way, Khoma Brut soon overhears that a wealthy Cossack captain is searching for him, as his dying daughter has requested him by name to "read the prayer of the dying over her and the psalms for three days after her death." The philosopher, tempted by thoughts of a handsome wage, allows the captain's coachman—Yavtukh—to escort him to where he is needed. Upon his arrival, the Cossack captain announces that his daughter has already died, but that her final wish—that the psalms be read over her coffin for three nights—must be fulfilled. As the reader already suspects, the daughter is indeed the lovely corpse of the withered hag from the earlier episode and also, according to the gossip of the local serfs, a "bloodsucker." Khoma Brut is sent to the side of her coffin for the first night's reading, in the decaying vaults of the family's private chapel, the wasting of which "showed how little the owner of the estate cared for God and his own soul."

In this damned and derelict place, for the next three nights, the philosopher is subjected to visions and antics of the undead. The beautiful corpse sits upright in her coffin and reaches out to him; she pilots her coffin through the air like a macabre aircraft; and she chants into existence demonic, otherworldly familiars, from whom Khoma Brut shields himself by drawing a circle of chalk around his feet, rendering himself invisible to them. As a last resort, on the final night, the daughter summons the dreaded Viy, an earth-clotted gnome with iron arms and heavy eyelids that droop to the floor. The impish familiars hoist its eyelids up and the eyes of the Viy penetrate the chalk barrier. Discovered, the soul of Khoma Brut flees his mortal body in terror. A droll epilogue presents Khalyava and Gorobets drinking to the memory of their comrade, philosophizing that his peculiar fate was God's Will.

Adaptation

Bava's first step toward his directorial debut has been preserved in the form of a 4-page treatment, dated September 1, 1959. This date places the composition of this document in the immediate wake of his completing the principal photography for *La battaglia di Maratona*.

"Viy"[7]
Story by Mario Bava

This treatment is based on a short story by Nikolai Gogol.

It's about a young married couple. They embark in their car on a country trip. They find themselves lost in the woods as the sky is getting dark and a thunderstorm is approaching. The trees of the woods are ominous-looking, with big, black, and convoluted trunks. While walking around, they find a barren clearing with a few old cabins, deserted, charred and half in ruins. At the edge of the clearing, there's an old church, also in ruins, from which a faint pipe-organ sound is heard. The couple, intrigued, enters the church. The doors and stained-glass windows are literally covered in a frieze of petrified monsters.

We hear some footsteps . . . A little man appears, entirely dressed in black, with thin ankles sticking out from large, worn-out shoes. Next to him there's a shaggy, messy, black dog. The little man has impressive, red-ringed eyes, revealing all the white in the cornea. His beard is white and flowing. Sensing the couple's trepidation, he welcomes them to the Land of the Dead, and tells them not to fear. When questioned by them, he embarks on a long story.

In those same houses once lived people ruled by a centurion. He had a daughter, who was blonde and beautiful. During the night, however, this lovely girl took the form and the character of a witch and went out performing all kinds of spells, harassing many people. Once, she met a philosopher seminarian: Chomà. Well, since then, that poor philosopher never knew a moment's peace: she used him as a horse at night to go to the most horrible places and terrorized him as best as she could. But, in time, the philosopher rebelled and started beating her so hard that she died. After dying, the witch recovered the aspect of the beautiful blonde daughter of the centurion. The centurion was deeply saddened by her loss. He called Chomà, according to his daughter's last will, telling him that he must perform a service over her body for three successive nights. Chomà knew that the centurion was deeply saddened by the loss of his daughter, and he also knew that he would die of a horrible death if the centurion ever found out he was responsible for beating his daughter to death. There is also the question of why the girl specifically asked for Chomà to oversee this ritual. Why him? The centurion wants to know, but Chomà is very careful to say nothing. Anyway, he is astonished and doesn't want to perform the service, but the centurion forces him, threatening him with a flogging if he refuses.

The services became nights of terror for poor Chomà, since the dead girl, resuming her form as a witch, rose from her coffin each night and tried to get close to him, but she was never able to cross the magic circle which he had drawn around himself in chalk, activated by a special incantation.

But on the third night, the witch conjured up all the monsters under her power. They came into the church and tried to cross the aforementioned magic circle, but couldn't do it. In the end, the witch summoned the Viy, an enormous and awful monster, hulking and crooked, completely filthy with black soil. Its arms and legs were knotty and brawny like roots. It moved forward heavily, stumbling. The monsters held it by its arms to help it, taking it right to the place where Chomà stood. It had an iron face with eyelids that reached all the way down to its feet. "Lift my eyelids; I can't see," it said, and all the monsters hurried to lift its eyelids. "There he is!" cried the Viy, pointing its iron finger at Chomà. Stunned, Chomà slumped to the ground and his soul fled from his body, from sheer fright.

The cockcrow had already resonated once, but, in the mayhem, the goblins had not heard it. The second time, they tried to flee, but remained jammed in the space of the doors and windows, their eyes wide open, stunned. Now the time is up.

No priest ever dared to serve mass in that place again, and so, as time went by, the church became covered in a forest of plants, roots, weeds, blackthorns, so dense that no one could find there way back there till now.

As the old man ends his tale, the young man realizes that his wife has changed. Her blonde hair has turned black; she stares at him harshly, her teeth chattering. She tells him: "You are Chomà . . . Chomà, aren't you?" The young man recoils, terrified. And she says, "I will haunt you forever and ever, you won't have a moment's peace in all your future lives. Now you can't draw magic circles . . . you can't even pray!" That said, she throws herself at him and bites him on the throat.

In the church, the petrified monsters come back to life and it's once again a horrible bedlam. The little man, crouched in a corner with his dog, which is whining near him, draws a magic circle.

Outside the noise of a car.

The witch throws the lifeless body into the casket.

Now the car isn't there anymore, but there are clearly visible tracks left by its wheels. They lead towards an abyss from which it's coming a rumbling and a big smoke.

The dog looks and whines, and then, as if driven mad, it runs far away.

6 David Magarshack, *Gogol, A Life* (New York: Grove Press, 1957); 124–25.

7 Translated by Daniela Catelli.

ANDREJ *(John Richardson) and Kruvajan (Andrea Checchi) visit the crypt of the Vajda family.*



This is a remarkable document, not only because it differs so radically from the film Bava would ultimately create, but because it contains images and situations destined to resurface in Bava's later work. The decision to tell Gogol's dark fable within a contemporary framing story shows Bava already contemplating the uncanny juxtaposition of past and present, as modern-day people become lost in ancient and unfamiliar surroundings and find themselves caught up in the past history of an abandoned ruin. This will later happen in *Lisa and the Devil* (1973) with its single protagonist. The petrified monsters, first seen as a decorative frieze inside the derelict church, look forward to the concept of *Anomalia*, an unrealized science fiction project from the late 1970s, written with Dardano Sacchetti. The "*I wurdalak*" episode of *I tre volti della paura/Black Sabbath* (1963) concludes with a horse galloping away as though driven mad.

The fact that "Viy" was a classic literary property—that is, in the public domain—made it an agreeable choice to Nello Santi. But the treatment was unacceptable, as written. Bava may have been a compulsive reader, but he was above all an instinctive artist, unable to express himself in words as well as he could communicate emotion through images. Therefore, Galatea's resident

ANDREJ *returns to the Vajda crypt (below) with the priest (Antonio Pierfederici), where they discover the reactivated evil of Princess Asa.*





"SADNESS *in Her Eyes": Princess Katia memorably appears at the entrance of the Vajda chapel ruins.*

screenwriter Ennio De Concini was brought in to meet with Bava and develop a more suitable basis for a screenplay. Chances are, however, that their talents were more similar than complementary. As Sergio Leone once said of De Concini, "He was far better at improvising stories, live, in front of producers, than at writing them down . . ."[8] With this in mind—and the fact that De Concini's name appears on more than twenty films produced between 1958 and 1960, more than is likely for anyone to have actually written in full—it seems probable that his involvement in the screenplay was mostly conceptual, while the actual writing was entrusted to another credited writer, Marcello Coscia (with whom Bava had previously worked on *La morte viene dallo spazio* and *Caltiki il mostro immortale*). That said, it would be wrong to underestimate De Concini's contribution, as Bava's directorial debut shares a number of elements often found in earlier films bearing his byline: sovereign decadence, the defiling of holy places, the fall of corrupt empires, and most significantly, the casting of a single actress in dual roles embodying Good and Evil (as was done with Silvana Mangano in *Ulisse*). Also credited with the screenplay is the film's editor, Mario Serandrei, who wasn't a writer at all. As we will see, Serandrei was likely awarded credit by Bava for "rewriting" the story—and saving the movie—in the editing room.

The title concocted for the film was *La maschera del demonio* (literally, "The Demon's Mask"), chosen to suggest a relationship in the minds of audiences with two other horror films which had met with successful receptions in Italy: *La maschera di cera* and *La maschera di Frankenstein*—respectively, Andre de Toth's *House of Wax* (1953) and Terence Fisher's Hammer production *The Curse of Frankenstein* (1957). This practice would become a tradition-of-sorts with Bava's future films as a director, whose titles frequently served as ironic "tweaks" of other popular film titles dating from the same period. Whether this began as a commercial decision (based on

8 Christopher Frayling: *Sergio Leone: Something To Do With Death* (Gordonsville VA: Faber & Faber, 2000), 94.

the producers' notion of making a success by impersonating success) or an artistic one (owing to Bava's own ironic sensibilities, and his view of his own movies as a kind of sub-cinema) is anyone's guess.

By comparing the synopses of Gogol's story with that of *La maschera del demonio*, we can appreciate Bava's observation that "Such was the genius of the screenwriters—myself included—that absolutely nothing remained of Gogol's tale." [9]

Synopsis

The film opens in the year 1630, in a bleak Moldavian forest in the dead of night, where a group of black-robed Inquisitors are enacting the ritual execution of Princess Asa of Vajda. Asa has been accused of witchcraft and vampirism, along with her accomplice, Prince Javutich—already slain. The Grand Inquisitor—Asa's younger brother, Griabi [10]—denounces her and approves the branding of her back with the "sign of Satan." Before the final tortures, Asa pronounces a curse on her brother and his fellow Inquisitors and "their sons and their sons." Griabi finally decrees that Asa will wear the Mask of Satan—a heavy bronze mask with leonine features, its interior lined with thick spikes—which is brutally hammered onto her face by a hooded executioner. As blood spurts behind the mask, Asa's body is set ablaze, but the flames are mysteriously quenched by a sudden rainfall. As her body is conveyed to the Vajda family crypt, Javutich is buried in the local cemetery, in unconsecrated ground, among the unmarked graves of murderers and suicides.

Two hundred years later, two doctors—Chomas Kruvajan and his protegé Andrej Gorobec—travel by coach through Moldavia en route to a medical convention in Mirgorod. Their coach loses a wheel and, while their superstitious and vodka-tippling driver attends to repairs, the two men pass the time by investigating a weird hum emanating from some abandoned ruins. They trace the hum to a broken pipe organ in an abandoned chapel ruin. [11] Kruvajan soon identifies the ruins as the property of the once-regal Vajda family and discovers, in the midst of the rubble, the cause of the Vajdas' fall from grace: the tomb of Princess Asa, the witch. A customized creation, Asa's resting place has been provided with a window through which she must gaze for eternity upon an upright crucifix carved into the stone of its heavy lid.



ANDREJ *drowns his infatuation for the Princess to the amusement of the more worldly Kruvajan.*

As Andrej helps the coachman with his repairs, a large bat attacks Kruvajan. In the midst of battle, both the crucifix and the tomb's window are shattered. After beating the creature to death with his cane, Kruvajan cannot resist examining the contents of the violated tomb, removing the Mask of Satan from Asa's face (scorpions and spiders scramble from its empty eyes) and studying a triptychal Cyrillic icon of St. George, the sainted dragon slayer, containing the laws of how to return a vampire to its rest. Andrej returns and discovers that Kruvajan has cut himself on the jagged glass still framed in the coffin's shattered window. Together they exit the crypt, unaware that droplets of Kruvajan's blood have been left to drip into the gaping eye socket of the dead Princess.

While returning to their coach, Andrej and Kruvajan encounter a woman whom we recognize as Princess Asa—has Kruvajan's blood reanimated her so quickly?—flanked by two large, intimidating Great Danes. This is, in fact, Asa's lookalike descendant Princess Katia, with whom Andrej falls in love at first sight. As the younger man gapes at her beauty, Kruvajan extends his apology to the Princess for trespassing on her family's property, and begs her to excuse him and his young colleague. "If you don't mind, I won't say goodbye," Andrej adds, "because perhaps we will meet again." As they drive away, Andrej discovers that he has absent-mindedly taken the protective icon with him . . . In the dark of the Vajda crypt, Kruvajan's blood initiates the unthinkable.

Katia returns to Castle Vajda, where her father Prince Vajda is troubled by spiritual unrest. It is the Feast of St. George, the bicentennial of Asa's death and the curse she placed on their family. When the Prince, Katia and her younger brother Constantine notice an uncanny change in a portrait of Asa, Prince Vajda remembers that an earthquake all but destroyed their family chapel a century ago, leading to the death of another lookalike descendent, the 21-year-old Princess Masha. He frets that his daughter Katia also resembles Asa, whose painting hangs in the castle ("It's as if the witch tormented her victims with her own beauty before killing them"), and that she too has now reached the

9 Volta.

10 The name is given as "Guerogui" by some sources.

11 The same explanation is given for an eerie ambient sound that accompanies William Holden's arrival at Gloria Swanson's house in Billy Wilder's 1950 film *Sunset Blvd.*



KRUVAJAN *falls under the spell of the reawakened Princess Asa.*

age of 21, the same age at which Asa was put to death. Upon seeing an apparition of the Mask of Satan in his hot toddy, Prince Vajda has a breakdown and is sent to bed, tightly gripping a crucifix. His stable groom Boris is sent to fetch the two doctors Katia met outside the family crypt as night was falling.

Meanwhile, the doctors have arrived at a tavern in neighboring Mirgorod. Andrej retires early, high on wine and romance, but Kruvajan decides to take a stroll and enjoy a pipe before retiring. Back in the crypt, Asa has been rematerialized by Kruvajan's blood, but not fully; she uses her only strength to summon Prince Javutich from his grave. At her psychic command, he rises from the damp clay covering his coffin and pulls the spiked mask from his face. He staggers down the road to Castle Vajda, but his unwelcome appearance in the room of



BARBARA STEELE'*s stand-in, used as a model for lighting the set, is glimpsed in this frame from an RAI newsreel devoted to the making of the film.*

Prince Vajda is foiled by the Prince's bedside crucifix.

Kruvajan is enjoying a pipe in the evening air when Javutich soundlessly appears in a coach to take him to the ailing Prince. (The encounter is witnessed by the innkeeper's young daughter, who watches in astonishment as the coach gallops through the night in silent spectral slow motion, while Javutich thrashes his ghost mares like a team of furies.) Kruvajan is taken to Castle Vajda, where he is led through subterranean tunnels back to Asa's graveside, which suddenly explodes as if through an exertion of sheer will. The cadaverous, spike-punctured beauty of the undead Princess proves irresistible as Kruvajan is drawn toward her to sacrifice his life essence through a kiss. The life Katia drains from Kruvajan's lips is sufficient to restore her beauty fully, and to render the good doctor her soulless slave. A seedy, dishevelled version of Kruvajan appears at the castle to treat the Prince. Remembering him from their earlier encounter, Katia pleads with him to save her father.

The next morning, as some servants are washing clothes in the river, they discover the corpse of the Vajda coachman, Boris, lying in the water, drained of blood. Katia and her brother Constantine awaken to discover their father dead, his face ravaged with infection and contorted with terror. Kruvajan is nowhere to be found. Andrej awakens to find his mentor missing from the inn, but the innkeeper informs him that he was summoned to Castle Vajda in the middle of the night. (Evidently, Boris made it to the inn before Javutich killed him.) Andrej is received courteously but coldly by Constantine, who holds Kruvajan's abandonment of his father responsible for his sudden death. Some villagers arrive to inform the Vajdas of Boris' death, and much is explained when the innkeeper's daughter sees a portrait of Javutich—dead 200 years—and identifies him as the coachman who took the doctor to the castle the previous night. Andrej is invited by Constantine and Katia to stay with them at the Castle.

In search of information, Andrej visits a local Orthodox priest, who translates the writing on the ancient Cyrillic icon, which explains the laws governing the existence and elimination of vampires.

That afternoon, Andrej finds an opportunity to express his devotion to the Princess, which she receives gratefully. As if generated from the positive energies of their new love, a breeze spreads from the garden where they stand embracing and starts a fire, which reveals a secret passage behind the fireplace of the main hall. The passage leads Andrej and Constantine to the crypt, where they find Asa's restored corpse at rest. Understanding what is at work here, Andrej and the priest locate Kruvajan's body in the abandoned coffin of Javutich, where they use the icon's directives and impale the screaming vampire through the eye to ensure his eternal rest.

Meanwhile, Castle Vajda is engulfed in a private historical nightmare as an older generation stages its attack on the new. Katia discovers Ivan (the Vajda family manservant) hanged by the neck, and as she kneels by her father's dead body and appeals to his spirit for protection, Prince Vajda awakens, hungry for blood. He stalks his daughter until an outraged Javutich intervenes, hurling the Prince into the flaming fireplace and carrying Katia to the crypt, where her ancestor usurps all of her youth and vitality with a mere handclasp. Javutich materializes before Constantine out of thin air and hurls him into a pit of spikes, but the young Prince later rises during a fight between Andrej and Javutich and pulls the latter into the pit with him. When Andrej returns to the crypt, Asa poses as Katia and encourages him to destroy the "vampire." Before he can impale her, he notices an impossibility . . . a crucifix strung about the gaunt witch's neck! Removing it, he tries to return it to his beautiful companion, whose cloak is flung aside to reveal the torso of a rotted corpse. The priest arrives with some torch-bearing villagers, and Andrej identifies the real witch to her persecutors. They promptly restage the burning of two centuries before. As Asa withers and burns, Katia's beauty is restored and she awakens to Andrej's loving embrace.



ANDREJ *carries the fainted Katia to her bed.*

There are common points shared by Gogol's story and *La maschera del demonio*, but they are mostly superficial. The name of the young hero, Andrej Gorobec, owes something to the rhetorician Gorobets, and the Christian name of Dr. Kruvajan—Chomas—was plainly derived from Khoma Brut. The character of Asa's evil serf Javutich grew out of Yavtukh, a coachman who appears only fleetingly in the tale; his occupation likely suggested the spectral coach sequence. The decaying village overlorded by the Vajdas is given the name of Mirgorod, the title of the story collection in which "Viy" was first published. The decrepit chapel figures prominently in the story too, as does the unexpected rejuvenation of the hag into a beautiful woman. The concept of the bronze "Mask of Satan" was perhaps inspired by Gogol's description

of the Viy's heavy, iron eyelids, which only the amassed legions of Hell can lift from its all-seeing eyes.

"My father was extremely fond of Russian literature," says Lamberto Bava, "especially the works of Gogol, Leo Tolstoy, and Fyodor Dostoevsky, whose collected works he prided himself on having read four times." With this in mind, though *La maschera del demonio* does not credit Bava with contributing to its screenplay, his grasp of Russian literature identifies him as an important—possibly the main—conceptualist behind the screenplay. The film's use of the Grand Inquisition and its contemplation of the metaphysics of twinship are evocative of Dostoevsky's novels *The Brothers Karamazov* and *The Double*, respectively; in fact, *La maschera del demonio* is more evocative of Dostoevsky's somber ruminations and Tolstoy's troubled family sagas than of anything in Gogol's merrily lunatic universe. The scene introducing Princess Katia also draws inspiration from Ivan Turgenev's story "Kasyan From the Beautiful Lands," whose author/narrator encounters a wise, wizened dwarf named Kasyan while exploring a strange woods as his coachman tends to the broken axle of his carriage. The two men walk through the forest together, until their mutual reveries of the strangeness inherent in nature are interrupted by the sudden appearance of a beautiful, young, mushroom-gathering girl, who is revealed to be the perfectly formed daughter of the misshapen Kasyan.

Empowered by his new position to do so, Bava took it upon himself to storyboard the entire script, working into his maiden feature a visual emphasis that was quite unusual for its time. As in *I vampiri*, ancestral portraits figure prominently in the story, and Bava makes the characters in them—Asa and Javutich—more real and forbidding by framing a good deal of the present tense action with arched doorways, vaulted ceilings, windows, even a missing plank in the wall of a barn. In death, Asa is compelled to remain in her tomb by visual means, as she is held in place for all eternity by a cross carved atop the stone lid, which she must gaze upon through a window built into her resting place—making her means of incapacitation a form of cinema.

Given equal prominence in relation to these cinematic/painterly conceits is a recurring use of circular imagery that sometimes explicitly reminds us of the preciousness of the human eye. The film opens by plunging its audience into a sustained spell of darkness that lasts exactly 13 seconds, finally fading-in on a close shot of silvery, flickering flames—which is also the last image in the picture, lending the entire movie a certain circularity. Bava forces us to share Asa's point of view as the spike-lined mask is carried nearer to her face by her inquisitioners (whose dark hoods reveal only their eyes), and cuts from the subjective to the objective action in such a way that the camera appears to pass through the eyehole of the mask itself. When Andrej and Kruvajan later enter the Vajda family crypt, the camera executes a stunning 360° turn (as Bava did on his first assignment as a cameraman, Rossellini's short *Il tacchino prepotente*) to convince us of the reality of this setting; as they pry the mask from Asa's face, scorpions rush out from her hollow eye sockets ("Those empty eyes seem to be looking out at us," Kruvajan notes), and as they ride away—while droplets of Kruvajan's blood drip from a shard of broken glass into one of those ghastly cavities—Andrej explains why he has fallen in love with Katia ("at first sight") by remarking on the "sadness in her eyes." There is later a rhyming or mocking cutaway from Asa's hollow eyes to the bell of a horn being played in the tavern at Mirgorod. As Kruvajan steps outside to smoke a before-bed pipe at the side of a pond, he casually shatters its stillness with a stone, and the image of Asa emerges from the ripples radiating from the stone's throw—circle within circle within circle. The twinship of Asa and Katia is itself an optical effect. Katia is later saved from an attempted abduction by Javutich by glimpsing his reflection in a mirror, and as she prays for safety beside her dead father's coffin, Bava shoots the awakening of the undead Prince Vajda through the fingers shielding the disbelieving eyes of the Princess—forcing the viewer to share her dread of seeing, and to feel, no matter what their age, like a child hiding his eyes at the movies. Several of the film's most chilling images involve the sudden, shocking sight of the dead suddenly opening their eyes, or the recently living being found dead with eyes bulging wide with terror, and Bava's breed of vampire can only be put to rest by staking them—where else?—through the eye. With such an elaborate network of references, the film's emphatic attention to visual splendor doesn't seem at all excessive, but rather perfectly and intricately measured.

As with *I vampiri*'s unrequited love story between the Duchess Du Grand and the grandfather of Pierre Lantin, and the found documentary film



ANDREJ *and the priest discover Kruvajan at rest in the unconsecrated grave of Javutich.*

footage in *Caltiki il mostro immortale*, Bava enriched the verisimilitude of the script by including some backstory—that is, scripted references to events which took place before the story being told. At one point, Prince Vajda recalls that, on the first centenary of Asa's execution, Princess Masha (who, like Katia, was also Asa's twin, and also age 21) was killed when an earthquake all but destroyed the family chapel. With a simple throwaway line of dialogue, Bava extends the scope of his narrative by an additional century, makes sense of the chapel's disrepair, establishes that Asa's curse has already proven effective against one generation, and pinpoints the face shared by Asa, Masha, and Katia as the locus of the witch's power and the vulnerability of the Vajda women of later generations. Nearly all of Bava's subsequent work as a director would also involve some element of backstory, which not only gave his horror films an aspect of superstitious dread and its eventual fulfillment, but also acted as a narrative counterpart to visual devices he had been employing for most of his career. Backstory is comparable, in some ways, to Bava's cinematographic penchant for projecting "fourth wall" impressions onto the three visible walls of a set, completing the circle of his imaginary worlds. Just as he had found a means of "erasing the camera" by thus implying the character of an unseen wall or window that might be occupying its place—light shining through unseen venetian blinds, barred windows, or transparent drapes—Bava's use of backstory gave his movies a sense of wholeness, as well as an illusion of greater scale. His use of backstory is also comparable to his technique of "selling" a glass matte painting by positioning something real in front of it, whether it be an actor, a tree branch, or a wagon wheel; it adds an extra layer of dimension.



20TH CENTURY FOX: *Barbara Steele in a promotional shot documenting a short-lived blonde makeover.*



BARBARA STEELE *and John Richardson first appeared together onscreen in the 1959 Rank production, SAPPHIRE.*

The script's emphasis on the beauty shared by three generations of women—a ripple through the centuries, if you will—called for an unforgettable face. In a move that would significantly alter the future course of horror, Bava cast this dual role with a young British actress whom critic Raymond Durgnat would later describe as "the only girl in films whose eyelids can snarl . . ." [12]

Cast

Despite the recent success of *Dracula il vampiro*, Bava's decision to launch his directorial career with a horror film must have been regarded at the time as a serious gamble. In the four years since *I vampiri*, no one in Italy had dared to produce another horror film, but the tremendous success of the Hammer film had been encouraging—and not just to Bava. Elsewhere in Rome, as Bava's directorial debut was entering preproduction, a low-budget film entitled *L'amante del vampiro* ("The Vampire's Lover") was being shot in the Castello di Borghese in Artena—exteriors courtesy of the Castello di Balsorano in L'Aquila—with an Italian cast headed by Walter Brandi. (The film was later released in America as *The Vampire and the Ballerina*.) Showing that Riccardo Freda had taught him well, Bava insisted that the casting of British talent was essential to the film's success; it was the only way to persuade the Italian public that they were being offered something of comparable quality to *Dracula il vampiro*. With that in mind, Bava began looking at photographs of actors under contract to 20th Century-Fox, who were then planning to join forces with Galatea the following summer to coproduce a Biblical epic called *Esther and the King*. He quickly settled on two young British actors, who were represented by the same agent at William Morris and available for employment on the Continent.

Barbara Steele was born in Trenton Wirrall, Cheshire, England, on December 29, 1938. The only child of a



ARTURO DOMINICI *as Asa's deadly brother and minion, Javutich.*

well-to-do couple, Steele spent an impatient childhood "looking forward to the day I could get out of there [the country]" and found temporary respite from her boredom in the fantasy worlds of grammar school plays. In her late teens, she moved to London, where she attended the Chelsea Art School and moved in the same circles as future screenwriter/director Donald Cammell (*Performance*) and members of The Rolling Stones. Amateur modelling—kitschy samples of which show the nascent performer (in what she calls "my virgin days") admiring potted plants and registering surprise—led to her first professional job, as the model for the album cover of Reg Owen's easy listening album *You Don't Know Paree!*, released in 1958.

That same year, Steele was noticed in a play and offered an acting contract with The Rank Organization, who publicized their latest acquisition with a two-page spread in the December 1, 1958 issue of *Life* magazine. One of the last contract players to be signed by the company, Steele arrived on the screen in five Rank productions released in rapid succession during 1959, including *Upstairs and Downstairs* and two films directed by Basil Dearden—his remake of *The 39 Steps* and his racially-themed police procedural *Sapphire*. Too exotic-looking to be believably cast as the girl next door, Rank sold Steele's contract to 20th Century-Fox in 1959.

The 20-year-old was excited about relocating to Hollywood, but things did not work out to her liking. The studio promptly ordered that she be dyed blonde, and she was cast as the female lead in the Elvis Presley Western, *Flaming Star*. Steele and director Don Siegel did not see eye-to-eye and she was replaced by Barbara Eden during the first week of shooting. She acted as a blonde only once, in an episode of TV's *Adventures in Paradise* called "Daughter of Illusion," before her career (and many others) ground to a halt by a major Screen Actors Guild strike, which commenced on March 7, 1960. Based on a SAG demand that actors be additionally paid when theatrical motion pictures were sold to television, the strike was aimed against theatrical film production at those major studios which had not signed new SAG contracts making such allowances. Only Universal and some other small production companies had signed the updated contracts. In addition to countless actors, nearly 5,000 studio employees were put out of work until the situation was resolved in late April.

"I remember there was this terrible Screen Actors Guild strike happening, or about to happen, so I knew that work in Hollywood was going to be pretty hard to come by," Steele recalls. "So I decided to fly back to Europe, find a nice beach somewhere, and wait things out."

On the same front page of *The Hollywood Reporter* where the details of



KATIA *mourns beside the coffin of her father Prince Vajda (Ivo Garrani), only to see his eyes open in bloodlust.*

12 *Motion Magazine 4: Violence in the Cinema* (London, UK: 1963).

the SAG strike were reported, there appears another story which would prove equally as fateful to Steele's stalled screen career:

> ***ITALIAN PRODUCERS STEP UP ACTIVITY***
>
> *Rome*—Possibly with an eye to a bigger share of the US and world film market resulting from the Hollywood strike situation, Italian producers are stepping up activity.
>
> Nearly twenty productions and co-productions now are shooting, which [*sic*] the number in preparation has gone past the sixty mark.

It was during this fateful juncture that Mario Bava, in the process of casting his directorial debut, happened to discovered Steele's photograph in a stack of résumé submissions from the William Morris Agency. His experienced eye recognized in her dark beauty an equal potential for romance and horror. "She had the perfect face for my films," he later said. Indeed she did. No face is better identified with the films of Mario Bava than that of Barbara Steele, who would make horror film history in the dual role of the evil Princess Asa and her twin descendant, the melancholic Princess Katia.

For the male lead, Bava chose John Richardson. Born January 19, 1938, Richardson was a former male model whose career had run parallel to that of Steele. He had been signed to Rank on the same day as she; they appeared together in their first screen tests; they made their first film together (*Bachelor of Hearts*, 1958); and they also shared a couple of scenes in Basil Dearden's racially-themed murder mystery *Sapphire* (1959). Richardson was also signed to 20th Century-Fox, but had better luck there than Steele did. Among his starring roles were the Hammer Films productions *She* (1965), *One Million Years B.C.* (1966), and *The Vengeance of She* (1967)—but even he was dyed blonde. It was while filming *One Million Years B.C.* that Richardson and co-star Martine Beswick (later Beswicke) fell in love; they remained together for several years until an amicable separation. He had a supporting role in the Barbra Streisand musical *On a Clear Day You Can See Forever* (1970) and in the Sergio Martino-Ernesto Gastaldi *giallo*, *I corpi presentano tracce di violenza carnale/Torso* (1973). Ironically, in 1977, when Mario Bava was trying desperately to get a science fiction project produced in the wake of *Star Wars*, Richardson starred in two for Alfonso Brescia, one of the least talented of Italian directors: *Battaglia negli spazie stellari/Cosmos: War of the Planets* and *Anno zero—guerra nello spazio/Battle of the Stars*. Though still handsome in his 50s, Richardson's film career began to slow down after his appearance in Riccardo Freda's *Unconscious/Murder Obsession* (1980), which was followed by very brief appearances in Neri Parenti's *Scuola di ladri—Parte Seconda* (1987) and Michele Soavi's *La chiesa/The Church* (1989), in which he played the architect of the eponymous structure. According to Martine Beswicke, Richardson today makes his living as a photo journalist.



TEENAGE *Germana Dominici is stalked by her father Arturo (as Javutich) in this gag shot. The two characters never meet in the film itself.*

Apart from Steele and Richardson, *La maschera del demonio* was cast with local talent. Winning the important secondary role of Dr. Kruvajan was Andrea Checchi. Born October 21, 1916, Checchi made his first screen appearance at the age of 10 in Alessandro Blasetti's *1860* (1926). A graduate of Rome's Academia di Belle Arti, he won recognition for his painting as well as his acting. He had previously worked with Bava on the set of *Buonanotte . . . avvocato!*, in which he played the second male lead. In the same year that he starred in *La maschera del demonio*, Checchi also appeared in Vittorio De Sica's *La ciociara/Two Women* and Fritz Lang's *Die Tausend Augen des Dr. Mabuse/The Thousand Eyes of Dr. Mabuse*—three very different films, but all three worthy of being called masterpieces. Bava's family recall that Checchi was one of Mario's closest personal friends; his portrayal of Kruvajan—warm, ironic, and avuncular—was modelled on Bava himself. They would work together once again on the Viking adventure *Gli invasori/Erik the Conqueror* (1961).

La maschera del demonio marked the official end of Bava's long and fruitful collaborations with actors Ivo Garrani and Arturo Dominici, and the film presents both men with what are probably their greatest roles. As the haunted Prince Vajda, Garrani finds the summation of a half-dozen earlier performances as noblemen who compromise themselves and their families through weakness or corruption. Garroni's later film appearances would include *Seddok (L'erede di Satana)/Atom Age Vampire*[13] (1960), *Morgan il pirata* (1960), *Ercole alla conquista di Atlantide/Hercules and the Captive Women* (1961), Luchino Visconti's *Il gattopardo/The Leopard* (1963), Mario Monicelli's *Casanova '70* (1965), *Waterloo* (1970), *Holocaust 2000/The Chosen* (1977), and the horror-comedy *Zora la vampira* (2000).



MARIO BAVA *directs Barbara Steele on the crypt set.*

"I believe it was Bava himself who wanted me for the role," Garrani supposes. "He used to assemble his 'team' for his movies—people he already knew, people he knew he could trust. I think this was the reason he called me. He tried to have the same people around him as often as possible. Strangely, our collaborations ended after this. I don't know why; there was no particular reason."

Too often overlooked in discussions of *La maschera del demonio* is the outstanding performance of Arturo Dominici as the malevolent Javutich. We must remember that, for the majority of this picture, as Asa lies immobile in her crypt, Javutich is the evil that actually walks the Earth on this particular Feast of St. George, or Black Sunday. While Asa almost immediately fumbles her campaign after managing to stand once again on her own two feet, Javutich is given many opportunities to exhibit his intelligence and supernatural command over time and space. Steele has her great moment with the seduction of Kruvajan, but Dominici has four such highlights: his resurrection; the ghostly coach ride (surely one of the finest instances of poetic horror in the cinema); his escort of Kruvajan into progressively darker areas of Castle Vajda, until the lantern he carries is left hanging by itself in mid-air outside the crypt of Princess Asa; and his taunting materialization from thin air in front of Constantine, as he proceeds to prove that the young man is no match for his centuries-old familiarity with the castle and its secret trappings.

"I have good memories of Arturo," says Ivo Garrani, warmly. "We acted very well together, but I lost contact with him—as I did with almost every other actor I worked with, because I preferred to keep my private and professional lives separate. So I never had the occasion of pursuing an offscreen friendship with other actors."

"Arturo was a very sweet man," concurs actor Richard Harrison, who starred opposite him in *Perseo l'invincibile/The Medusa Against the Son of Hercules* (1963). "He was a charming gentleman, not at all the villain he played onscreen. He was also the type of actor who didn't put on airs, as some others were prone to do, so I could enjoy communicating with him. I also remember that he had a very pretty little daughter who was an actress."

In *La maschera del demonio*, Arturo's daughter Germana played the role of the innkeeper's daughter, whom the script does not give a name, though we are reminded several times that the name of her pet cow is Irina. Germana Dominici, the second-born of three daughters, was 13 years old at the time of filming. She remembers that her father's makeup was bluish-green in complexion, and that she first saw him in full costume at the studio commissary, where he surged up behind her with a monstrous growl, giving her a good fright.

Enrico Olivieri, who played the minor supporting role of Katia's brother Prince Constantine, was reportedly born to a noble family on December 4, 1939, in Turin, and was thus a prince in real life. [14] Despite his youth, Olivieri had been a working actor for longer than Ivo Garrani—active since 1948, when he played a *piccolo* role in Mario Soldati's *Fuga in Francia*. Soldati cast him again, in the more important role of Oscar, in *La donna del fiume/Woman of the River* (1955), which made international headlines for its steamy love scenes between Sophia Loren and her two leading men, Gerard Oury and Rik Battaglia. He also appeared in a minor, uncredited role in King Vidor's *War and Peace* (1956) and Giacomo Gentilomo's *Sigfrido/The Dragon's Blood* (1957, on which Eugenio Bava had worked as a technical advisor).

Production

The filming of *La maschera del demonio* commenced at Scalera Film (identified onscreen as Titanus Appia Studios) on March 28, 1960. The crypt and forest sequences were filmed on a sound stage next door to where Antonio Margheriti was directing *Space Men/Assignment Outer Space*—the second Italian science fiction film and the first to be made in color, which also happened to be co-scripted by Ennio De Concini. The Castle Vajda scenes (the exteriors and very few interiors) were filmed on location at a rented *castello* in Arsoli (about 60 kilometers outside Rome), which was owned by Prince Leone Massimo, the ex-husband of actress Dawn Addams (who had recently starred with Andrea Checchi in *Die Tausend Augen des Dr. Mabuse*).

Though Massimo De Rita remembers the allotted budget being in the neighborhood of $50–60,000, production manager Armando Govoni recalls

13 Countless film references erroneously credit Mario Bava with producing this film, but he had nothing to do with it. For some reason, American prints open with an animated sequence announcing "A Mario Fava Production"—though no one of this name is credited anywhere on Italian prints.

14 I say "reportedly" because this information appeared in the AIP pressbook for *Black Sunday*, which makes it worth mentioning, though its veracity is open to question.



JAVUTICH *escorts Kruvajan through secret passages toward an unspeakable fate.*

the final budget as closer to $100,000. With this sort of investment up front, Nello Santi wanted very much for the picture to be shot in Technicolor, like Hammer's Dracula film, but Bava submitted a list of reasons why it was essential that the film be photographed in black-and-white. "*La maschera* was filmed in black-and-white because Bava felt it was the appropriate stylistic choice for that kind of a movie," Govoni reasons. There was also the matter of reprising the red/green lighting transformation effects from *I vampiri* and *Caltiki il mostro immortale*, which would not have been possible to do, were the film shot in color.

During the course of production, Bava agreed to support his producer's needs by allowing a number of color production stills to be taken. These color stills offer a tremendous insight into Bava's approach to the production because they show that he and Ubaldo Terzano lighted the sets and actors as though the film was being shot in color, with the same bold swatches of saturated color gel lighting that would become Bava's calling card in horror films yet to come. Asked if Bava lighted the sets any differently than usual to accommodate the needs of the color stills photographer, Armando Govoni replies, "The set photographer shot some photos in color for the publicity and advertisements. If you see particular color effects in those pictures, they are present as a casual fact—but the lamps had the correct temperature for black-and-white shooting." In other words, the color stills reflect how the sets looked as a matter of course. Bava and Terzano used color gel lighting not only to set an on stage mood for the actors, but also to provide the black-and-white cinematography with specific tonalities of the gray scale that nature alone could not provide.



Production lasted approximately six weeks, wrapping on May 7. A six-week schedule was about par for a Galatea production, but somewhat more indulgent than the three or four weeks accorded to most Italian films of *La maschera*'s station and period. Armando Govoni recalls the schedule as "very tiring. We usually worked from 8:00 a.m. till 1:00 a.m. the next morning. Sometimes, instead of going home, I spent the night in one of the Scalera dressing rooms, to steal an hour more of sleep. Since *La maschera,* I've worked on movies made in only two weeks and a day, but this one was particularly demanding—full of special effects, requiring a precise, millimetric positioning of the lights."

The schedule was meant to be luxurious, but Bava and his crew were worked to the bone. Govoni denies that the film was a "troubled" production, but by reading between the lines of what is known about the film's production—and by closely examining the film itself—*La maschera del demonio* begins to look like a project that went before the cameras prematurely, before its script was fully settled. "I like to start [the filmmaking process] with a storyboard," Bava once explained, "which means that I draw the entire film [on paper], with all the shots and cuts. It helps me a great deal, but if I am not given enough time to prepare myself, then I have to work intuitively." [15]

Bava placed great faith in intuition, which sometimes led him to ideas that brought sparkle to the turgid waters of second-rate scripts. "My father was never satisfied with his stories,"



POETRY IN SLOW MOTION. *Javutich and his celebrated spectral carriage.*

Lamberto Bava reveals. "He would continually revise his scenarios even after shooting had begun, sometimes changing as much as 50–60% of the script." [16]

La maschera del demonio was clearly such a case. Regardless of how well it looks and plays, the film contains many inconsistencies. Govoni remembers reading a completed script for the picture in February, prior to having it translated into English. Barbara Steele, on the other hand, denies ever seeing a completed script. "We were given the pages day to day. We had hardly any idea of what was going down on that film. We had no idea of the end, or the beginning either, not at all. I'm sure that Bava knew . . . [but] maybe he didn't!" [17]

The compulsion to continually improve upon the scripts he was given was a habit that Bava would never break; he couldn't resist the temptation to improvise, to expose his work to hazard or the influence of whatever happened to be in the air. "I'll never be another Antonioni," he once admitted. "I love to improvise too much, to solve problems, to create new scenes out of sheer desperation. A good director doesn't work this way; he sticks to the letter of the script and his schedule. That's how masterpieces get made." [18]

To seasoned horror buffs, the film's most obvious fallacy is its confusion of witchcraft and vampirism. Bava confessed that he came to the film with little prior knowledge of the subject of vampires. "The strange thing is that I didn't know, before making this film, what vampires were," he said. "In our country, we have no vampires. As a child, I heard our maid telling us fables about Sardinian and Sicilian bandits, which terrified me, but I never heard of a vampire. In our country, the sun drives such things away." [19]

As in *I vampiri*, there is no literal blood-drinking in *La maschera del demonio*, but considering the immense commercial success of *Dracula il vampiro* in Rome, it is unlikely that Bava felt any obligation to tiptoe around such explicitudes to placate the Italian censors. In fact, the characters of Asa and Javutich were originally scripted as Hammer-like vampires, and Steele and Dominici were fitted with the vampire fangs Christopher Lee had made famous. A publicity still of Dominici wearing his fangs survives, and the photo's outdoor setting indicates that the attack of Javutich on the ill-fated coachman Boris may have been filmed. But, after a few days, the fangs were discarded. "I made the actors get rid of them, because they were becoming a *cliché* even then," Bava reasoned, but Armando Govoni remembers differently: "The fangs were used throughout the shooting, but when we saw

ARTURO DOMINICI *bares the vampire fangs that were ultimately eliminated from the shooting.*



15 Luigi Cozzi, *Il cinema dei mostri* (Rome, Italy: Fanucci Editore, 1987), 249–60.

16 Lamberto Bava interview, "Mario Bava, Mio Padre" in Luigi Cozzi, *Il Cinema Gotico e Fantastico Italiano Vol 1—Mario Bava, I Mille Volti Della Paura* (Rome, Italy: Mondo Ignoto/Profondo Rosso, 2001), 149–56.

17 Christopher Dietrich and Peter Beckman, "Karma, Catsup and Caskets: The Barbara Steele Interview," *Video Watchdog* 7, September/October 1991, 50.

18 Alfredo Castelli and Tito Monego, interview in *Horror* 1. 1969.

19 It's interesting to note, given this context, that the vampiric wurdalaks of *I tre volti della paura/Black Sabbath* (1963) seem to have arisen from Bava's childhood memories of this peasant bandit class.



MARIO BAVA *camps it up on the graveyard set, as Ubaldo Terzano frames Javutich's resurrection behind the camera.*

the rushes, especially in the close-ups, they looked too fake, so Serandrei cut around them."

It was in this way that the defining lines between vampire, witch, and Satanist began to blur. In *Black Sunday*, American International's English-language version of the film, the narration tries to bridge the gulf between the two by saying, "History has given these slaves of Satan the name of Vampire."

Another source of confusion involves the precise nature of the relationship between Asa and Javutich. In the English-language versions of the film, Javutich is described as Asa's "serf" or "servant," but the film's Italian press materials identify him as *"Prince Ygor Javutich—fratello della strega"*—which means, "*brother* of the witch." This revelation helps to clear up some of the mysteries surrounding this character in the English versions—namely, why the Vajdas would hang a portrait of one of their former servants on the wall of their castle, and why a servant would dress as imperiously as Javutich, his breast emblazoned with the griffin carved into the family hearth at Castle Vajda. With this information in hand, and given the devotion that Arturo Dominici displays in all his scenes opposite Barbara Steele, it becomes more obvious that these royal siblings may have been crucified less for practicing Black Magic than the rites of incest.[20] Late in the picture, when Andrej and Constantine discover the secret passage to the family crypt behind the castle's fireplace, they discover in that secret recess a nude portrait of Asa, who is shown holding a crystal ball in her hand, with a snake weaving in and out of her fingers—symbolizing her commanding grasp of male power symbols that would have posed an intolerable challenge to the men around her.



WILLED *back to life by his sister, Asa, Javutich rises from his grave—the Mask of Satan still hammered to his face.*



PRINCESS KATIA *sees an unwelcome reflection in her vanity mirror while preparing herself for bed.*

One wishes that the film had been made in a period when issues such as these could have been addressed more directly by the script, but at the time, it was daring enough to hint at them visually.

Not all of the production's difficulties were rooted in the dilutions and revisions of its screenplay. *La maschera del demonio* was further complicated by the on-set behavior of its 20-year-old star, Barbara Steele.

"Bava chose her for her eyes and her face," Govoni confirms, "but I was never impressed by her limited acting ability. She was a strange, neurotic person—unlike John Richardson, who was precise, punctual, and always prepared."

Bava agreed. "Steele was half-crazy, afraid of Italians," he said, more boldly. [21]

"Lord alone knows I was difficult enough," Steele admits. "I didn't like my fangs—I had them changed three times. I loathed my wig—I changed that four times. I couldn't understand Italian, I didn't want to play a Chopin waltz. I certainly didn't want them to tear open my dress and expose my breasts, so they got a double that I didn't like at all, so I ended up doing it anyway—drunk, barely over 18, embarrassed and not very easy to be around." [22] This last bit refers to a scene in the crypt, after Javutich delivers Katia to Asa's burial site. He tears the front of her dress, as though to reveal her throat, and then prepares to satisfy his own curiosity by ripping away the front of her white undergarment—but an offstage sound arrests his move, and he dashes away. While doing publicity for the film's US release, Steele told *New York Daily News* "On the Town" columnist Charles McHarry that the original *La maschera* script contained *three* nude scenes in which she refused to participate. This assertion, of course, contradicts her later assertion of having never seen a complete script of the film.

Furthermore, Steele was frequently a late arrival on the set. Bava remembered one such occasion: "One day she refused to come to the set because someone told her I was using a special film stock that made the actors look naked! I went to her and said that, if I had such an invention, I would have made millions from it long ago." [23]

Germana Dominici remembers that her father Arturo was often forced to stand around, awaiting the unpredictable actress in the heat of a Roman spring, wearing heavy makeup and an even heavier velvet cloak. She recalls him pacing and railing at the amiable director, "Who does she think she is—*Marilyn Monroe*?" Dominici's burden of makeup and wardrobe also caused him to suffer a mishap while filming the celebrated sequence of Javutich clawing his way out of a muddy grave. Buried for several minutes—under his costume, a heavy cloak, a lightweight version of the bronze "Mask of Satan," and several pounds of dampened vermiculite—the actor succumbed to the heat, amplified by the studio lights, and fainted. The crew was not aware of this until he failed to surface on cue, and they rushed to pull him out before he suffocated. After shots were grabbed of the earth pulsing with his effort to emerge, Bava thought of a safer way of filming the resurrection: at a low angle, with Dominici's clawed hands scrabbling over a built-up mound of earth. To the amusement of his crew, Bava lightened the mood on the set by climbing into the open grave himself and demonstrating various comic ways in which the scene might be played.

Steele's own memories of the filming tend to be more imaginative than reliable, for reasons that have little to do with a faulty memory. Less than a year after completing the picture, her colorful storytelling found a receptive ear with journalist Charles McHarry, who happily reported her claim that she had mastered twelve different screams for the picture. "[Steele] couldn't scream worth a hoot until the Italian director of *Black Sunday* went to work on her," wrote McHarry. "She quickly learned a witchy scream, a disgusted scream, a defiant scream, a frightened scream, a fury scream, and some others. The witchy scream was toughest, and was managed only after gargling with a nasty potion mixed by the director. She thinks the stuff was alum water and wine." [24] (Alum water and wine—a recipe for ballyhoo?)

Though the production records say otherwise, Steele remembers making the movie in the dead of winter,

20 This was not quite a first in vampire cinema. In 1935, Tod Browning's *Mark of the Vampire* propagated the legend of an incestuous father and daughter, played by Bela Lugosi and Carroll Borland, who became vampires after committing suicide—but the detail ran afoul of the Hays Office and had to be omitted, with only a bullet wound in Lugosi's temple surviving as a remnant of Browning's intention.

21 Volta.

22 Barbara Steele, liner notes for *Mario Bava's Black Sunday* CD, Bay Cities, 1992, music composed by Les Baxter.

23 Abruzzese.

24 Charles McHarry, "On the Town," *New York Daily News*, February 28, 1961.



describes the weather as freezing cold, and claims that long days were spent out of doors on location, in the drafty *castello*, and on location in actual tombs. "Bava was deathly ill," she claims, "as was everybody else. Everybody had some terrible virus and we were totally asphyxiated by all the dry ice. It's just as well that the film was dubbed later, because everyone was utterly nasal." [25] Asked about the freezing cold, Armando Govoni counters, "We shot from March through May; don't you think it would be difficult for a Roman spring to be like a polar spring?" And, as already pointed out, *La maschera*'s various tombs, crypts, and cemeteries were all built on sound stages at Scalera Film.

While much of what Steele has said on (and off) the record about the production is discredited by production records and other on-set witnesses, a few of her stories have the ring of truth. For example, she talks about herself and John Richardson getting a case of the slap-happies in the midst of some last-minute shooting: "You reach a point of no return when you start to laugh. You laugh because you're nervous, then you become so guilty you can't stop. I just couldn't look John in the eye any more, so I'd look at his nose, the left part of his forehead—anything! Bava nearly had a heart attack at the end. He thought we would never get through it!" [26]

La maschera del demonio may have been a difficult production, but Armando Govoni insists that Bava's first experience as a credited director was undaunting. "To think that a film of this kind could impose difficulties on Bava is to insult him," he says. "Bava had been a major director of photography. Directors called on him all the time for advice about where they should place their camera to get the best point of view. So, for Bava to direct this movie was 'business as usual.' He had some problems, perhaps, in directing the actors."

This is virtually the only point on which Steele and Govoni agree. "I

PROMOTIONAL *shot of Steele and Richardson chatting in costume.*

think that Bava was a director's director, as opposed to an actor's director," Steele proposes. "He was totally concerned with the look of the film. He didn't work on any concept with the actors, particularly; we just fell into it. He sort of salvaged us, actually."

In a tribute to Bava written on the occasion of his death (but not published until 1992), Steele wrote an elegant, impressionistic memoir of her *La maschera del demonio* experience: "I can see Mr. Bava standing with perfect equanimity in an old tweed jacket on a sub-zero set that was loaded with twenty volatile Italians suffering from cheap brandy, 18-hour days, and the flu, wind machines flying, eyes full of rubber cement, and the producer swearing on his mother's grave that we'd all get paid 'next week.' And Mr. Bava, the perfect gentleman, kind, alert, amused, was always standing in the shadows in a state of perfect composure." [27]

Elsewhere, Steele has described Bava as being "like a ghost, a man in silent shoes . . . Not cold, but very shy and removed, inhibited and distant. Very subjective and obviously preoccupied with this fabulous vision that he had."

But Govoni describes Bava in warmer, more approachable terms: "Bava was a serious man, but no more formal than any other. When we were working together, we used to go to a restaurant about 200 meters from the studio. He was happy to eat with people he liked. A movie is not a marriage."

While Govoni's and Steele's recollections of Bava are opposite, in proximity and in temperature, they are doubtless equally sincere. Govoni speaks of Bava with the *bonhomie* of a fellow crew member, and the crew was always Bava's preferred company on a film set. The relationship that exists between an actor and director is quite different. As Govoni suggests, Bava "may have had some difficulty with directing the actors." Indeed, one of Bava's favorite daydreams in later years was that he might someday make "a film *without* actors." Steele's description of the man who made her famous, while warm and appreciative, also reflects what was lacking in their rapport.



PUBLICITY SHOT *depicting Andrej and Princess Katia on horseback. Such exterior scenes tended to be written out in the editing.*

Bava adapted to his new role of director with ease. As Lamberto Bava has said: "He made a certain kind of film, according to his own ideas, in his own way—and he found the experience enormously calming and therapeutic . . . [28] He sometimes became so technically involved that it was exasperating. To get lost in the minutiae of filmmaking gave him immense satisfaction—the pure joy of self-expression and diversion, yet formalized. In a sense, it was a bit like a game for him. On the set, he was a man transformed." [29]

Photography & Special Effects

Mario Bava would later declare that *La maschera del demonio* was "the only film of mine that was truly well-made. It was filmed entirely with a dolly, which I was never able to use again because of the time and money involved. There were 60 signs for the handtrucks, high and low. The crew were going crazy but, with the dolly, I could frame a scene perfectly simply by raising or lowering the camera. I photographed the film myself; I was very fast. At most, it would take me 7 minutes to light a shot, maybe 12 to light an entire room." [30]

Now it is Armando Govoni's turn to disagree with Bava. "The director of photography was actually Ubaldo Terzano, who had been Bava's assistant," he insists. "He lighted the sets so perfectly that Bava seldom had to correct him."

The film itself credits Bava with "photography," while Terzano is listed as "camera operator," but considering the increased demands on Bava's attention as director, it is understandable why Terzano would be given additional latitude in his responsibilities. That said, Bava was wholly responsible for designing the shots, approving Terzano's corresponding framings, and fine-tuning the lighting of individual scenes.

During his years as a cameraman, Bava had become increasingly involved in all visual aspects of film production, including art direction, set dressing, wardrobe, and makeup. Needing now to relegate some of these responsibilities, but wishing to retain creative control of each department, Bava filled his key crew positions with young craftspeople whose previous experience had been principally in positions of assistance—they were eager to please and to learn, worked cheaply, and were malleable and without ego. Line producer Massimo De Rita had served as production manager on *La battaglia di Maratona;* art director Giorgio Giovannini had started out as the assistant of Flavio Mogherini; first assistant director Paolo Mercuri had worked as a production secretary since 1954; Terzano, of course, had been Bava's camera assistant and, more recently, operator for many years. Bava would tell Terzano what he required visually, provide him with a storyboard, and then leave him to it; when the time came to rehearse a scene, he would either leave it as-is, adjust a light, change a lens, or improvise on impulse an entirely new approach to the scene. But we mustn't underestimate Terzano's involvement: he operated the camera, it was his eye looking through the viewfinder, and his call whether a take was printed or scratched. So the cinematography of this legendary horror film, so often attributed solely to Bava, was at least a collaboration of the two men, in which Terzano carried the ultimate responsibility. He may have followed Bava's instructions and realized his visual ideas, but this is not to say that Terzano was without creative influence; all one has to do is compare the panther-like grace of his camera movements, their smooth glide and their velvety shadows, to the starker, more mechanical cinematography operated by Antonio Rinaldi in Bava's post-1964 work to realize that Terzano was a tremendously valuable contributor to the sleek and stylish appearance of Bava's best-looking films.

Unlike Bava's later work with Rinaldi, *La maschera del demonio* has never been reprimanded for overusing

25 Dietrich and Beckman.

26 Ibid.

27 Barbara Steele.

28 Lamberto Bava interview, Cozzi.

29 "Intervista con Lamberto Bava," *La Lettura, Cattolica 1st Festival internazionale del giallo e del mistero*, September 1980, 107.

30 Abruzzese.

the zoom lens, yet the film abounds in zoom shots: the zoom as the door of the Prince's bedroom opens to reveal Javutich; the zoom-out from the cross that repels him; the zoom into the empty doorway as we hear the vampire's fleeing footfalls; the zoom into the face of the dead serf Boris; the zoom into Kruvajan's face as it is unearthed at the burial site of Javutich; and the corresponding zoom-out from the shocked faces of Andrej and the priest. In each of these cases, the zoom is used to convey, visually, the effects of fright—the zoom-in reproducing the way the eye seizes upon abhorrent details, the zoom-out visualizing a corresponding flinch of revulsion.

There is little doubt that Bava was fully in charge of the film's many special effects shots, which required his particular eye and sense of precision. It was the Italian way of working to reserve all special effects photography for a final week appended to the shooting schedule, so it is likely that Terzano supervised the camera crew during principal photography of all the films he made with Bava, while Bava took over for the sake of expediency in the final week of production.

La maschera del demonio contains some of Bava's most lauded visual moments, particularly the prologue's hammering of the Mask of Satan onto Princess Asa's face; the 360° pan shot as Andrej and Kruvajan descend into the Vajda crypt; the attack of the large bat, a creature evoked almost entirely through shadowplay; the introduction of Princess Katia, flanked by two frightening Great Dane hounds; the unnoticed beads of Kruvajan's blood on the broken glass window of Asa's crypt, dripping into her hollow eye sockets; Kruvajan casually tossing a pebble into a small moonlit pond, which dissolves to an overhead shot of Asa beckoning Javutich to live again; Javutich rising from his grave under a lightning-scarred sky and plucking the mask of spikes from his pitted face; the alarming 180° pivot above the ravaged, staring face of the murdered Prince Vajda . . . the list goes on and on. It is difficult to think of an earlier horror film in the sound era with an equal number of such impressive, purely visual moments.

The last shot mentioned is a classic example of Bava's dictum that the simplest solution to a problem is always best. While analyzing the film in preparation to record my audio commentary for Image Entertainment's DVD of *Black Sunday,* I was baffled—knowing how heavy motion



FILMING *the 180° "reveal" of Prince Vajda's death with a special camera rig devised by Eugenio Bava.*



KATIA *and Constantine (Enrico Olivieri) discover the ravaged body of their dead father.*

picture cameras were in those days—by the smoothness of the radical camera movement that reveals the ravaged face of Prince Vajda, so I screened the picture for my friend Michael Lennick, a professional special effects designer of more than twenty-five years experience. Michael immediately understood how the shot was done, and described to me how the camera had been mounted on a pivot platform locked down inside a rig of two concentric steel rings, separated by a system of wheels. Such a contraption, he explained, would allow the camera to drop forward on the guides of one ring, then spin 180° onto the other, turning the upside-down close-up of Prince Vajda's ravaged face rightside-up. He also pointed out that *Black Sunday* was making use of this technology more than two decades before Freddie Francis' camera team innovated such a rig for the Dino De Laurentiis production of *Dune* in 1984. Great. The only problem is—according to the actor involved in the shot—this was *not* how it was done.

"Actually, it was faked in post-production," reveals Ivo Garrani. "Bava never moved the camera in that shot. Instead, he created the illusion of rotation with the *camera truca."* In other words, the frame was locked down and optically spun until the ravaged face of Prince Vajda was right-side up onscreen.

One hesitates to challenge the word of such an important witness, but a recently surfaced production photo documenting the filming of this shot shows Ubaldo Terzano manning a customized 35 mm camera, whose modifications were the work of Eugenio Bava. The camera appears to be mounted between two planks of wood, with the lens encircled by a steel ring; a rear system of radiating handlebars look capable of rotating the camera a full 180° in a single spin. Evidently the camera moved so little that Garrani was deceived into thinking the shot was achieved optically.

Garrani also says that the shot of the Prince roasting to death in the family hearth—which other special effects men have suggested to me was done by filming the flames through an angled piece of glass capturing Garrani's reflection—was also done with the *truca,* which married the separate elements of himself and the fire. For the actual shots of the Prince's head melting and charring in the flames, a wax head with a mechanized interior was substituted, so that the head could continue to



TURKISH *one-sheet poster, art by Ibrahim Gökcan.*

move its eyes and jaws realistically as it burned. The contraption was one of several contributions made to the film by Eugenio Bava.

"I knew Eugenio Bava quite well," recalls Armando Govoni, whose duties on the picture included running an errand to Milan to acquire a special foam latex used by Eugenio to create the dead faces of Asa and Kruvajan. "I don't recall whether he ever visited the set of *La maschera,* but I can confirm that all of the modifications made to the cameras used by Mario for his special effects were the inventions of his father."

Eugenio Bava was able to fashion a foam latex mask of Barbara Steele's face from her photos, without taking an actual lifecast. It was used for the shots inside Asa's violated tomb, depicting the scrambling of scorpions from its hollow eye sockets and the rematerializing of its eyes. (Many years later, Bava confided to fellow special effects designer Armando Valcauda that the scorpions used in this scene posed quite a problem, as some of them escaped the confines of the shot and got loose on the set, throwing the crew into a tizzy.) A special section of the tomb was rebuilt for these close-ups, with a hollow area built under the mask, allowing various kitchen mixtures to be lifted into the sockets from below—first a mixture of what appears to be tomato soup and rice (suggesting blood and maggots), and then two poached eggs (representing Asa's rematerializing eyes). To give the dull eggs the illusion of brightening with sorcerous power and intelligence, two small, pulsating lights were trained on each yolk. Eugenio also designed and sculpted various forms of the eponymous "Mask of Satan"—a real one cast in bronze, and also lightweight foam rubber substitutes which were painted bronze and worn by the actors.

One imagines that Eugenio's "Mask of Satan" must be one of the most coveted props in horror film history. After the film's release, Bava received a number of offers for it. "I throw out all the letters I get," he told Ornella Volta. "The only one I've kept was from a crazy woman in Bruges. She said that she would pay me any amount of money for the Mask of Satan that my father made—the one with all the spikes inside, to keep Barbara Steele nailed down in one spot. If I ever happen to go to Bruges, I must remember to take a look at that woman's house. My films are most successful in Northern countries, because crazy people tend to live in the North, away from the sunshine. Just think how cold it must be during the winter in Bruges!" [31]



JAVUTICH *whips his ghost mares—a studio cyclorama clearly visible behind him.*

Even more forbidding than Bava's notions of Bruges are the film's scenes in the forest between Moldavia and Mirgorod, the eeriest of which were shot on a small sound stage at the Scalera studios. No artificial trees were erected; the entire forest was *suggested* with glass mattes, foregrounded bracken, and other "smoke and mirrors." Studied closely, most shots of the coach in transit show that the horse-drawn vehicle was incapable of moving more than eight steps in either direction. For the close-ups of the coach driver (Mario Passante, who had previously worked for Federico Fellini in *Il bidone* and *La notte di Cabiria/The Nights of Cabiria*), Bava photographed the actor seated atop a false coach rig, with rising smoke behind him to lend activity to a static studio cyclorama, and then rewound the exposed footage in the camera, superimposing a zoetropic procession of tree branches. For the shots of the passengers inside the coach, various stagehands trotted past the windows carrying branches obtained from a local florist. To show the coach coming and going, it was photographed moving hesitantly toward, and then away from, a different set of glass mattes painted with black streaks and augmented with actual placements of dead wood.

Fearing that these tight conditions might show through, Bava insisted on one day of location shooting, so that the coach could be photographed in a more realistic setting before it moved on into the clutching, bone-fingered trees of Mirgorod. A false entrance to the derelict Vajda chapel was built and simply leaned against a hillside; it incorporated a small, black-lined alcove that the actors could walk into. The day set aside for the shooting was a typical, sunny, Roman spring day, but Bava cleverly camouflaged the sunshine by photographing the roadside always through the gnarled branches of dead trees, placed artfully in the foreground as a framing device. Look at these shots again and imagine the bracken erased from view, and you'll be astonished at how much of a difference such a minor addition can make in a shot. It alters the very temperature, as well as the character of a scene.

31 Volta.



CONSTANTINE *emerges from the spiked pit to pull his evil ancestor to his doom.*

Another bit of camera trickery was involved in the memorable scene of Javutich floating like a ghost toward the bed of Prince Vajda. This technique may have been introduced by cinematographer Henri Alekan in Jean Cocteau's exquisite *La Belle et le Bête/Beauty and the Beast* (1946), where Beauty (Josette Day) is shown gliding through the corridors of the Beast's enchanted castle. Bava reproduced the effect by having Arturo Dominici stand on a makeshift dolly, while the camera held him in tight close-up, its own backtracking movement pulling him along. Dominici's complete lack of ambulation gave him the appearance of malevolently willing himself toward the helpless Prince Vajda, no longer patriarchal in his presence.

For the third time in four years, Bava resorted once again to his popular (and still top-secret) red-and-green makeup/lighting dissolve trick for the simultaneous aging of Princess Katia and the rejuvenation of Asa. The trick would be trotted out once again at the film's finale, as Asa succumbs to age while burning at the stake. Wrinkles were presketched on Steele's face in red grease pencil, and her eyes and cheeks shaded with rouge to look sallow and sunken. All of this was rendered invisible under a barrage of strong red lighting (invisible on monochromatic film stock), and made gradually apparent as the red lights dimmed and green lights were raised, bringing the red lines into relief with the monochromatic illusion of gray and black. The effect is actually less impressive here than in its previous applications, because the barrage of red lighting makes Katia look overly tanned before the transformation begins. Of course, Terzano was looking through the viewfinder this time; one imagines that Bava's more attuned sense of optical effects might have caused him to make some lighting adjustments, were their roles reversed. The aging of Katia in the sequence is also not maintained in later scenes, which makes Asa's only onscreen act of vampirism in the entire picture look ineffectual, if not gratuitous.



ANDREJ *rescues Constantine from the pit, but the price for victory has already been paid.*

The most impressive special effects in *La maschera* are the in-camera trick shots supervised by Bava himself, which are so invisible that they are rarely singled out for praise. The split-screen scenes in which Steele acts with herself, as Asa gloats over the prostrate form of her subdued descendant, are not only convincing but stylishly framed, with the rewound double-exposed footage matted along the jagged edge of the witch's exploded tomb. The explosion of the witch's resting place—which may have been inspired by a "Ripley's Believe It or Not!" account of Queen Elizabeth I's coffin exploding while on view at Whitehall Palace in London, on the eve of her interment on March 24, 1603—was accomplished with miniatures; the tiny crypt, a bit larger than a shoe box, was prescored so that the pieces of its lid could be pulled away by a fine wire, revealing a doll of Steele resting inside. Viewed through the groined, cobwebbed arches of the ruined chapel (either a foregrounded miniature or a photographic matte; we can't be certain), the shot is remarkably convincing, even on a big screen. The film's Italian trailer, included on Image Entertainment's *Black Sunday* DVD, includes an alternate take of this effects shot that doesn't work nearly so well.

Perhaps the greatest single effects shot in *La maschera del demonio* is the transition shot immediately following Kruvajan's arrival at the castle, after his seduction by Asa. We see a night exterior of Castle Vajda, as one of the windows is illuminated by the full moon as it peeks out from behind a passing cloud. This shot—a throwaway moment so perfectly believable that it hardly begs consideration until one's fourth or fifth viewing—is a multi-layered glass matte effect that was executed live, in front of the camera. The left wall of the castle—which is viewed from a staggered low angle—was a forced perspective maquette that merged, toward the right side of the

screen, with a perfectly tailored black paper cut-out of the castle's tower that was affixed to a foregrounded pane of glass. Behind this layer, a cloudy night sky was airbrushed onto a second level of glass, lending a sense of depth to the image. Behind these two layers, a small light was positioned behind a diffusion screen to provide the moon, which was itself set up behind a third glass matte depicting a passing cloud. This pane of glass was pulled manually across the light to animate the movement of the cloud over the "moon." As the "moon" was gradually revealed, a small flashlight-sized beam positioned behind the window of the maquette was raised on a dimmer, creating the illusion of moonlight being reflected on the window—a window which, in truth, isn't there; there was no glass in the window of the maquette. It's the perfect grace note to a magnificent illusion, all the more magnificent because the shot is seemingly so unnecessary and disposable.

For the shot in which Javutich gleefully materializes out of thin air to stalk Constantine, Bava employed a simple trick. Enrico Olivieri was positioned on the left side of the frame, standing before the nude painting of Princess Asa found in the secret passage behind the secret fireplace, the right side of which was painted mostly black and merged with shadows. Arturo Dominici stood in darkness, at an angle behind the camera which, as the lights were raised, presented the illusion of the gloating actor materializing in front of the painting out of thin air—or rather his reflection, as it was caught on a pane of angled glass positioned between the set and the lens. The shot contains a subtle giveaway to how it was achieved: the griffin emblazoned on Dominici's costume is reversed.

Shortly after Javutich intimidates Constantine into walking backwards toward a trap door that drops him into a pit of spikes, the vampire struggles with Andrej over the same precipice. Surprisingly, the scene cuts from the floor-level action to an in-camera shot that presents us, presumably, with Constantine's point of view from the depths of the pit. For this shot, Bava constructed what appears to be a hurried, but perfectly effective, combination of matte painting and foregrounded miniature. Actor John Richardson appears to be hanging onto the edge of the trap, dangling over a pit of tall, jagged spikes, while still fighting with Dominici, who is visible on the other side of the aperture. By still-framing the shot, it is possible to see that Richardson (or, more likely, his double) was actually resting on his stomach in a dark makeshift tunnel not much longer than his own body, pretending to hang on, while Dominici grappled with him, standing outside the tunnel in a brightly lit area. The foreground of the shot consists of miniature spikes (which look as though they might be a jagged bouquet of snapped pencils) and a stone wall maquette, suggesting the walls and floor of the pit. Richardson was lit from above and from the right, the light sources blocked from view by nothing more elaborate than a bluntly positioned piece of cardboard! At the top of the shot, two bare planks are nailed together—just enough to suggest the juncture of the other two walls of the pit at a glance. The unexpected image has great dramatic punch, and is onscreen for such a short time that the viewer hasn't adequate time to deconstruct it.

Editing

Not only was *La maschera del demonio* continually rewritten on the set, but the shared screenwriting credit of Mario Serandrei—the film's editor—strongly suggests that it was rewritten in the editing room, as well. Serandrei may have been the most talented film editor working in Italy—he had edited *Ossessione, Senso*, and *Fabiola*, among many other timeless classics—but he wasn't a writer. In a career dating back to the early 1940s, *La maschera del demonio* is his only writing credit. This implies that he devised solutions to narrative problems in the editing room, to an extent that went beyond the usual cutting-together of existing scenes and sequences.

La maschera del demonio contains a number of scenes that don't hold up to close scrutiny—in the way they are edited, in the way one scene results from another, or in the way certain scenes are played by the actors. For example, though Princess Asa drains the life from Kruvajan with her kiss, she is not restored to life by it. Although revived and strong enough to explode the walls of the tomb that imprisons her through a sheer exertion of will, she remains immobile in the family crypt until the last reel of the picture. (In later years, when Hammer Films produced *Dracula A.D. 1972*, they came under a great deal of criticism for allowing the Count [Christopher Lee] to spend the entire film in a ruined church, never interacting with the modern world; it's a testament to Bava's direction and Steele's performance that *La maschera del demonio* has never been accused of a similar reticence.) Furthermore, one would imagine that, upon his resurrection, Javutich would dash immediately to the grave of his sister/inamorata—but instead, he is not shown reunited with Asa until several scenes *after* he has led Kruvajan to her tomb. (That's right: she has already fed on Kruvajan, yet she still lies there, powerless.) My suspicion is that the scene of Javutich visiting the prone Asa was filmed with the idea that it would immediately follow his resurrection, and that his first order of business was originally to abduct Katia and bring her to Asa, who then took her descendant's place. ("I will bring you a fresh, young body," he says in the *Black Sunday* version. "She was cast in your image. Through her blood, your destiny will be fulfilled." Javutich actually says these words before we see him lay eyes on Katia for the first time.) This theory is further supported by Steele's inexplicably shady reading of some scenes, such as the one following the death of Prince Vajda, in which Katia goes out of her way to ridicule the idea that Javutich might still be alive and then flirtatiously invites Andrej to stay at the castle. Watch the scene again, and you'll see that these are not the actions of a young woman determined to find the answers behind the death of her father, nor of someone shaken by the death of a parent. Here, Steele's performance is much more in line with Asa impersonating Katia.

The moment of Katia's abduction by Javutich may well be included in the finished picture to some extent, in the scene where Katia—preparing herself for bed—spies the clutching hand of Javutich reflected in her vanity table mirror and screams. As she first enters the room, she pauses beside a curtain to undress and it is immediately apparent that Javutich is behind the curtain. The shot is composed in such a way that it would have no purpose unless A) Javutich was going to grab her from behind, or B) nearly grab her from behind, without success. Neither thing happens, because as the curtain begins to rustle, the scene cuts away to a pointless shot of Andrej, pacing in his own room. When we cut back to Katia's room, she is wearing a nightgown and seated at a vanity table (we assume—we never see it), where she removes her crucifix. At that very moment, she sees the reflection of Javutich's gloved hand in the mirror reaching through the curtain for her. First of all, Javutich couldn't possibly hope to reach the Princess from such a distance; the shot would make sense only as a close-up of his hand as it reached for her nearby. Secondly, there is no vanity table or mirror in the scene. Bava suggests their presence entirely with sleight of hand—by filming Steele going through the motions of a woman using such items, and by inserting a cutaway to an optically flipped shot of Javutich's reaching hand (and Katia's reaction to it), which allows the viewer to *interpret* it as a mirrored reflection. The more one thinks about it, what could Javutich possibly hope to reach from the other side of the room? Clearly, this is recycled footage of the gloved hand reaching out to Katia as she stood within reach of the curtain.

Fortunately, *La maschera del demonio* is such a parade of classic Gothic imagery and nightmarish chills, and so expertly edited, that one must know the film very well indeed before its well-concealed faults begin to show. Bava intended the film to be seen once, maybe twice, and then forgotten—but the world had other plans.



AIP & Black Sunday

La maschera del demonio premiered in Rome in August 1960, shortly after the Italian horror film—dormant since the commercial failure of *I vampiri*—had been revived by another quickie inspired by the success of *Dracula il vampiro*: *L'amante del vampiro/The Vampire and the Ballerina.* Written by Ernesto Gastaldi and directed by Renato Polselli, *L'amante del vampiro* proved only a moderate success. Bava's directorial debut earned even more—an estimated 140 million *lire* [$87,000]—but this was probably little more than a break-even figure; if its earnings had ended there, the endeavor would hardly have been worth the bother. In retrospect, it is interesting to note that both of these films were signed with their directors' own Italian names, not with English pseudonyms, which may have been the very thing that prevented them from achieving popularity in Rome as they would elsewhere around the world.

When *La maschera del demonio* was sold to other European countries, it received plaudits far in excess of its homeland reception. It was particularly well-received in France, where the respected magazine *Positif* acknowledged the film's importance by putting Barbara Steele's Princess Katia, flanked by her two hounds, on the front cover of their July 1961 edition. And when it was released in the United States by American International Pictures—under the title *Black Sunday*—it became an immediate hit with genre fans, who praised it as a perfect hybrid of classic and contemporary horror cinema.

As mentioned earlier, Samuel Z. Arkoff and his partner James H. Nicholson began acquiring Italian films for AIP in 1959, with the help of Fulvio Lucisano, a Roman talent agent with a few modest production credits to his name. Sword-and-sandal pictures were inexpensive to acquire and performed well in the wake of *Hercules*, so Arkoff and Nicholson began to pick up every halfway-decent, exploitable picture Lucisano could find

PRINCESS KATIA*'s first appearance, an image copied by numerous horror film directors from Rafael Baledón to Jean Rollin.*

for them. In time, they would found American International Television to play-off those purchases whose titles did not test well with theater owners, or which they decided not to formally distribute to theaters. It was in their second year of these foreign acquisitions that Lucisano—"a man who looks exactly like Julius Caesar," in Arkoff's estimation—invited Arkoff and Nicholson to attend a screening of a new Galatea production entitled *La maschera del demonio*.

"It was a very cold time of the year in Rome," Arkoff reminisced. "We sat in a screening room, as I recall, at 9:00 in the morning and, because of the high ceilings and marble floors, it was as cold as a sonofabitch! And then this picture started . . . It was *terrific*! We saw it in Italian with an interpreter, which isn't usually satisfactory, but Fulvio would chime in from time to time to make things more understandable. But [we could tell] it was a picture from a first-class horror and suspense director. Bava himself arrived towards the end of the screening. He heard there were a couple of Americans coming and we had already made a reputation for ourselves by distributing a number of horror pictures, so he was interested in meeting us. I daresay Mario was near 50 at the time, and his English didn't seem to be very good. In fact, he seemed to be embarrassed somewhat by talking, but he could actually speak English better than he let on. He would smile, happy that we liked the film and that we were quite effusive about it. He was very modest, but I thought Bava was a great artist."

Arkoff and Nicholson bought the American rights to *La maschera del demonio*—their very first international horror acquisition—for "under or about" $100,000. (Little did they suspect that their purchase covered the picture's entire production cost in one fell swoop!) In the wake of this lucrative deal, Arkoff and Nicholson entered into a formal business partnership with Lucisano, allowing him to resume his career as a film producer under the banner of his own company, Italian International—which continues to thrive today, nearly fifty years after its founding. AIP's five-year contract with Lucisano specified that their otherwise independent companies would co-produce two films annually, with AIP providing the script, the expensive top-line marquee talent, and on-set dialogue and production supervisors, while Lucisano would be responsible for everything else. Lucisano would control the product sales in Italy, France and Belgium, while AIP would control sales throughout the rest of the globe. [32]

Though excited by the film they had seen in Rome, Arkoff and Nicholson's enthusiasm cooled somewhat when Galatea delivered an English-language print, bearing the title *The Mask of Satan*. This version had been recorded at ELDA [English Language Dubbers Association] in Rome, utilizing a translation of the original scripted dialogue by George Higgins III, with most—if not all—of the male roles dubbed by an expatriate American actor named Dan Sturkie. [33] Arkoff found the ELDA track to be "technically unacceptable."

Consequently, AIP hired Lou Rusoff—Arkoff's brother-in-law, who later wrote the screenplay that launched AIP's popular *Beach Party* franchise—to produce a new English-language version of the picture at New York City's Titra Sound Corporation. The sessions were directed by Lee Kresel, edited by Salvatore Billitteri, and recorded by Robert Sherwood. The redubbing of the picture was not conducted with any of the original stars, though Barbara Steele told Hollywood columnist Louella O. Parsons that she had dubbed her own performance in New York (untrue). Titra's voice talent included Joyce Gordon as Asa and Katia, Bernard Grant as Dr. Kruvajan, Brett Morrison as Prince Vajda, Peter Fernandez as Constantine, Corinne Orr as the tavern keeper's daughter, and George Gonneau as the film's narrator. During the dubbing process, it was decided to alter certain character names, resulting in decades of jarring reportage: Kruvajan's Christian name was changed from Choma to Thomas (an interesting change, given its Biblical associations of doubt and the ironic approach which the character takes to the artifacts in the Vajda crypt), Andrej Gorobec became Andreas Gorobecs, and Javutich became Javuto.

Nearly all of the film's original cast (with the exception of Checchi, Dominici and his daughter) had spoken their lines in English. According to Armando Govoni, the cast was given a crude text translation to work from, and they largely stuck to it. Hence, John Richardson finds the time—while recoiling in horror from the resurrected Asa—to blurt out, "We're in the midst of a mystery that defies all reasoning!" (Technically unacceptable, indeed.) The on-set sound was recorded for reference rather than use, and one of Steele's actual screams is heard on the soundtrack. As Titra set about redubbing the film, their voice talent were required to stick to what the actors onscreen were saying, with only slight embellishment. In some cases, the embellishment was done for censorship reasons, as when Asa's line "You too can find the joy and happiness of Hades!" was awkwardly softened to "You too can find the joy and happiness of *hating!*" In the first of many sexual elements in Bava's work softened by AIP, the incestuous relationship between Javutich and Asa was also eradicated by the new dialogue, so that the evil Prince became Asa's "unfortunate serf, Javuto, whom you forced to do your bidding." When he finally saw the film in 1968, British critic Tom Milne wrote in *Monthly Film Bulletin* that "the English version . . . was devastated by dubbing that sounds as



THE FOUNDERS *of American International Pictures: Samuel Z. Arkoff (with cigar) and James H. Nicholson.*

32 Born in the state of Georgia on January 5, 1924, Dan Sturkie made few onscreen appearances, and only in minor roles (as in Jack Arnold's *Outside the Law,* 1956), before relocating to Rome in 1959 to pursue a career in dubbing. He would later dub Reg Park in *Ercole al centro della terra/Hercules in the Haunted World* (1961) and Bekim Fehmiu in *Odissea/The Odyssey a.k.a. The Adventures of Ulysses* (1968), to name only a couple of key performances in the Bava canon. When the Italian film industry began to fail in the 1970s, Sturkie returned to Hollywood and found work with his friend Mel Welles—whom he had known since they worked together, providing most of the dubbed male voices in Richard Fleischer's *Barabbas* (1962)—in the features *Joyride to Nowhere* (1977) and *Dr. Heckyl and Mr. Hype* (1980); he also landed small roles in William Friedkin's *Cruising* (1980), *Psi Factor* (1980), and Michael Wadleigh's *Wolfen* (1981) before retiring. He died on May 10, 1992, at the age of 68.

33 "Demi-Gods but Not Muscle-bound: Nicholson on Beefcake Casting Problem," *Variety*, June 15, 1960, 20.



ANDREJ *declares his support to the melancholy Katia in this scene, deleted from the AIP version known as BLACK SUNDAY.*

though it belongs, not just to a different film, but to a different world from the near-hysterical images on the screen."

AIP's meddling with the picture did not stop at its soundtrack. In Europe, horror films were considered to be adult entertainment, and they stopped at nothing in the cause of frightening and titillating their audience, including glimpses of female nudity—as in Renato Polselli's *L'amante del vampiro* and Giorgio Ferroni's *Il mulino delle donne di pietra/Mill of the Stone Women* (both 1960). This was the opposite credo to AIP, who had built their fledgling empire on producing and distributing exploitation fodder for "kiddie matinees." Though *The Mask of Satan* contained no nudity, it was more graphically violent than anything American audiences had previously seen. Therefore, Arkoff dictated to his brother-in-law that certain editorial changes be made, as well.

Though the eventual AIP ad campaign promised a more adult kind of horror, most of its mature content was scrapped before it ever saw the light of an American 35 mm projector. Among the most obvious trims: the shot of the sizzling "S" imprinted on Asa's back as the brand is lifted (shortened), and the spurting of blood from behind the spiked mask as it is hammered onto Asa's face (faded to black); the squirting impalement of the undead Kruvajan's eye and his scream (removed entirely); the flesh peeling from Prince Vajda's face as he roasts to death in the family fireplace (shortened); and, most damaging of all, the final, objective shot of Kruvajan succumbing to Asa's cold, dead kiss. In the AIP version, the subjective shot of Asa's lips, parting in thirsty anticipation, fades prudently to black, almost as though she has swallowed the camera whole. In fact, it looks like a deliberate parody of Jack Buetel's subjective-view kiss with Jane Russell in Howard Hughes' *The Outlaw* (1943).

"All of AIP's films were very clean," Sam Arkoff reasoned, "so, anything that was suggestive of playing around—*fornicating* a corpse, you know what I'm saying?—we wouldn't stand for it."

Arkoff knew a couple of other things that AIP's juvenile audiences wouldn't stand for, as well: romance and a lot of talk. Therefore, excessive dialogue and scenes reinforcing the romance between Katia (Steele) and Andrej were also cut.

The first of the deleted scenes was apparently snipped before AIP got anywhere near the picture, and survives only in Italian prints. Even here, the scene is inexplicably misplaced, a daylight scene that interrupts the consecutive night scenes of the innkeeper's daughter milking the cow and Javutich's rising from his grave—replacing the tracking shot to the barn window and the progressively closer shots of the tombstone. The scene in question involves Katia and Prince Vajda, who meet at the bottom of a long staircase-like fountain,[34] where the Prince finds his daughter in the grip of a dark and strangely pensive mood:

VAJDA
Katia! Katia, my child! You seem worried, overwhelmingly sad about something.

KATIA
No, it's nothing. It's just that . . . the coming of autumn always makes me sad.

VAJDA
You don't smile any more. Would you like it if we moved away from this castle? You seem so unhappy within these ancient walls . . .

KATIA
No, I want to stay here. My melancholy isn't very serious, and this castle has belonged to our family for centuries, so why change now? All of our history is contained here, all that remains of those who came before us.

VAJDA
I wanted to take you away from here when you were born—you and Constantine. I wanted to take you both far, far away from this dominion of sadness and the memories that run rampant here.

KATIA
I might have still been unhappy . . .

VAJDA
Perhaps. But not like this.

KATIA
Oh, Father, how can I convince you?

VAJDA
Perhaps you could convince me—with one of your smiles?

KATIA
[Tries to smile unsuccessfully]
No, it's no good . . .

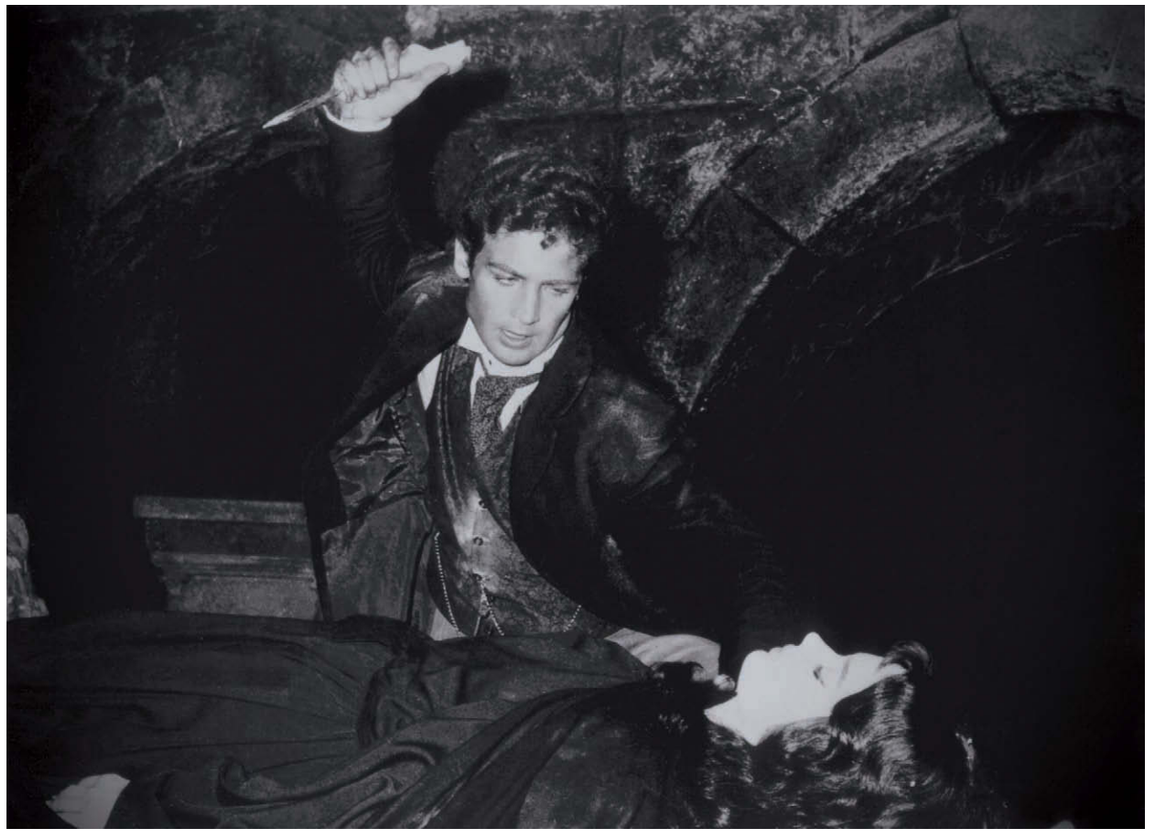
VAJDA
You see? The way you shuddered just now, as though a dark menace was hovering about you . . .

KATIA
Please, let us not speak of this any more. Excuse me, Father. We'll talk later.[35]

The scene would have made better sense had it appeared earlier in the film, and marked Katia's return to the castle, immediately following her encounter with Andrej in the chapel ruins. Placed thusly, it would have ventured an explanation for the "sadness in her eyes."

The scene also marks the only time in the film when Prince Vajda is depicted in a normal disposition;

he looks dignified and in perfect self-control, not yet overwhelmed by his fears. Had it been used, however, it would have seriously weakened the impact of the Prince's introduction, as it stands—Bava's camera opening on Katia playing a romantic theme on the piano, then dollying along to Constantine cleaning his rifle, and then tracking around a wing chair to reveal the Prince, visibly preoccupied with unspoken fears. Finally, the fountain scene is too awkwardly inserted—too disruptive of one of the film's great suspense set pieces (not to mention the fact that it interrupts an elaborately storyboarded camera move)—to believe it had the approval of Bava or Serandrei. As seen in the Italian version, the scene looks very much like a discarded remnant swept up from the cutting room floor and crudely reinserted at random. It is appropriate that, when the export versions of the film were produced in Italy, this dialogue scene was omitted.



The most bewildering of the cuts imposed by AIP sacrificed one of the loveliest shots in the movie, as well as a key dramatic revelation. After Katia leaves her ailing father in the care of Dr. Kruvajan, she goes to bed, and we fade in on the next morning as an early fog rolls through an open window. The camera follows the waves of fog to Katia's bed, where the Princess lies asleep. (The shot is compositionally similar to a shot of Daliah Lavi's Nevenka in Bava's *La frusta e il corpo/The Whip and the Body*, made three years later.) Suddenly, Katia's brother Constantine rushes into the room, embracing her and crying "Katia! Poor father!" As she embraces him in shock, we realize that Prince Vajda has died. Curiously, the AIP version includes the rolling fog, but cuts away—before we see Katia—to the Princess rushing toward the Prince's bed with Constantine in close pursuit, discouraging her with shouts of "Katia! No!" before she sees her father's ravaged face. The only possible explanation for such an omission is that AIP felt the scene would be more frightening if the Prince's death was not announced, but permitted to take the viewer by surprise.

In the film's second half, the two versions present a key event somewhat differently to disguise the removal of an entire scene from the AIP version. On the morning after the death of Prince Vajda, we see an exterior shot of various workmen on the castle staff unloading various artifacts from a wagon, including tall candlestick holders, which are being delivered from the sacristy to adorn the Prince's coffin as he lies in state. Inside the castle, Andrej presents the priest with the icon from Asa's tomb, and the priest agrees to attempt a translation of its Cyrillic text, in the hope of discovering some useful deterrents to the evil oppressing the castle. Then Constantine engages the priest's attention, asking for his help in persuading Katia to leave the premises. As they talk, Andrej drifts toward a nearby window, where he sees Katia walking toward the garden; we then cut to an exterior of Katia standing beside a fountain. The AIP version does not include the following scene, in which Andrej follows the Princess outside and engages her in their first intimate conversation:

ANDREJ
Princess Katia? I hope I'm not intruding . . .

KATIA
No. I feel so desperate and alone.

ANDREJ
I understand, but you mustn't despair. You should always have faith in yourself. In life!

KATIA
In life? What is my life? Nothing but sadness and grief! Something that destroys itself day by day, and no one can rebuild it. [Indicates ruins] Here is the very image of my life. Look at it. It's being consumed, hour by hour, like this garden—abandoned to a purposeless existence.

KATIA leans against a tree, half-embracing it.

ANDREJ
If the hand of man abandoned this castle, or even this earth, there is no reason why you should do likewise with your life and your youth. Go far away from here and you will be happy again, Katia. Forgive me if I've called you by name. And remember that I'll always be ready to help you.

KATIA turns to him.

KATIA
You're very kind, Andrej. But today everything seems so hopeless. I feel a sense of terror. A presentiment of death, of being destroyed by something that's inside me. How I wish I had your faith, your strength!

ANDREJ
You mustn't give in to despair. I know it's hard for you, but even here in this garden, the sun will reach into the darkest corners and chase away the shadows of the night.

KATIA
Andrej, help me! I beg you to help me . . .

KATIA leans against him, almost kisses him, and breaks into sobs.

34 This isolated exterior scene may have been filmed at Villa Lante in Bagnaia, east of Viterbo, which is said to be remarkable for just such a fountain.

35 Translated from the Italian by Christopher Sven Dietrich.

EMPHASIZING *the film's eye injury motif, Princess Asa and her victims can only be put to rest by staking them through the eye.*





When Katia says, "Here is the very image of my life," in reference to the garden ruins of her castle, her words foreshadow a line from Bava's 1973 film *Lisa and the Devil*, in which the reclusive necrophile Maximillian (Alessio Orano) remarks that his life "is the very configuration of this villa"—a Borgesian conceit that may suggest Bava's own input as a screenwriter. As the couple embrace, the scene shifts back indoors, where we see a breeze blow in from outside, which causes a hanging velvet drape to billow against one of the ornamental candle holders and catch fire. The servant Ivan puts the fire out, and in so doing, he pulls down the drape to reveal the portrait of Javutich—now torn to reveal the gears which operate the secret passage behind the hearth. Taken purely as an accident, the moment seems awkwardly contrived; however, since the breeze appears to rush in from the spot where Andrej and Katia have embraced, the breeze can be interpreted as a physical manifestation of the goodness of their affection for one another—a positive mystical force, bred by love, that works to expose the hiding place of the evil within the house.

This interpretation is impossible to reach in the AIP version, which cuts directly from the delivery of the funereal accoutrements to the ornamental candle randomly setting the drapery on fire. At this point, the scene between Andrej, Constantine, and the priest is inserted, with Andrej's gazing from the window interrupted by the discovery of the fire, which cuts to Andrej's return from outside—the entire exterior dialogue scene is omitted, being too romantic for AIP's target audience.

Also trimmed from the AIP version was some material from the climax. As Asa is captured by the villagers and readied for another bonfire, Andrej views the spectacle from a ground-level window in the subterranean crypt and succumbs to despair. Believing Katia to be dead, our emotional hero pleads with the

RARE *color shots of the film's Inquisition prologue, a sequence copied by countless horror films in years to come.*

priest for explanations of why his beloved must die, while this monster perishes with her beauty.

> ANDREJ
> Katia! My life is finished too, now! How can I ever resign myself? I will never find peace!

These sentiments are a bit over-the-top for a relationship that is barely a day old, and AIP's judgment here was correct: the finale works much better without them. But, melodramatic and overwrought as they are, these scenes find Bava accommodating in his film the elements of romance that Italian audiences of the day demanded.

As it reaches its finale, the AIP version includes a final, clumsy piece of narration, as George Gonneau intones, "The Lord has answered our prayers, for He will conquer the forces of darkness forever." It serves the purpose of leaving no doubt, in the minds of American parent and religious groups, that the picture leaves an ultimately wholesome impression on its audience, despite its decidedly unwholesome highlights.

Music

During the dubbing sessions, the decision was made to replace the film's original Roberto Nicolosi score, which Sam Arkoff felt was . . . well, too *Italian*. "The Italians made relatively inexpensive pictures and had no budget for music," he related. "There were several companies in Italy that would provide soundtracks free, in exchange for publishing and other rights. You would tell them what you wanted and they had a whole supply of themes to choose from. We would never accept their canned music, which was written to Italian tastes. Italians favored a different kind of music than American audiences would accept."

For the rescoring, Arkoff hired Les Baxter (1922–96), a bandleader, arranger, and a former musical associate of Nat King Cole and Mel Tormé, whose orchestral albums *Ritual of the Savage*, *Tamboo!*, and *The Sacred Idol* had helped to popularize the "exotica" craze of the 1950s. Baxter's first score for AIP had been for the aforementioned *Goliath and the Barbarians*, which was subsequently released on vinyl not as a soundtrack, but in the guise of one of his "exotica" LPs, *Barbarian*. Baxter flew to New York City on Monday, January 9, 1961, to begin scoring the picture at Titra.[36]

Watching *The Mask of Satan* and *Black Sunday* back-to-back, one can well appreciate that Baxter's score was a major factor in the creative fulfillment and international success of Bava's debut. Nicolosi's score (orchestrated by Pier Luigi Urbini) is applied very sparingly, leaving much of the film's macabre atmosphere to baleful winds and other manifestations of the sound editor. It makes intermittent stabs at thematic underlining, as when celestial chimes accompany the appearances of the cross; however, some key dramatic scenes—including, unbelievably, the climactic fistfight between Andrej and Javutich—are accompanied by *no music whatsoever*. At times, the lack of music enhances the tension of scenes, makes them seem more godforsaken, but what music is present tends to be thinly orchestrated and derivative. It is obvious that Nicolosi patterned his cues after James Bernard's anxious music for *Horror of Dracula;* there is a good deal of frenetic, stop-and-go, up-an-octave cat-scratching, and in the forlorn, bass clarinet theme that accompanies Javutich's rise from the grave, one can hear the discernible influence of Hans J. Salter's oboe theme for Ygor (Bela Lugosi) in Universal's *Son of Frankenstein* (1939). The association is relevant in view of the original dialogue, which refers to the character with the full name of "Prince Ygor Javutich."

Scoring a horror film would have been a challenge to any Italian composer at this point in history, so Nicolosi can be forgiven for grabbing at straws and actually clutching very few; it is better, in most cases, to err on the side of subtlety. Where Nicolosi unquestionably excels is in the composition of what might be termed "Katia's Theme"—a lushly romantic piano piece in the Rachmaninoff mode that first sweeps into place during her conversation with Andrej outside the crypt (establishing their mutual attraction) and, thereafter, whenever passion or sorrow is felt. This *leitmotif* works so well that Baxter incorporated it into his own score, alluding to it during this initial scene with a single, teasing phrase and allowing it to come into full flower later. No credit was given to Nicolosi. On November 30, 1960—a full month before the film's scoring sessions in New York—Baxter included a recording of this theme on his exotica album *Jewel of the Sea* as the title track (with a footnote on the jacket explaining that it



ASA *is burned by the Inquisitioners led by her brother, Griabi.*

36 AIP press release, January 3, 1961.

was originally composed as "Katia's Theme" for American International Pictures' *Black Sunday*), and legal records show that, on May 25, 1961, Baxter filed copyright on "Katia's Theme" in his own name. The true author of the piece is easily identified by comparing the scene of Andrej carrying the swooning Katia to her bedroom, as it appears in the two versions of the film; the scoring here is basically identical, though more grandly orchestrated in the AIP version. One hastens to mention in this regard that, by acquiring the rights to the picture, AIP were empowered to use (or not use) Nicolosi's score in any way they wished.

There are instances when the two scores lead the viewer to interpret the same scene entirely differently. Nicolosi's judgment is most flattered by the first scene inside Castle Vajda, in the elaborate dolly move that glides past Katia at the piano, past her brother Constantine cleaning his hunting rifle, and ends on Prince Vajda staring hauntedly into the fireplace. Baxter gives Katia a woeful dirge to play (clearly written not to tune, but to match Steele's hand movements on the keyboard), establishing a tone of dread long before we are shown the Prince's facial expression; in fact, one infers from the scene, as it appears in the AIP version, that the *music* has brought on the man's mood. Nicolosi, however, has Katia reprise the theme established on the soundtrack during her meeting with Andrej, suggesting that she is distracted by thoughts of new love, making their subsequent, quick romance much easier to accept. When the shot finally creeps over the Prince's shoulder, the otherness of his expression comes as a shock and he is established as firmly in the grip of the day's implications and vulnerable to its advances.

Baxter's score is everything Nicolosi's score is not: boisterous, unsubtle, boldly orchestrated, incessantly busy—musically underlining every footfall, every droplet of dripping blood (note how the string section adjusts to *pizzicato* whenever we



PRINCESS ASA—*the first truly erotic succubus of the cinema.*



THIS *staged publicity photo finds Andrej grappling with Javutich for the soul of comatose Princess Katia.*

go back to Asa's crypt), every smoking undulation of dry ice. Consequently, whereas the Nicolosi score allows Bava's *mise en scène* to stand more or less on its own legs, the Baxter score is much more supportive, responding to its visual information, accentuating (and even prompting) the viewer's responses to it, with the end result that *Black Sunday* becomes much more rigorous in its determination and ability to frighten. This post-production marriage of Bava and Baxter, was, in essence, the synergy that produced the first authentic masterpiece of Italian horror.

And yet . . . and yet. While Baxter's music bolsters the film immeasurably, in doing so, it also obscures—as it complements—the quantum leap of creative imagination that is actually embodied by Bava's debut. To see AIP's version is to see a much tighter, more polished work than Bava actually directed; the post-production gloss applied to the film, especially the new score, helps to eliminate every hint of the native cinematic conventions that Bava had so brilliantly overcome. The precise value of the Nicolosi score is that it better illustrates where Bava was coming from—the true measure of his advance. *La maschera del demonio* started out as a second-rate, openly derivative horror project manufactured in a country with little or no previous experience in the genre; it became something much more, thanks to Bava's grounding in art, literature, and photography. To see the film in its original state (e.g., *The Mask of Satan*) is to understand that, even at the time of its completion, the Italian horror film was still a work-in-progress, not as yet wholly defined. It was wholly defined only when it became *Black Sunday.*[37]

Distribution

AIP's retitling of the picture was another crucial chapter in its reinvention for North America. In 1960, the word "Satan" was considered too strong for use in the title of a horror film, and according to New York columnist Robert Sylvester, AIP had tested numerous alternatives—including *Witchcraft*, *The House of Fright*, *The Curse*, *Vengeance*, and *Demoniaque*—before finally settling on the title that would bring the film its most lasting fame.

In the original dialogue, the recurring, tragic events that beset the Vajda family are said to occur every 100 years since the execution of Princess Asa on the day known as "The Feast of St. George." The references to St. George are vague—the Vajda family is linked to the emblematic image of the dragon slain by George—and nowhere is it mentioned that the Feast of St. George is the Sunday following the Christian holidays of Palm Sunday and Easter Sunday. In the first chapter of Bram Stoker's novel *Dracula*, the 4 May diary entry of Jonathan Harker quotes an old, hysterical peasant woman who cautions him not to keep his midnight appointment to meet a coach from Castle Dracula: "It is the eve of St. George's day. Do you not know that tonight, when the clock strikes midnight, all the evil things in the world will have full sway?" Bava and his screenwriters may have been attracted to this date by common superstition or its literary connection to the meeting of Harker and Count Dracula, but it is more likely that Bava heard the details of St. George's mythic life from his father Eugenio, who made a study of the lives of the Saints he sculpted. Known mostly to Westerners as the fabled dragon slayer, George was born circa 245 A.D. and had a glorious early career as a soldier in



BARBARA STEELE *models the rotted skeleton breastplate briefly glimpsed during the film's climax.*

37 Another musical variant is offered by the film's Spanish soundtrack. The Spanish version, which was evidently assembled without access to the film's original music-and-effects tracks, was given entirely new accompaniment in the form of public domain classical tracks by Edvard Grieg and Richard Wagner. It is this version which was released on DVD in Spain by Vella Vision, under the title *La Máscara del Demonio*.

the Roman army. When Diocletian became emperor, George was tortured and put to a martyr's death for speaking out against his terrible persecution of the Church, which included the demolition of Christian churches, the massacre of entire Christian towns, and the arrest and torture of bishops and deacons. George was killed not once, but three times; each time—after being dismembered, prematurely buried, and finally burned at the stake—restored to life, as legend has it, by a righteous and vengeful God. In Bava's film, Asa is not portrayed as a martyr, but she is put to death thrice in very similar ways: first by mutilation, again in the backstory by an earthquake, and by fire before the end credits roll.

During the scripting of the AIP soundtrack, someone—most likely, producer Lou Rusoff or director Lee Kresel—had the brainstorm of replacing Bava's subtle allusions to the Feast of St. George with a more sinister-sounding anniversary. As summarized by George Gonneau in the AIP version's opening narration, "One day in each century, it is said that Satan walks the earth. To the God-fearing, this day is known as Black Sunday." But what is lost in this translation is the connection the original screenwriters intended to make between the Vajda and Dracula families, as *Drakul*—the root of Dracula's name—is Romanian for "Dragon slayer."

When AIP premiered Bava's film at the Allen Theater in Cleveland, Ohio, on February 3, 1961, it bore the title *Black Sunday*—a moniker perhaps inspired by *Black Friday* (a 1940 Universal production starring Boris Karloff and Bela Lugosi) and another hot European import of the moment, Jules Dassin's *Never on Sunday*. According to Glenn Erickson, the original release prints of *Black Sunday* superimposed over its closing shot of the flaming brazier a recommendation that the audience also see AIP's concurrent release, *The Two Faces of Dr. Jekyll;* one of these original prints was still in circulation as recently as Filmex in 1980. In its initial release, *Black Sunday* was double-billed with films from smaller independent companies, including the British comedy *Carry On Nurse*, which starred future



US *one-sheet poster, art by Reynold Brown.*



FACADE *of Cleveland's Allen Theater, where BLACK SUNDAY had its US premiere.*

Goldfinger golden girl Shirley Eaton, distributed in the US by Governor Films.

As it happens, *Black Sunday* went into release at approximately the same time as *The Devil's Commandment*, RCIP's reworked US version of *I vampiri*. In a neat coincidence, the two films were reviewed on the same page of the industry journal *Boxoffice*, whose critic was unaware of any creative link between them, and unwilling to cut either film any slack. Incredibly, of *Black Sunday* he wrote: "The photoplay has its artistic facets—light compositions, camera movement, etc.—but the less said about them, the better."

In an unprecedented publicity move inspired by the showmanship of Alfred Hitchcock and William Castle, AIP's ad campaign announced that admission to *Black Sunday* would be restricted. A special introductory crawl was also added to AIP's prints, which read, *"The producers of the film you are about to see feel a moral obligation to warn you that it will shock you as no other film has . . . Because it could be very harmful to young and impressionable minds, it is restricted to only those over 14 years of age."* (Unless, of course, they happened to be accompanied by the price of admission.)

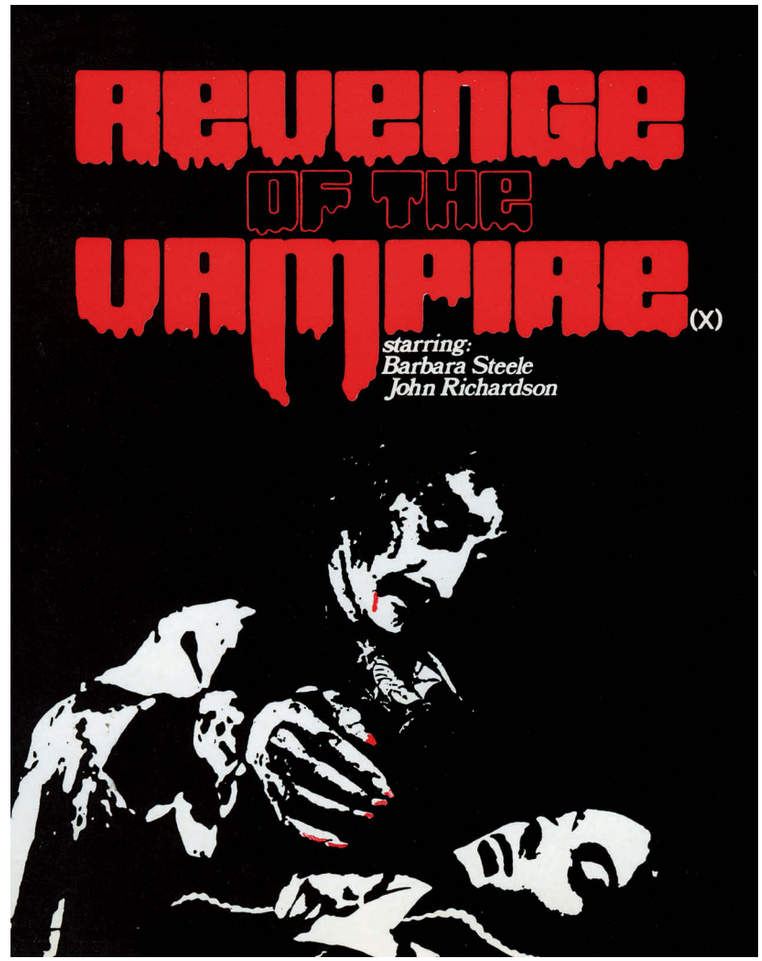
AIP also manufactured a promotional gimmick giveaway in the form of an envelope containing a card upon which was printed a kind of "protection" incantation. The card read:

Witch and Wizard, go away!
Chill some other soul today!
Vampire bat and horrid toad,
Deadly snake beside the road,
Ghostly shriek and chilling moan,
I command—Leave Me Alone!

All your horrors and your terrors
Daunt me not. They're only errors
Conjured by you just to frighten;
Never truly to enlighten.
Powers of Darkness—go away!
Chill some other soul today!

The ballyhoo paid off: *Black Sunday* grossed $14,750 in its first week at the Allen Theater, topping AIP's previous record holders by 35%. On the basis of three record-breaking opening dates—the other two being in San Francisco, California, and Salt Lake City, Utah—*Black Sunday* became the biggest grosser in AIP's five-year history.[38] From the get-go, it was a bigger commercial success than Roger Corman's first Poe picture, 1960's *The Fall of the House of Usher*—which had been produced in color and widescreen on a budget of $270,000, roughly 3–5 times the total cost of *La maschera del demonio*. In its first year of release, *Black Sunday* had 8,392 recorded playdates, generating domestic rentals in the amount of $706,000. 35 mm prints would remain in active drive-in and neighborhood theater circulation for years to come. By all accounts, it traumatized a generation.

The film's reception in Great Britain would prove more complicated. AIP's British partners in distribution, Anglo-Amalgamated, submitted a print of the retooled version to the British Board of Film Censors in February 1961, at which time it was rejected outright—in more sensational language, banned in the United Kingdom. Somehow, a single screening of *Black Sunday* was arranged at the National Film Theatre during the Christmas holiday season of 1961, when Tod Browning's *Freaks* (also banned in the UK at that time) was yanked from the schedule at the last minute. It would prove the film's only public screening in Britain for the better part of a decade, and some fans lucky enough to have scored a ticket spoke to their friends about Bava's forbidden debut in ways that added immeasurably to its legend. The British ban would remain in effect until May 15, 1968, when the film was finally passed in cut form with an "X" certificate under the title *Revenge of the Vampire*. Distributed by Border Films, the picture was paired with William Grefé's Florida-made *Sting of Death* (1966); seldom has a double bill better showcased the best art and trash the horror genre has to offer. A vivid illustration of how the cinematic landscape had changed in the intervening years was offered by its coverage in *Monthly Film Bulletin*, which appeared on the same page as a review of Michael Reeves' final film, *Witchfinder General*. The *MFB*, always careful about such tabulations, reported the film's running time of 88 minutes, indicating that Border Films had bypassed the AIP cut in favor of the original, ELDA-dubbed version, *The Mask of Satan*.





UK *poster designs from the film's belated 1968 British release.*

For better or worse, it is this original export edition that is currently the prevailing edition of the home video era. Because AIP acquired the film as an independent production, their rights to the picture contractually expired thirty years later, in 1991. It was on the eve of that contract's expiration that Orion Pictures (then the owners of the American International library) released *Black Sunday* on LaserDisc, the AIP version's only legitimate video release to date. That same year, the Italian owners signalled the return of the film to their control by licensing *The Mask of Satan*—first to Toshiba Video of Japan, and then to Great Britain's Redemption Video, for release on VHS. Since then, *The Mask of Satan* has also been surfaced on VHS and DVD, for the first time in the United States, through Image Entertainment—under the more familiar, but technically misleading, title of *Black Sunday*.

Over the years, there has been talk of a possible home video release of the AIP version through MGM Home (now Sony) Entertainment, the current holders of the company's product, but various factors have kept this from happening. As AIP's properties traded hands, the rights to certain import titles like *Black Sunday* were not renewed and fell into the public domain. Therefore, it would not be in the financial interests of MGM to digitally restore and release this, or any other, PD titles, because any other video company would be within their legal rights to digitally copy and issue their product under a competing banner, probably at a lower price. Also, Image Entertainment's decision to use the title of *Black Sunday* on their release has misled the marketplace into

38 AIP press release, February 24, 1961.

thinking that the movie that bore this title has already been released.

Consequently, Mario Bava's most famous film has entered the 21st century as twins, the older successfully usurping the younger's place in our modern world. Both versions are beautiful . . . but different. One is the director's original creation—complete and uncut, uncut in the dual sense of being uncensored and also a flawed gem, like an uncut diamond. The other version is the director's first *tour de force*—a cut version, but cut like a diamond, somehow more perfect and scintillating in its streamlined reduction. If a Baxter-scored version of the uncut film existed, there would be no problem; as things stand, it is difficult to choose between them.

Commentary

La maschera del demonio is considered by many to be the most auspicious directorial debut in the history of horror films. Its arrival on theater screens was greeted as a welcome return to the black-and-white, Old World atmosphere of Universal's "golden age" horrors, while the younger, Hammer-bred generation of horror aficionados responded with equal enthusiasm to its unflinching scenes of graphic horror. Beyond these studio signatures, Bava's grounding in cinematography imbued the film with a greater emphasis on visual storytelling—visual continuity, in fact—than had been perpetrated by any horror film since the 1920s. It also had a dark fairy tale aspect, which marked its inheritance from such European antecedents as F. W. Murnau's *Nosferatu* (1922) and *Faust* (1923) and—the most pronounced of all its influences—Cocteau's *La Belle et le Bête*, with which it also shared a pronounced romanticism that made it unusually palatable to female audience members.

Despite the catholicism of its influences, *La maschera del demonio* also represented something new. It was not second-hand German Expressionist like the Universal horror



GERMAN *A-1 poster, art by Hans Drain.*

films, nor was it purely influenced by 19th century realists like Thomas Gainsborough as were the Hammer films; *La maschera del demonio* drew inspiration not only from these, but from a variety of other artistic sources: Byzantine art, Russian orthodox iconography, fairy tale illustrations, art nouveau, rococo, Disney—and somehow, it all blends believably together in its baleful wash of black-and-white cinematography. It is the very hallmark of what is known today as "golden age" Italian horror.

From its opening 13-second plunge into darkness, which fades up on an image of flames, to the rhyming closure of its incendiary finale, *La maschera del demonio* exudes a mood of dark serendipity, of Manichean evil poised for inevitable triumph. Here, the most appalling horrors are strangely alluring and seductive—even the ruins are morbidly compelling. The monochromatic landscapes are steeped in an ever-thickening atmosphere of godforsakenness and dread, a fact cleverly underscored by Bava's careful placement of the camera in cowering postures—behind trees, behind columns and candelabra, as if intimidated by everything it sees—and elsewhere, its intricate, geometric movements feel so precise as to make the sequence of events feel irrevocably fated.

Bava also supplied *La maschera del demonio* with an assortment of visual quotations that prove a familiarity with the genre, remarkable considering that horror films had been banned in Italy until the mid-1950s. Prince Vajda's vision of the Mask of Satan in his hot toddy recalls a nearly identical moment in Victor Halperin's *White Zombie* (1932) when the face of voodoo master Murder Legendre (Bela Lugosi) appears in a goblet of wine. The innkeeper's daughter's fearful walk through the forest to milk a cow not far from the haunted cemetery harkens as much to *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs* (1937) as to the "corn meal" sequence in Jacques Tourneur's *The Leopard Man* (1943). After his seduction by Princess Asa, the stubble-faced vampiric form of Kruvajan greatly resembles Onslow Stevens, as he looked when he played another doctor infected with vampirism in Universal's *House of Dracula* (1945). The climactic scenes in the crypt reveal an acquaintance with the final acts of Tod Browning's *Dracula* and James Whale's *Frankenstein* (both 1931), as torch-bearing villagers converge on the Vajda chapel ruins to put the vampire to rest.

But it was from Cocteau's *La Belle et le Bête* that Bava seems to have learned the most about navigating the terrain of cinematic fantasy. The scene of Belle's father (Marcel André) getting lost in the woods, prior to his discovery of the Beast's castle, is very much a blueprint of Bava's own presentation of the haunted woods of Mirgorod, and the father himself has many characteristics shared by Prince Vajda; there are suggestions in both films of a once important family brought low by the father's weaknesses, which are themselves a self-loathing response to even greater ancestral sins. In both films, the younger generation must pay the price for the sins of their fathers, and both also address the fears of a young woman about choosing a husband in advance of her father's approaching death. Yet the greatest similarities between the two films are stylistic rather than thematic. Understandably, given the facts of his background, Bava was attracted to Cocteau's technique of using his actors as *tableaux vivant,* as a form of living sculpture; he would always be less concerned with his actors' dramatic capabilities than with their visual correctness for a role. The character of Javutich resembles the Beast somewhat in his combination of sleek monstrousness and regality, most of all as he emerges from his grave in princely finery with a bronze leonine mask hammered to his face. For the scene of Javutich driving the spectral carriage, Bava borrowed a page from the scene of Beauty's arrival at the Beast's castle, which underscored the transition from reality to a world where magic held free reign by introducing slow motion photography. (Bava's handling of the scene also represents an inspired inversion of a coach scene in Murnau's *Nosferatu*, which was undercranked to show the horsedrawn phantom vehicle moving at a nightmarishly jagged, accelerated speed.) Another source of inspiration was Cocteau's use of actor Jean Marais in the dual role of Avenant—the handsome farmer who asks for Belle's hand in marriage—and the Beast. This twinned casting lends credence to the popular interpretation that the Beast represents Belle's virginal fears about marriage and sex with Avenant, which are ultimately resolved when both Avenant and the Beast die at the same moment, to be reborn as a third character, a Prince, who embodies the best qualities of both. Marais' inventive casting in *La Belle et le Bête* may have inspired the idea of Asa and Princess Katia resembling one another and being played by the same actress. [39]

Bava also quotes his own work in *La maschera del demonio* with the introduction of Javutich—his long-nailed hands scrambling up and over a mound of earth—a scene which is modelled on the first appearance of Nieto (also played by Arturo Dominici) in the opening moments of *Caltiki il mostro immortale*. Self-quotation can be a form of in-joking, which is also discernible in Bava's debut. For example, the celebrated shot that introduces Princess Katia—the sudden appearance of her imposing presence flanked by two menacing *mastino napoletano* dogs—may have been intended by Bava as a wink at his mentor, Riccardo Freda. Giuseppe Maccari, who worked as a camera assistant on one of Freda's films, recalled: "I remember that Freda used to come to the set with a little dog every day—except a couple of days when he arrived with a huge *mastino napoletano*! A huge dog with a face full of wrinkles and red eyes. I mean, I love dogs myself, but that one was really scary! It wasn't nice to work in a small room with that beast—that animal!" [40] In the image of Asa's barrel-chested, mallet-wielding executioner may also lurk a conscious parody of the mallet-bearer that introduced all of Barbara Steele's and John Richardson's earlier films, striking a bronze mask instead of the famous Rank Organisation gong.

If such tongue-in-cheek parallels seem incompatible with such a frightening movie, consider the humor in the demeanor of Asa and Javutich as they flaunt their power over life and death: Asa's closed eyes mischievously springing open in the instant that poor Kruvajan looks away from her, and the look of imperious satisfaction on Javutich's pitted face as he materializes before Constantine out of thin air. It is in these two merrily macabre moments that *La maschera del demonio* comes closest to evoking the mood of Gogol's writing, and that unexpected element of humor and irony is somehow inextricably entwined with the ability of these two scenes to chill the blood.

It is almost easier to think of *La maschera del demonio* without Mario Bava than without Barbara Steele, whose dual performance as the Princesses Asa and Katia led to her immediate coronation as "The Queen of Horror." As with Gina Lollobrigida and Steve Reeves before her, Bava recognized and brought out the qualities that could make Steele an international star. Asa and Katia have been described by some critics as a literalization of the Madonna/Whore complex, but it is more immediately pertinent to call attention to Princess Asa as the first formidably *female* monster in the history of horror pictures.

Elsa Lanchester in *Bride of Frankenstein* (1935) was an inspired amalgam of ghoulishness and glamor, but she was blown to atoms almost the minute she was unwrapped. Gloria Holden in *Dracula's Daughter* (1936) was a normal-looking character whose predatory, lesbian nightlife was depicted solely by implication; her tragic aspect made her seem as much a victim as a villain. Margaret

39 There is something cosmic at work here. On five occasions in his long career, Jean Marais would play dual roles in five films: *La Belle et le Bête*, *Le Capitaine Fracasse* (1960, as Baron de Sigognac/Capitaine Fracasse), and a series of three films for director Andre Hunebelle—*Fantômas* (1964), *Fantômas se déchaîne* (1965), and *Fantômas contre Scotland Yard* (1967)—in which he played the master criminal Fantômas and his reporter adversary Fandor. In each of those films, he played opposite an actor (Josette Day in *La Belle* . . . , Louis De Funès in the other four) who was born within twenty-four hours of Mario Bava, on the most commonly reported date of his birth: July 31, 1914. Furthermore, Bava may have had something to do with the special effects of the second film in the Fantômas trilogy (see Unverified Works in Appendices).

40 Alan Upchurch, "Raptus: The Making of The Horrible Dr. Hichcock," *Video Watchdog* 49, January 1999, 36.

Hamilton made a frightening Wicked Witch of the West in *The Wizard of Oz* (1939), but in this children's film, her characterization was deliberately polarized, utterly unattractive and divorced from gender. Monsterdom generally reverted to a boy's club throughout the 1940s; when women did essay horror roles during this period—like Virginia Christine's reborn Princess Ananka in *The Mummy's Curse* (1944)—they were revealingly portrayed as ciphers, out of touch with their identity and inner strengths, who survived the centuries only to remain subservient to the brutish male monsters who pined for them. Exotic dancer Shirley Kilpatrick's shapely radioactive threat in *The Astounding She-Monster* (1958) was perhaps the first example of a female monster who was equally enticing and repellent, but in the final reel she was revealed to be an innocent, well-meaning, fatally fumbling emissary from space. Meanwhile, the eponymous corpse-quilt of *Frankenstein's Daughter* (also 1958) was so desexualized that she not only appeared to be male, but was actually played by a man.

The template for the rejuvenated Princess Asa appears to be the Wicked Queen of Walt Disney's classic animated feature *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs* (1937), which, as mentioned earlier, was for many Italians their first taste of horror on the big screen. This character—principally animated by Art Babbitt and voiced by veteran actress Lucille LaVerne—was described by Disney himself as "a mixture of Lady Macbeth and the Big, Bad Wolf."[41] (For her part, Barbara Steele once told me that Lady Macbeth was one of the roles she would most love to play.) Princess Asa—pallid, thirsting not for blood but male essence—is a far more complex figure, one that presses psychological buttons never before pushed by any other nightmare conjured up by the horror cinema. Her face is abhorrent—a glowering, hole-pocked death's head. (The character Pinhead, from Clive Barker's *Hellraiser* films, is very much the inversion of her.) She is utterly repugnant, a living corpse, yet Bava shows us what Kruvajan sees, the attraction that draws him irresistibly nearer and



BELGIAN *affiche, a crude repainting of Giuliano Nistri's original, elegant poster design.*

nearer to his doom. Below her ghastly visage is a voluptuous body, breasts heaving with expectancy, her long nails scratching at the jagged stonework of her obliterated resting place. "Kiss me," she commands. "You will die, but you will experience pleasures mortals cannot know"—and we have no reason to doubt her. The only thing remotely like this apparition in the long history of horror cinema is Max Schreck's repellent Count Orlock in Murnau's *Nosferatu*, a symbol of post-WWI pestilence who has been called the most sexless of monsters. Asa, on the other hand, embodies a highly eroticized image of Death, and she galvanizes—in one powerful, visual jolt—the great *leitmotif* that runs throughout Bava's filmography as director: Sex and Death.

Roy Bava remembers, as an inquisitive youngster, quizzing his grandfather about his professional preoccupation with love and death. Mario's response, as paraphrased by his grandson: "Why am I so preoccupied with death? Because in life there are only two things you can be sure about: one day, you are born and someday, you are going to die. It's quite easy to be born; there's nothing too interesting about that. Nobody's very interested in speaking about the dead or even the aesthetics of death, but people tend to speak quite a lot about love, so I thought maybe I could put love and death together."[42]

Obviously, this is the sort of simplified explanation one would offer to a young, inquisitive grandchild. It is neither dishonest nor evasive, but one senses it doesn't quite get at the whole truth. Bava's true feelings on the subject were certainly more complex and deeply rooted—they would have to be, in order to preoccupy him for the next twenty years—and it is possible that Bava himself, who took an instinctive rather than a deliberately self-expressive approach to his art (or his "work," as he would have termed it), never consciously traced the reasons behind his obsession.

In depicting Princess Asa as he does, Bava might have simply been recreating, in vivid terms, the character described in Gogol's story:

> *She lay as though living: the lovely forehead, fair as snow, as silver, looked deep in thought: the even brows—dark as night in the midst of sunshine—rose proudly above the closed eyes; the eyelashes, that fell like arrows on the cheeks, glowed with the warmth of secret desires; the lips were rubies, ready to break into the laugh of bliss, the flood of joy . . . But in them, in those very features, he saw something terrible and poignant. He felt a sickening ache stirring in his heart . . . The rubies of her lips looked like blood surging up from her heart . . . 'The witch!' he cried in a voice not his own as, turning pale, he looked away and fell to repeating his prayers. It was the witch he had killed."*[43]

But the dichotomy embodied by Asa can be interpreted in many different ways: as a personification of the fear of sex, of venereal disease, of temptation and faithlessness, of the damnation of succumbing to sexual temptation, of the marital contract itself ("Till death do us part")—and, in all frankness, any of these things might become secret preoccupations in the middle age of a self-described "romantic artisan" who had spent nearly half of his life in an increasingly ill-fitting marriage, and who lived in a country where divorce was

regarded not only as immoral but was in fact illegal.

La maschera del demonio also resonates as a horror story about what Lamberto Bava calls "the burden of heredity." Just as Mario's son has admitted to having difficulties living up to his father's professional legacy, Mario also faced the challenge of becoming his own man while standing in the long shadow cast in the Italian film business by his father. In *La maschera*, the Vajda family is living under much more than a curse; they are living under the weight of their family name and family history. It is by no accident that Bava depicts the living and the dead of the Vajda family communicating via an ornately carved fireplace—the very thing Le Pathé Cinema asked Eugenio Bava to provide on the night when the Bava family took its first, fateful step into the motion picture business. When Asa spitefully replies to her brother's condemnation, she curses not only him but the blood he will pass onto his son "and his son and his son"—the house of Vajda itself. Given the sovereignty of Castle Vajda ("The history of Moldavia is carved in these stones," says Kruvajan as he surveys the family crypt), the curse placed on it appears to have trickled down over the centuries until all of Moldavia has fallen into an almost unsalvageable state of superstitious, moral disrepair 200 years later, when the narration is resumed. The first Moldavian villager we meet in the film's "present day" year of 1830 is an alcoholic coachman who relies on strong drink to make the journey to Mirgorod, which takes him past the Vajda crypt, where, as bad luck would have it, his axle wheel snaps—perhaps by a malevolent external force, perhaps under the weight of his own dread. Andrej and Kruvajan, the first of many unlucky travellers in Bava's official filmography, fulfill their roles as out-of-towners by ridiculing his local lore but, as night falls, they too grow timid and are shown delving into their cups because they have both been touched by configurations of Asa. Andrej has fallen in love with Katia, her mirror image, while Kruvajan's own morbid attraction to the witch's legend has led to the reactivation of her ancient evil with his own blood.



THIS FRENCH *reissue affiche from the 1970s (which misspells Barbara Steele's name) is a rarity for its use of a photographic image.*

In sharp contrast to the imperious Asa and Javutich, Katia and Constantine—and also their father, Prince Vajda—are depicted as victims of their ancestral past, tyrannized by the burden of heredity. Over the centuries, the Vajda family has lived under a cloud of inertia, not even taking down the portraits of the two blackest sheep in their family, choosing instead to live under their malignant stares, almost as a daily reminder of their inevitable triumph. Even the family chapel—their only sanctuary from such evil—has been allowed to degenerate into a rotted shell of its former purpose, because of its proximity to Asa's tomb; fear itself has deprived them of the ability to protect themselves. So rife with cowardly regression are the present day Vajdas, the film implies, that they have ceased to be themselves. As we delve deeper into Bava's work as a director, we will see that another of his principal themes was the destructive properties of the family unit, and it is fascinating to find it already in full flower in his first film—in fact, in its very first scene.

La maschera del demonio has sustained its classic reputation over the years on the strength of Barbara Steele's personal allure, its beautifully decadent imagery, and a half-dozen or more classic scenes. Unfortunately, as noted earlier, the film also contains much that is patchy and inconsistent. The not-fully-discarded vampire premise breaks many of the genre's traditions, particularly the shot of Javutich's hand reflected in a mirror. The ultimate confrontation between Andrej and Javutich is not conspicuously different to a fistfight in a Western, with Javutich reeling from punches as mortally as his opponent—after we have seen him rise from the grave, pull a spiked mask from his face, pilot a ghostly carriage, and pass through open flames. Though the Cyrillic icon buried with Asa states that a vampire can be destroyed only by a stake through the eye, Javuto is dispatched by a fall into a pit of spikes and Asa is burned at the stake by torch-bearing villagers, as History repeats itself. Too many of the film's most memorable shocks—the aging/rejuvenation scene, and the climactic moment when Asa's black cloak opens to reveal a putrid, skinless torso beneath (a gag Bava would later recycle in 1965's *Terrore nello spazio/Planet of the Vampires*), to name two—are staged purely for effect, without narrative cause or consequence. After a wonderful build-up, Asa's actual revival is extremely perfunctory, depriving her of the reign of terror which we've been led to expect and Steele's performance deserved, rushing to an uninspired conclusion as though suddenly bereft of invention.

In spite of its narrative instability and perfunctory wrap-up, *La maschera del demonio* somehow never prompted the cries of "When will Bava get a decent script?" that would greet some of his later, more

41 John Grant, *Encyclopedia of Walt Disney's Animated Characters* (New York NY: Harper and Row, 1987), 139.

42 Roy Bava, *Mario Bava Maestro of the Macabre* interview transcript, 2000.

43 Nikolai Gogol, "Viy" in *Mirgorod* (Moscow, USSR: Foreign Languages Publishing House, undated), 212–13. The title of Gogol's story can be found in translation spelled "Vij" or "Viy" because the English translation of Russian words and proper names are based on phonestic transcriptions of the original Cyrillic spellings. By the same token, some of Gogol's works can be found in English attributed to "Nikolaj" or "Nikolay" Gogol. The "j" spelling is characteristic of older translations.

challenging work. But such questions miss the point of Bava's particular genius, which was always more attentive to inner life than outer deeds, more attentive to atmosphere than location, more attentive to *mise en scène* than to actors—in short, more elemental than materialistic. However inarticulate he may have been about his craft, Bava must have been conscious of at least this much about his creative leanings; too many of his movies open on shots of the sea, the sky, or the sands of a beach to be accidental, just as *La maschera* begins and ends with images of silvery, flickering fire. The story that unfolds between those images is hastily-sketched and partly improvised—an excuse for mining the deeper levels where Bava lived: the levels of visual and thematic continuity. In cinematic terms, one might call these levels the subconscious, or the paranormal, of narrative. Thus, Bava's most popular film is surprisingly consistent with the most personal, least commercial films he made.

Reverberations

Despite the tremendous worldwide success of *La maschera del demonio*, Mario Bava and Barbara Steele would never work together again. The reasons for this disappointment are complicated. According to Lamberto Bava, Mario was very pleased with her contribution to the film. "As an actress, he was delighted by her, feeling that she was the ideal star for *La maschera del demonio*," he says, "but as a person, he didn't hold her in very high esteem, because she always made him feel as though the movie was beneath her."

After the release of *La maschera*, Steele took immediate advantage of her newfound currency as the Queen of Horror by appearing in such films as Roger Corman's *Pit and the Pendulum* (1961, in which she was slammed inside an Iron Maiden) and also Riccardo Freda's *L'orribile segreto del Dr. Hichcock/The Horrible Dr. Hichcock* (1962, in which she was buried alive) and *Lo spettro/The Ghost* (1963, in which she was injected with a chemical that left her permanently immobile), almost never lingering anywhere long enough to dub her own performances. Then she won a supporting role in Federico Fellini's *Otto e mezzo/8½* (1963)—in which she is introduced muttering to herself, "*Cruel bees, sucking all the life from these poor flowers . . .*"



THIS ARGENTINIAN *poster lends the title of Bava's classic to another Barbara Steele film, Antonio Margheriti's I LUNGHI CAPELLI DELLA MORTE (1964).*

As Steele was making her favorite film with Fellini, across town, Bava was preparing a film for producer Luciano Martino entitled *La frusta e il corpo.* Evidence suggests that Bava or Martino may have offered Steele the lead role of Nevenka (eventually played to perfection by Daliah Lavi) and was rejected, her agents discouraging offers for her to appear in films that were "beneath" her. During a Q&A session following a screening of *Black Sunday* at the Egyptian Theater in Los Angeles in June 2002, Steele said as much herself: "Apparently, he [Bava] wanted me to play a role in another picture that was eventually done by Daliah Lavi. I would have been very happy to do it, but the invitation never reached me."

In the end, Steele appeared in more European art films (e.g., Schlondorff's *Der Junge Torless/Young Torless*) and Italian comedies (Lucio Fulci's *I maniaci*) than horror films, but to her own dismay, it is for her Italian horror films, and *La maschera del demonio* in particular, that she is best remembered. Her other primary works in this category are Antonio Margheriti's *Danza macabra/Castle of Blood* (1964) and *I lunghi capelli della morte/The Long Hair of Death* (also '64, which was released in Argentina under the title . . . *La maschera del demonio!*), Mario Caiano's *Amanti d'oltretomba/Nightmare Castle* (1965), Camillo Mastrocinque's *Un angela per satana/An Angel for Satan* (1966), Massimo Pupillo's *Cinque tombe per un medium/Terror Creatures From the Grave* (1966) and Michael Reeves' Italian-made *Revenge of the Blood Beast/The She Beast* (1966).

It is regrettable that Steele and Bava went their separate ways because he was unquestionably the von Sternberg to her Dietrich. And she, better than any other actress, personified that crucial element of Bava's universe: the seductive allure of superstition, the beauty at the heart of darkness. One can easily envision her in the roles played by Leticia Roman, Michèle Mercier, Fabienne Dalí, and Claudine Auger in *La ragazza che sapeva troppo/Evil Eye*, *I tre volti della paura/Black Sabbath*, *Operazione paura/Kill, Baby . . . Kill!*, and *Ecologia del delitto/Twitch of the Death Nerve*—and imagine the added potency that her presence would have brought to each film. (Indeed, the Auger role might have been Steele's longed-for opportunity to play Lady Macbeth.) Only Daliah Lavi in *La frusta e il corpo* and Laura Betti in *Il rosso segno della follia/Hatchet for the Honeymoon* succeeded in making what might have been ideal Barbara Steele roles completely their own.

"It was very difficult for me, doing all those horror films at that particular period of my life," Steele confided to Christopher Sven Dietrich and Peter Beckman. "The difficult thing is that most directors demand excess in acting. They want a very expressive reaction at all times, which is fine for one take but, put together as a whole, looks a little overboard all the time. Vincent Price

can do that; I mean, he's a certain age, it's his makeup and he's got a certain kind of look to be creeping around pillars all the time. It's a fairly stylized form of filmmaking and they often want a stylized form of acting. But it's hard for a woman to do that." [44]

Unable to shake the impression she had made in her Italian horror films, Steele briefly retired from acting and married the American screenwriter James Poe, with whom she had a son. Poe is said to have written a role for Barbara in his screenplay adaptation of Horace McCoy's novel *They Shoot Horses, Don't They?*, which was ultimately played by Susannah York. As her marriage faltered in the early '70s, Steele made occasional surprise returns to the screen, almost always with novice directors destined for importance—i.e., Jonathan Demme's *Caged Heat* (1974), David Cronenberg's *Shivers/They Came From Within* (1975), and Joe Dante's *Piranha* (1978). After her 1980 divorce from Poe (who subsequently died), Steele went to work for producer Dan Curtis, for whom she co-produced the successful TV miniseries *The Winds of War* and *War and Remembrance*. In 1990, against all odds, Steele did exactly what she vowed never to do, by returning to the horror genre. She played vampire lover Dr. Julia Hoffman in Curtis' 1991 NBC-TV primetime revival of his '60s horror soap, *Dark Shadows*, which lasted only nine episodes.

An interview conducted during this period found her finally coming to terms with her screen persona: "I have total respect for Mario Bava and *Black Sunday*," she declared, "because it is visually stunning and that's what cinema is: visuals and atmosphere. It's like a Rembrandt. As an observer—if I remove myself and think of myself [as] an audience—I'm very grateful and respectful towards it." [45]



ANOTHER STRIKING *Reynold Brown design, used only on US window cards and ad mats.*

In 1992, Steele contributed liner notes to Bay Cities' compact disc release of Les Baxter's *Black Sunday* score, and in 1994, she collaborated with Video Watchdog on the publication of a 1995 *Black Sunday* Calendar. When the calendar debuted at the Chiller Theater Convention at the Meadowlands Hotel in Secaucus, New Jersey, Steele also sold T-shirts and videocassettes of the film, which she autographed. At a question-and-answer session hosted by Tim Lucas and David Del Valle, the actress gave her large audience exactly what they had longed to hear when she said, "Okay—I *loved* Mario Bava." After decades of resisting the brand he had burned into her career, her defenses fell as she finally embraced it.

Her feelings about the film have clearly changed, but her insecurities about her own contributions as an actress remain firm. "*Black Sunday* looks so exquisite to me today, as a film," she says. "It was probably the best of that genre of film I've made, but I don't feel it was the best for me as an actress. Frame by frame, it looks so beautiful . . . but anybody could have been playing that girl." [46]

Just as *La maschera del demonio* minted Barbara Steele's inescapable image as a horror star, it helped Mario Bava to discover not only his true calling, but his true identity. "My father's first film had a great success, especially in America," recalls Lamberto Bava. "The producers wanted this kind of film and they petitioned him for more. Consequently, he became passionate about it, reading nearly everything in literature of a fantastic nature, even very rare works . . . He was a fatalist who had a very profound sense of death, like an unavoidable event that could potentially intrude upon his every aspiration. In a way, with these films, he strove to purge these superstitious feelings, to exorcise them from himself. Yet he also had a desire for the unexpected, the unknown. Perhaps the fantastic gave him a means of addressing the things he did not want to happen, of stepping outside the real world in order to get away from the things we encounter every day."

And yet the film's extraordinary success had a perversely antagonistic effect on Bava's subsequent career. In the years following its release, critics were virtually unanimous in not only praising *La maschera del demonio* or *Black Sunday* as Bava's best film, but damning it in the same breath as his only good one.

Carlos Clarens' groundbreaking *An Illustrated History of the Horror Film* (1967) was the first reference book to take this view. Clarens opined that Bava never fulfilled his early promise because he quickly "rejected chiaroscuro in favor of lush Technicolor and developed the directorial flourishes of *La maschera del demonio* into mannered tricks, such as gratuitous shock cuts and an unrestrained use of the zoom lens." [47] Similarly, in a chapter on *Black Sunday* in his compendium *Cult Movies* (1984), Danny Peary recalled that the film "convinced many of us that Mario Bava would be a force to be reckoned with for many years to come. Unfortunately, he never made another movie half as good." [48]

There is no question that *La maschera del demonio* is one of the most confident directorial debuts in cinema history, far too accomplished to limit to its particular genre. However, Clarens' assessment overlooks the fact that it is every bit as guilty of shock cuts and zoom shots as any other Bava film; it also fails to consider the purely technical necessity for black-and-white in *Black Sunday*, or that Bava had built his reputation as a cameraman on works of

44 Dietrich and Beckman.

45 Ibid.

46 Ibid.

47 Carlos Clarens, *An Illustrated History of the Horror Film* (New York NY: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1967), 158.

48 Danny Peary, *Cult Movies* (New York NY: Delta/Dell Publishing, 1981), 35.

widescreen, Technicolor pageantry. *La maschera* was the exception—an aberration—not the rule. One imagines Clarens and Peary would have been no less critical of Bava, had he spent the rest of his career churning out uninspired variations on his first success.

The great irony of *La maschera del demonio* is that it was held in such high esteem by audiences and critics that Bava couldn't improve upon it, even by improving upon it. When his subsequent films were released in America, they were so badly dubbed, so compromised by editorial reworking, so far ahead of their time, or so difficult to see, that his distinguished debut can be regarded as a glorious fluke.

On the occasion of the film's belated release in London, Tom Milne laid down this candid assessment: "In general the atmosphere . . . is much closer to Gothic Transylvanian than is usual with Bava . . . About three-quarters of the way through, unfortunately, Bava's restlessly prowling camera suddenly gives up; after that the precarious atmosphere of unease is dissolved in a series of shock cuts and much rushing to and fro as all the loose ends are tidied away as quickly as possible."[49] The critical clarity of Milne's remarks was made possible by the fact that several of Bava's later, more personal works—like *Sei donne per l'assassino* and *Operazione paura*—were released in Great Britain well in advance of *Revenge of the Vampire*, enabling Milne to look back on the debut with greater objectivity.

The critical confusion surrounding Bava in America would persist until well after his death, but *Black Sunday* would always be held in high esteem. It was his most widely seen, most accessible film and, most importantly, it was the only one of his films to actually be improved by the meddling of an American distributor. These factors, coupled with Bava's reticence to discuss himself or his work seriously, led *Black Sunday*—an uncharacteristic work—to be misunderstood, for many years, as the accidental masterpiece of a flashy albeit uninspired hack.

When asked how his father felt about his own films, and how he reacted to unfavorable criticism, Lamberto Bava answers vividly: "He was a very private man, and did not speak about this. If someone recognized the value of his work, he was very happy; of course, the disapproval of the critics (who sometimes equated his films with comic strips) was hurtful, although a small group of intellectuals came to appreciate him. He would sometimes say, at the start of shooting a film, 'Now we're going to make a movie—and then we will all have *much* to be ashamed of.' It wasn't important to him that he join the pantheon of famous directors, some of whom he did not know, and are not generally known to the vast public. It was purely an amusement for him; he felt that he was making his films only for himself."

Remakes & Influences

Unbeknownst to Mario Bava, Gogol's "Viy" had been previously filmed in 1918 by the great Russian animator Ladislas Starevich (1892–1965), who had used it as the basis for an early experiment in the combination of live actors (Amo Bek Nazarov and Katia Senitskaya) and stop-motion animated demons. The short film ran only 1,200 meters.

The definitive adaptation of the story would not be produced until 1967, when Constantin Erchov and Gueorgui Kropatchov co-directed *Viy* for Mosfilm. The special effects of this production were executed by Aleksandr Ptushko—a director, art director, and special effects genius who specialized in works of fantasy such as *Kameny Tsvetok/The Stone Flower* (1946), *Sadko/The Magic Voyage of Sinbad* (1952), and *Ilya Muromets/The Sword and the Dragon* (1956), who was comparable to Bava in many ways. Directed by the younger Erchov and Kropatchov under the supervision of the ailing Ptushko (who died in 1973), *Viy* stars Leonid Kouraviliev as Khoma Brut and Natalya Varley as the witch. It is extremely faithful to the original story, and remarkable for its skillful teetering between the comic and the horrific. It isn't known whether the Russian filmmakers saw Bava's film, which is so loose in its adaptation of Gogol to be something else entirely, but the two films share a certain atmosphere and also certain directorial flourishes; for example, like Bava, Erchov and Kropatchov execute some wonderful 360° camera turns in the witch's crypt. *Viy*'s colorful, delirious staging of the final confrontation between Khoma Brut and the witch, who rallies all manner of hellspawn to her defense, is also remarkably similar to Bava's handling of the climactic Hadean sequences of *Ercole al centro della terra/Hercules in the Haunted World* (1961).

In 1968, Mario Bava was approached by Lawrence Woolner—who, with his brother Bernard, had distributed a couple of his films in the United States—with an offer to remake *Black Sunday* in color. Bava was all about process; he lost interest in his films once they were completed, so he had not seen his *capolavoro* in some time. Therefore, he arranged a private screening of the picture for himself and Lamberto, to see if the proposal was worth accepting.

"I didn't make the deal because my son and I couldn't keep a straight face as we watched it," Bava explained, in one of his rare published interviews. "Except for some rare masterpieces like Chaplin's films or *All Quiet on the Western Front*, people laugh at movies that are 10 years old—especially horror movies, which tend to look old-fashioned after even a couple of years."[50]

Bava's account sounds plausible, but he may have been using the interview to put a positive spin on the fact that the plans for this remake never quite came together. According to Bava's fan and friend Luigi Cozzi, Bava was not only receptive to this offer, but somewhat excited by the possibilities. "Two or three times, Mario told me that he was on the verge of making a deal to remake *La maschera del demonio* in color," Cozzi remembers. "When he spoke to me about it, he was very happy, but the deal always fell through." Bava's statement projects the calculated impression of a director who wants the world to know that he has moved up from his point of origin, and has learned to look down on his past work, as the producers he met were so fond of doing.

Almost two decades later, in 1989, Lamberto Bava announced his plan to do what his father never succeeded in doing: to remake *La maschera del demonio* in color. In truth, the resulting film is not a remake; it is as different to Mario's film as it had been different to Gogol's "Viy." Lamberto embarked on the production with hopes of casting Barbara Steele. "I wanted her to be in it," admits Lamberto, who sent her a personal letter of invitation. "She didn't even send a reply."

In Lamberto Bava's *La maschera del demonio*, four young couples on a skiing expedition accidentally disturb the glacial resting place of the diabolical witch Anibas (Eva Grimaldi). After removing a mask of spikes from the evil one's face, the ski party is rescued by a blind priest who offers them the comforts of his sanctuary until help arrives. It soon becomes apparent that three of the four couples have become unwitting receptors for the evil which Anibas swore on the descendants of her inquisitors. The untainted couple (Deborah Caprioglio and Giovanni Guidelli), chaste young lovers, are gradually defined as the battleground wherein the witch's victory or defeat must ultimately be decided, as her powers tease and test the corruptibility of their flesh, faith, and spirit.

Scripted by Massimo De Rita and Giorgio Stegani (whose previous work included Giorgio Ferroni's *Il mulino delle donne di pietra*, 1960), Lamberto's *La maschera del demonio* actually owes more to Gogol than his father's version did: the witch's carnal harassment of the priest; the hideous seduction-*cum*-transformation in the barn (expertly executed by effects artist Sergio Stivaletti); the portrayals of giggly, mischievous evil; and Anibas' demonstrations of her powers to the hero as she lies in state on her altar—all of these are splendidly Gogolian. Only the element of the spike-lined Mask of Satan is shared with Mario's interpretation. Elsewhere, the film provides a more satisfying, less superficial variation on the mythos found in Lamberto's *Demoni/Demons* (1985), dramatizing evil as an enemy that taunts us from within, rather than as



MEXICAN *lobby card.*

a virulent infection spread by drooling, gibbering, Heavy Metal miscreants. It's no *Black Sunday*, of course, but it's nevertheless one of Lamberto Bava's most personal and best-realized horror films, and also a most unusual Italian horror film of its period, one that teases our most primal insecurities and superstitions rather than run roughshod over its audience with gimmicks and graphic violence.

49 *Monthly Film Bulletin*, May 15, 1968.

50 Volta.

51 See *The Jack Kirby Collector* 13, December 1996, 42, where the debt to Bava's film is explicitly indicated.

In the forty-plus years of its reign, Mario Bava's *La maschera del demonio* has had an almost incalculable influence—on Bava's own peers, as well as on subsequent generations of artists and filmmakers. One of the first people to be graphically influenced by the film was the legendary comic book artist Jack Kirby (1917–94), who was well-known for using concepts and images from 1950s B-movies in his stories and artwork for "Silver Age" Marvel Comics. The influence of Bava is most strongly felt in two villains conceived to oppose the Fantastic Four: Doctor Doom (who first appeared in *The Fantastic Four* No. 5, 1962) and Diablo (first appearance: *Fantastic Four* No. 30, 1964). The former (whose origin story was first told in *Fantastic Four Annual* 2, 1964) was Victor Von Doom, the East European son of a dead witch, whose face was encased in a metal mask after it was hideously disfigured in a laboratory explosion. As Doctor Doom is generally acknowledged to be the primary inspiration for George Lucas' character Darth Vader, the great villain of the *Star Wars* movies can be traced—arguably—to Bava's Mask of Satan. Like Doctor Doom, Diablo is another East European monster—a Transylvanian alchemist and sorcerer buried by villagers within the ruins of his own castle 100 years ago, who is unwittingly freed by the vacationing Fantastic Four, who stumble upon his tomb. Diablo looks very much like a super-costumed version of Javutich, and in fact, the image of Javutich would reappear in Kirby's art years later, when he drew the vampire Count Dragorin in the two-part story "The Man From Transylvane" for DC Comics' *Superman's Pal, Jimmy Olsen* Nos. 142–43 in the 1970s.[51]

Perhaps the first filmmaker to show Bava's influence was Roger Corman, who, as AIP's main provider



of horror product, had an "inside track" of sorts. In addition to casting Barbara Steele in his *Pit and the Pendulum*, the influence of *Black Sunday* is apparent in *The Haunted Palace* (1963, an adaptation of H. P. Lovecraft's "The Strange Case of Charles Dexter Ward" deliberately misattributed to Edgar Allan Poe), which reprised many of its highlights: it opens with a warlock (Vincent Price) cursing the descendants of the townsfolk who are about to burn him alive; it then jumps 200 years ahead, when the warlock's twin descendant comes to inhabit the family castle and becomes darkly obsessed with his resemblance to his evil ancestor's portrait; elsewhere, there is a fight ending with a man falling into a blazing fireplace, a doctor hero, and a circular construction that ends with a second burning. It is possible that Bava drew some inspiration for *La maschera del demonio* from Lovecraft's story, as he later cited Lovecraft as his favorite writer.

Similar inquisition scenes occur in Chano Urueta's *El Baron del Terror/The Brainiac* (1961), Camillo Mastrocinque's *La cripta e l'incubo/Terror in the Crypt* (1964), Massimo Pupillo's *Il boia scarlatto/Bloody Pit of Horror* (1965), Michael Reeves' *Revenge of the Blood Beast/The She-Beast* (1966, also starring Barbara Steele), Harald Reinl's *Die Schlangengrube und das Pendel/Blood Demon/The Torture Chamber of Dr. Sadism* (1967), and Jim Wynorski's *The Haunting of Morella* (1990), which also made use of the film's good/evil twin theme. Imagery from *La maschera del demonio* made a startling reappearance in Tim Burton's virtually monochromatic color film *Sleepy Hollow* (1999), as Lisa Marie (a Steele lookalike) emerges from an Iron Maiden with her face punctured *à la* Princess Asa. One of Bava's most outspoken fans among the current generation of Hollywood filmmakers, Burton singled the film out as a major influence in the Channel 4 documentary *Mario Bava Maestro of the Macabre:*

PRINCESS ASA, *unmasked and consigned once again to flame, signals another of Bava's red-and-green lighting transformation effects.*

"One of the movies that remain with me probably stronger than anything is *Black Sunday*," he revealed. "I remember seeing images of it on TV as a child. Then I remember, when I was slightly older, I went to one of those horror marathons . . . a whole weekend where you sit there for fifty-some hours of horror films. You're sort of wafting in and out of consciousness, and the one film I remember from that whole weekend was *Black Sunday*. It was like a dream; [Bava] really captured film-as-dream, you know? People always say to me, 'Your films look good, but there's no story . . .' Well, there's a lot of those old films—his in particular—where the vibe and the feeling is what it's about . . . Bava was probably Number One that way, in telling you a story through the images and giving you a feeling. The feeling's a mixture of eroticism, of sex, of horror and starkness of image—and, to me, that is more real than what most people would consider as realism in films, because somehow it bypasses your mind and goes straight inside of you . . . To me, there's something about things that cannot be simply and quickly identified, and that are powerful, that makes them the most meaningful things of all. So yes, it was inspiring." Burton also hosted a special showing of *Black Sunday* as part of American Movie Classics' "Monsterfest" celebration in October 1998.

The popularity of *La maschera del demonio* may have yet to reach its zenith. A 1996 poll of the Top 25 Favorite Horror Films of All Time conducted by the British fan magazine *Shivers* placed *La maschera del demonio* at #15. In 2001, one year after Image Entertainment released Bava's director's cut on VHS and DVD for the first time in America, *Fangoria* polled its readers' choices for the ten greatest horror films made before 1970; *Black Sunday* actually tied for #7 with the film that helped inspire it, Hammer's *Horror of Dracula*—a ranking that would have been unthinkable in the Hammer-centric 1960s. (Even more surprising, James Whale's perennial favorite *Bride of Frankenstein* [1935] rode in at #8.)[52] What these polls show is that, while some traditional favorites are slipping, *Black Sunday*'s dark star continues in its ascent.

A possible disadvantage in the future history of *La maschera del demonio* came to light in October 2002, when Turner Classic Movies programmed a month of Mario Bava films for their weekly "TCM Imports" slot. The prints used for this retrospective were obtained from Alfredo Leone's International Media Films, Inc., and, in some cases, contained new editorial changes which Leone made in order to file new copyrights on the public domain material he had purchased in good faith. In no film were these changes more substantially, or disturbingly, inflicted than in *La maschera del demonio.*

Copyrighted 2000 by the Alfredo Leone Trust, this version—announced by TCM as *Black Sunday* but carrying the onscreen title of *La maschera del demonio*—predates the Image Entertainment release of *Black Sunday* (*The Mask of Satan*) on DVD, though it had never been publicly exhibited before 2002. While the onscreen title is here in Italian, the entire visual template is taken from the ELDA-dubbed *Mask of Satan* edition. Leone's version opens with the International Media Films Inc. logo, followed by a video-generated, red-on-black title card in scar-like lettering that reads, "Alfredo Leone Presents." As the executioner stokes the fire with a branding iron, the same red video-generated titles announce "A Mario Bava Film." From the moment the image fades up, through the shot of the S-shaped brand being pressed into the flesh of Asa's back, the soundtrack surprises us with a newly recorded (and horribly overwritten) narration:

> *Before the dawn of the Age of Reason, Satanic beings appeared across the world, lusting for blood. Simple folk and gentry alike rose up to desperately defend against the murderous assault of those monstrous undead horrors among them. No piteous pleas of human love or bonds of family afforded safety from condemning accusation. No beloved spouse or cherished brother was to be spared from the vampires for the flames of savagely justified destruction. At that time, a ritual began that signified the casting of the unholy ones into the abyss to suffer the eternal tortures of the dark underworld. Wielding steel and fire, the righteous inquisitors nailed the horrid mark of Satan into the unclean flesh of the damned, sealing their fate and establishing the Mask of Satan.*

Once the Mask of Satan is hammered onto Asa's face, the image of the mask that provided the backdrop to the original credit sequence is freeze-framed, and the title *La maschera del demonio* is superimposed in the same red, video-generated, scar-like font. The main titles are snipped out and reinserted at the end of the picture, following a red, video-generated *"Fine."*

The original music credit is replaced with a new card that credits the music jointly to Roberto Nicolosi and Les Baxter. Herein lies the key to Leone's most substantial changes, which occur on the level of its soundtrack. As anyone familiar with the original Italian (i.e. DVD) version can attest, several of *La maschera*'s most suspenseful scenes play out in a setting of eerie, desolated silence. In the International Media version, Nicolosi's sparse score is padded, whenever it fades down or out, with cues from Baxter's completely unrelated score for *Baron Blood* (another Bava film owned by Leone). Consequently, there is nary a quiet moment left in the picture; even the effects track has been beefed-up, so that when the Mirgorod villagers assemble at the Castle and are heard downstairs, they sound like they are about to crash through the doors upstairs. The film's original tenebrous soundscapes are robbed of all their intended subtlety, giving Bava's classic a heavy-handed feel that was never a part of its legend.

Clearly, Alfredo Leone was obliged to alter the content of these films to protect the rights he bought from Italian companies with correct chain of ownership, before becoming aware that the versions he bought had fallen into the US public domain. While one appreciates Leone's endeavors to keep Bava's name alive, and his need to recoup his investment costs, the existence of a reworking as drastic as this is potentially damaging to Bava's reputation. It was this version of *La maschera del demonio* that was used to represent Bava's work in the most prestigious American broadcast of its shelf life, but in place of the version Bava signed, TCM's viewers were shown a cacophonous, tone-deaf mess.

This aberration deserves to disappear back into the vaults whence it came, but its existence arouses reasonable concern for the future life of Bava's directorial debut. Might this version someday replace the superior *Mask of Satan* version currently available on DVD? Is this the version that will ultimately be passed down for the discovery of future generations? Only time will tell.

Beyond its artistic importance, *La maschera del demonio* represents a milestone in horror film history whose moment in time was transitional and decisive. It was the last great Gothic horror film in black-and-white. Other monochrome classics would follow—Robert Wise's *The Haunting* (1963), George A. Romero's *Night of the Living Dead* (1968)—but they were all contemporary in setting; they encouraged audiences to eavesdrop rather than to dream. *La maschera*, on the other hand, was like stepping back into the bedtime stories and nightmares of childhood; its opening narration could have easily begun with "Once Upon a Time . . ." But contrary to expectations, Bava used this magical, Old World setting to steer the genre into a disturbing new era. Here, horror was weirdly entwined with art, horror with beauty, and terror was tinged with poetry and a palpable new element of the erotic.

With one film, Mario Bava became the horror genre's last great classicist and its first great modernist.

52 Besting *Black Sunday* in the poll were *Psycho* (1960), *Night of the Living Dead* (1968), *Dracula* (1931) and *Nosferatu* (a tie for #3), *Rosemary's Baby, Frankenstein* (1931), and Robert Wise's *The Haunting* (1963).



MORGAN IL PIRATA

Morgan the Pirate



DETAIL *of US one-sheet poster.*

DURING THE PRODUCTION of *La maschera del demonio*, Mario Bava made the decision to follow that auspicious career chapter by returning to work as a motion picture cameraman—as though his opportunity to direct had never happened. He would follow the creation of his seminal horror classic with a gruelling six-month schedule of supportive (and partly anonymous) work that has mostly gone unchronicled.

Bava's main project during this period would be directing the photography of Galatea's upcoming international co-production with 20th Century-Fox, *Esther and the King*, to be directed by the legendary American filmmaker, Raoul Walsh. In the six-week period between the completion of *La maschera del demonio* on May 7 and the June 27 start date of *Esther and the King*, Bava loaned some uncredited assistance to the latest Steve Reeves picture, a co-production between Lux Film and Adelphia Cinematografica entitled *Morgan il pirata*.



SEVENTEENTH *century* *buccaneer Henry Morgan (Steve Reeves, third from right) is captured and enslaved in Panama.*

Marcello Gatti, later the award-winning cinematographer of Gillo Pontecorvo's *La battaglia di Algeri/The Battle of Algiers* (1965) and Enrico Maria Salerno's *Anonimo Veneziano/The Anonymous Venetian* (1970), met and worked with Bava several times on various uncredited assignments during the 1960s. "Whenever some special effect was needed, productions would call him," Gatti explains. "Mario would come, do his usual mysterious series of filmings, and take everything home to work on it, and later bring back the footage fully edited, with the special effects perfectly made."

Bava was happy to take these jobs; he was a professional paid for his services (presumably in cash), but in these situations, he agreed to work only on the condition that he received no credit. In a sense, his uncredited work—a virtual secret filmography—occupied the same place in his life that the sculpting of Saints occupied in the life of his father, Eugenio: it was work for the soul, his penitence for working in a business where self-promotion was essential to one's survival. In later years, Bava would explain his wish not to be credited by saying that he was a director, and that it could be detrimental to his career to be seen working as some other director's dogsbody. This was certainly true, but Bava had taken such jobs long before becoming a director, and he continued to take them after becoming a director because this was the work that he most loved to do. Creating illusions. Solving problems. Invisibly.

Because Mario's freelance jobs were uncredited, it has been impossible (till now) to look them up in reference books. The only way to find them is through the eyewitness testimony of colleagues, or by discovering them in the course of normal film-viewing, with an eye trained to recognize his particular arsenal of tricks, his brushstrokes. The latter is a very tricky business; the only special effects jobs I have included in the main body of this book are those which have been confirmed by Bava's co-workers and a few others which, my eyes tell me, unmistakably reflect his work. The more questionable titles are collected in a special appendix to this volume.

In the case of *Morgan il pirata*, we have the confirmation of Mario's son, Lamberto Bava. "Yes, it's true that my father sometimes worked on films for other directors, in secret," he admits. "When I became a teenager, I started to show more interest in my father's work and, sometimes, he would take me to the set with him. One of the earliest sets I remember visiting was *Morgan il pirata*." Lamberto would have been 16 years old at the time.

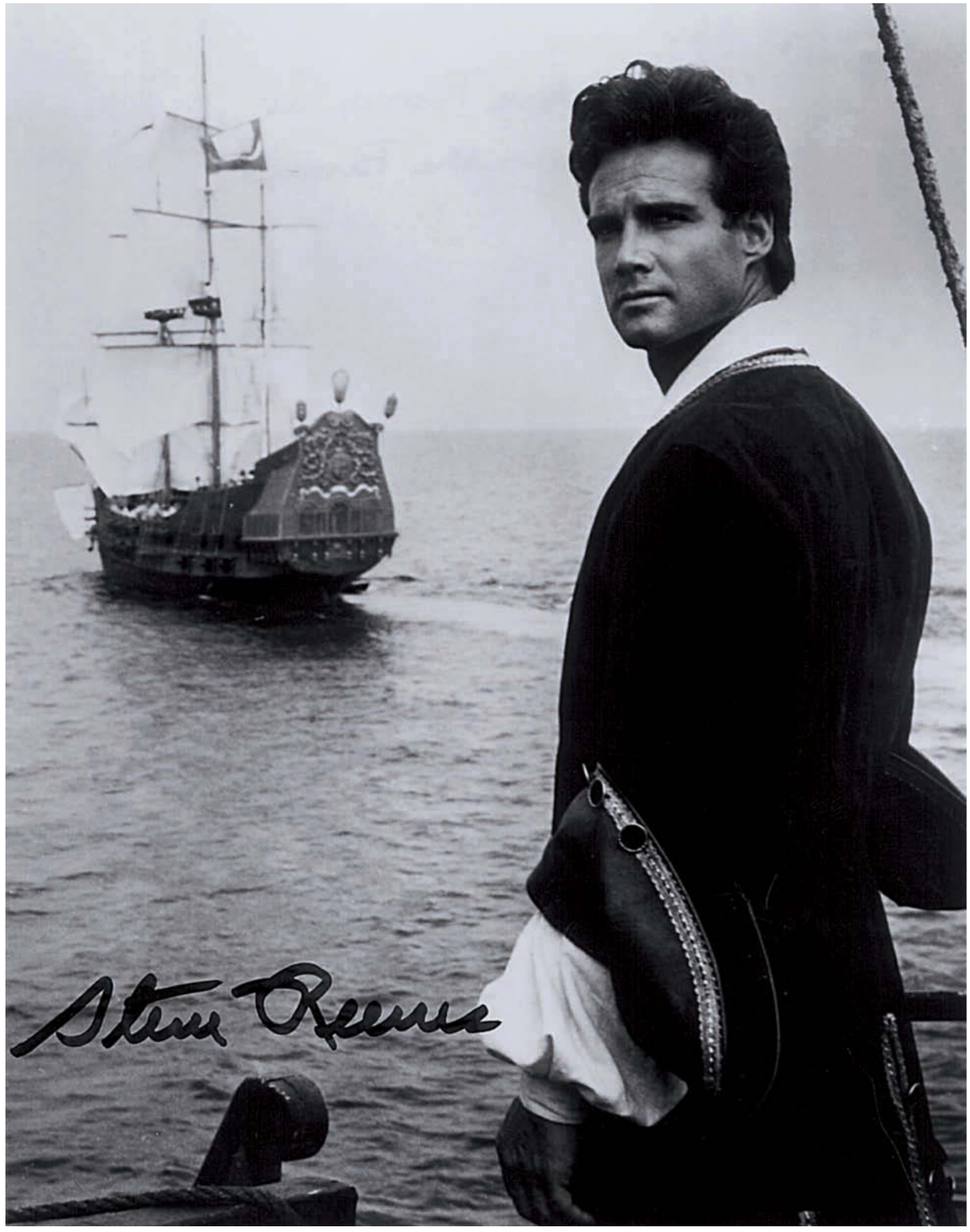
The first of Steve Reeves' films to be actively co-produced by Joseph E. Levine, after his success with the first two Hercules films in America, *Morgan il pirata* was primarily written by Bava's colleague Filippo Sanjust (*Agi Murad, Caltiki*)—again, with his services as costume designer attached. Brought in to direct the picture, at Reeves' request, was Andre de Toth. Born Endre Toth in Mako, Hungary, in 1912, he started making films in his homeland in the late 1930s, and like many other Hungarians, he fled his country as wartime invasions approached, turning for help to his most famous fellow countryman, producer Alexander Korda. Korda gave de Toth the opportunity to do some uncredited script work on *Lydia* (1941) for Julien Duvivier, and to provide some second unit direction to the classics *The Thief of Bagdad* (1940) and *The Jungle Book* (1942), after which he found himself directing *Passport to Suez* (1943), a "Lone Wolf" mystery starring Warren William. De Toth specialized in genre pictures—mostly crime thrillers and Westerns—achieving his greatest fame as the director of the horror classic *House of Wax* (1953), an ironic assignment as de Toth had only one eye and had to exploit the new "miracle" of 3-D without having any depth perception himself. By the same token, de Toth was that rare director of a pirate film to have actually worn an eye patch! After *Morgan il pirata*, he would helm

Morgan il pirata

"Morgan the Pirate"
Filmed at Titanus Studios (Scalera Film) and on location
May – June 1960
First released: November 17, 1960
Eastmancolor, CinemaScope, 2.35:1, 103 minutes

Production: Lux Film, Adelphia Cinematografica (Rome), Compagnie Cinématographique de France (Paris). Distributor: Lux Film.

Finland: *Meri-Rostvo Pirat-Morgan*, Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer
France: *Capitaine Morgan*, 6/23/61
Germany: *König der Seeräuber*, "King of the Pirates," 9/29/61, 94m
UK: *Morgan the Pirate*, Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer, 7/61, 95m 17s
US: *Morgan the Pirate*, Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer, 7/6/61, 96m



AUTOGRAPHED *portrait of Reeves in character.*

two more Italian costume pictures—*I mongoli/The Mongols* (1961) and *Oro per i Cesari/Gold for the Caesars* (1963), both co-directed with Riccardo Freda. His final credit was as co-director of a low-budget American horror film, *Terror Night* (1987), starring Cameron Mitchell. Andre de Toth suffered a fatal cerebral hemmorhage at the age of 89 on October 27, 2002.

Eight years before his death, de Toth published a thick book of memoirs, *Fragments: Portraits From the Inside*, but it included no mention of *Morgan il pirata*, perhaps indicating that he considered it more the work of his co-director than something of his own. The film's Italian director was Primo Zeglio, a director in his own right since the early 1940s, and also an occasional screenwriter for other directors (Francisci's *Attila*). In 1947, Zeglio directed a version of the oft-filmed story of Catholic sainthood, *Genoveffa de Brabante*, the only star vehicle of American actress Harriet White; in the 1950s, he became enamored of swashbucklers and directed two pirate films: *Capitan Fantasma* (1953) and *Il figlio del corsaro rosso/Son of the Red Pirate* (1958). After co-directing *Morgan il pirata*, he co-directed *Il dominatore dei sette mari/Seven Seas to Calais* (1961) with Rudolph Maté—the story of Sir Francis Drake, another sea-faring film with battle scenes supervised by Riccardo Freda. Zeglio would sometimes work under the pseudonyms Anthony Green, Anthony Greepy and Omar Hopkins.

Morgan il pirata is a 17th century swashbuckler about Welsh buccaneer Sir Henry Morgan (1635–88), who raided and plundered numerous Spanish settlements in the West Indies with the implicit support of the English crown. The film diverges considerably from historical record in its effort to complement its action with a love story.

Doña Inez (Valérie Lagrange)—the daughter of Don José Guzman (Ivo Garrani), the governor of Panama—first encounters Morgan (Reeves) as a slave being beaten during an auction. She buys him to stop the violence and assigns him to work as a groom in her stable. When her lady-in-waiting, Doña Maria (Lidia Alfonsi), discovers Morgan kissing Inez, she orders him arrested and he is scheduled to be drawn and quartered. He wins a reprieve in a lottery, and is consigned to work on a Panamanian slave ship instead. Morgan spearheads a successful mutiny and flies the pirate flag. In his travels, he conquers other ships and has a victorious duel against another buccaneer, François l'Olonnais (Armand Mestral), who has captured Inez and Maria—winning their release into his custody. Maria falls in love with one of Morgan's men, but Inez withholds the affection she feels until Morgan returns her safely to her father. After Morgan's raid on Tortuga, he is approached by Sir Thomas (Giulio Bosetti), governor of Jamaica and an



emissary from England, offering him a Knighthood, additional men and arms in exchange for a third of his plunders. When Don José Guzman forbids his daughter to see Morgan again and launches an attack against his fleet, Morgan plays along by staging his own death, later anonymously crashing the Governor's victory dinner for a minuet with Inez. Meeting secretly, Inez admits her love to Morgan, who refuses to let her join him yet. Instead, he decides to raid Panama and take the woman who loves him as his prize—entering not by sea as expected, but on land from the city's unprotected rear. It is a violent takeover, and while escaping her father's plan to sneak her away to safe haven in Spain, Inez is injured in the streets during an explosion. Morgan recognizes her medallion among the booty collected from bodies in the streets, and demands to be led to her. To his relief, he revives Inez, and the lovers reunite in a kiss.

Bava's covert contributions to *Morgan il pirata* are fairly easy to spot, because his cinematographic style is so much at odds with that of the film's principal cameraman, Tonino Delli Colli (b. 1923). Best known for photographing the Italian Westerns of Sergio Leone, Delli Colli—who first collaborated with Primo Zeglio on 1949's *Nerone e Messalina* ("Nero and Messalina")—is renowned for his arid, naturalistic visual style, which generally eschews shadow in favor of stark, sun-soaked imagery and an almost incidental limitation of color. Consequently, aside from the obvious trick shots, Bava's material tips its hand with its potent uses of color and shadow.

Bava's work first appears in a glass matte, which adds a palmy Panamanian vista to the plain background of a long-shot following Morgan's reprieve from execution. As Sir Thomas sails to the shore of Tortuga to meet with Morgan, we see another glass matte showing a fleet of five ships (more than the production could afford to build), viewed in silhouette over the shoulder of a foregrounded rock; this shot appears to have been achieved with nothing more than black paper cutouts, positioned on

FINNISH *one-sheet poster.*



STEVE REEVES *fences for freedom against Panamanian guardsmen in this US lobby card.*

glass against a night shot of the sea. There are also incidental shots throughout the film that show backgrounds of ships anchored offshore; some of these were real, while others were painted on glass. Bava also would have supervised the filming of the water tank shots of miniature ships at sea, notably the shot in which two ships explode into flames. These were optically merged with shots filmed on an actual beach.

In addition to these trick shots, it appears that Bava was put in charge of photographing some retakes and additional shooting, as were required by editor Maurizio Lucidi. The most impressive of this work is a colorful, impressionistic montage depicting Morgan's sea battle at Panama, which suggests far more than it shows. Built around close and medium shots of Reeves, this sequence convincingly takes place aboard a ship with a full crew, yet all that we see of the vessel are a single sheet (for the sail), a rope ladder, and a steering wheel, with a couple of stand-ins providing incidental background action in shadow. The rest of the illusion is supplied entirely by sound effects. One overlooks this material at first, as one should, but when viewed on its own, the footage is an astounding job of cinematic sleight-of-hand.

A suddenly increased sense of color and shadow also suggests Bava's participation in the filming of other scenes: the reunion dinner of Don José and Doña Inez after Morgan ships her safely home; Morgan's reunion with Inez on the balcony at her father's victory celebration (the people's festivities inserted into the background via blue screen), which is rich in reflected "flame" and "fireworks" lighting; and the concluding scene of Morgan reviving Inez in the street, where a subjective shot from the heroine's dazed point of view utilizes Bava's trademark "water glass," which he had used in pick-up shots for *Nel segno di Roma/Sign of the Gladiator* (1959).

In his Foreword to Andre de Toth's memoirs, Martin Scorsese writes, "In de Toth's films, there are no happy endings; only ambiguous ones." This is certainly true of *Morgan il pirata*, though here the ambiguity is the dimension of rape and pillage that provides a backdrop to its final reunion of the two lovers. There is just enough of a taste of compromise and abruptness about this "happy" ending to suggest that Bava may also have been brought in to forge a more upbeat conclusion.

Despite the measures that were taken to "fix" the picture, evidence of production difficulties abounds. Reeves' beard appears and disappears and is sometimes replaced with a fake beard (as during the mutiny scene), indicating a skewed chronology of takes and retakes. This matter is only exacerbated by the choppy continuity of the American edition, *Morgan the Pirate*, which was released by Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer in a version relieved of more than 10 minutes of footage. The movie is also compromised by its own amorality: for the first and only time, Reeves is cast as an irredeemable cutthroat who bows to no man or flag, and the balance of the cast is divided among characters who are either craven, criminal, or cowardly, leaving the viewer with no one to whole-heartedly champion. Though the rough edges are hard to overlook, *Morgan il pirata* is nevertheless one of Reeves' most satisfying vehicles, thanks to his sincere performance, some tautly directed action scenes (especially the initial duel between Morgan and L'Olonnais, as the latter amusingly declines to remove his shirt after Morgan removes his and stands bare-chested before him), and of course, Sanjust's magnificent costumes.

Morgan il pirata was reportedly budgeted at $2 million—amazingly, twenty times the cost of Steve Reeves' first Hercules film. In Italy, it earned back 618 million *lire* [$385,000], which was not a steep drop from the earnings of *La battaglia di Maratona* but still a noticeable one. Of course, the film's higher—one might say excessive—cost made it more unlikely to turn a profit, as did the fact that it had no fantasy content to attract younger viewers. Despite these handicaps, Joseph E. Levine spared no expense when premiering the picture in America. In addition to the full-page newspaper ads, relentless TV-spotting, and mammoth billboards, the producer took advantage of his existing business arrangement with Dell Publishing Co. to issue not only a comic book adaptation of *Morgan the Pirate,* but—because the film's lack of the usual magic and monsters were better suited to adult audiences—a novelization of the picture, as well. This was entrusted to Robert Carse, a frequent contributor to *Argosy* magazine who had distinguished himself as an authority on the topic of piracy, fictional and factual, with such books as *The Fabulous Buccaneer, From the Sea and the Jungle, Rum Row,* and *The Age of Piracy: A History.*



SPANISH *one-sheet poster, art by Soligo.*

ESTHER AND THE KING

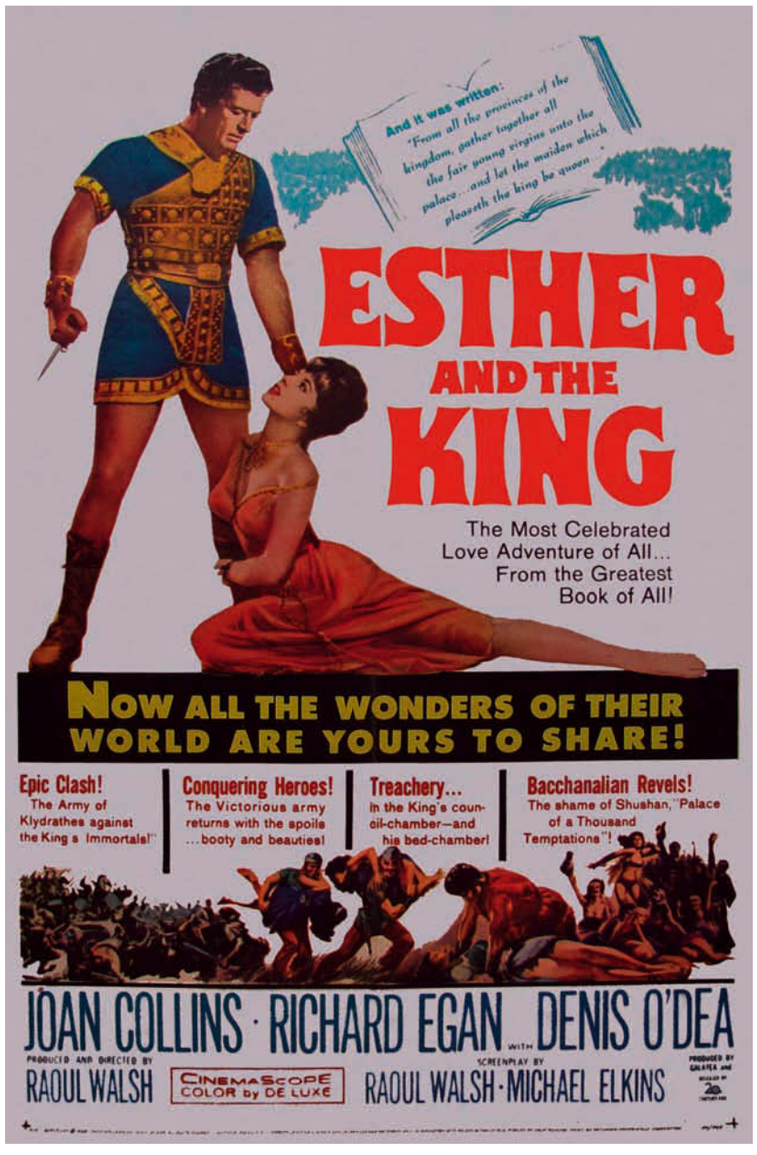
MARIO BAVA'S FIRST major project after the completion of *La maschera del demonio* represented a sharp shifting of gears. *Esther and the King*, a prestigious international co-production between Galatea and 20th Century-Fox, was based on the Book of Esther from the Old Testament. It was also the pet project of one of Hollywood's most illustrious veteran filmmakers, Raoul Walsh (1887–1980).

Walsh was the director of such Hollywood classics as *The Thief of Bagdad* (the 1924 version with Douglas Fairbanks), *The Big* Trail (1930, the first widescreen Western), *The Roaring Twenties* (1939, one of the last gangster films made before the advent of *film noir*), *High Sierra* and *They Died With Their Boots On* (both 1941), and the incendiary *White Heat* (1949). Walsh was given his start in films by David Wark Griffith, who assigned him his first directorial effort (co-directed with Christy Cabanne) the year Bava was born: *The Life of General Villa* (1914). He also acted in Griffith films—his most notable screen role being that of John Wilkes Booth in *The Birth of a Nation* (1915)—and was one of the thirty-six original founders of the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences.

Like Bava, Walsh had acquired a reputation for bailing out troubled productions. In 1954, when director Robert Wise was falling behind schedule with Warner Brothers' $4,000,000 epic *Helen of Troy* and realized that he no longer had the time to direct several crucial action scenes he had reserved for himself, Walsh was sent to Rome to helm second unit action sequences with Yakima Canutt. [1]

The 20th Century-Fox pressbook for *Esther and the King* paints his legend large: "Veteran director Raoul Walsh is a cigarette-rolling, drawling Texan who must have seemed like a figure out of a rip-roaring Western drama to the 150-member crew of Italians . . . Walsh appeared on the set in Rome each day in tight pants, Texas cowboy boots and ten-gallon hat, with a thin cornpaper cigarette in the corner of his mouth. He carried with him pounds of his favorite American tobacco which he rolled into cigarettes at the rate of forty a day, a supply large enough to last the twelve-week shooting period in Rome."[2]

But as Leonard Maltin notes in his *Movie Encyclopedia*, "Raoul Walsh was a storyteller who never let the truth get in the way of a good tale." In fact, at the time *Esther and the King* was made, Walsh was 73 years old and his eyesight was failing him. (He had already lost his right eye in 1929, while directing *In Old Arizona*, the first talking Western. In 1952, Walsh directed *Blackbeard the Pirate* with Robert Newton, making him—like Andre de Toth—another of the eye-patch-wearing directors in this genre.) He would retire altogether from filmmaking only three years later, when his blindness became total.



US *one-sheet poster.*

In a career spanning six decades and over 100 films, Walsh scripted only a few, and *Esther and the King* was one of these. One would therefore imagine that it was a personal film for him, yet it doesn't rate even a passing mention in his 1974 autobiography *Each Man in His Time*, nor does he include it in the book's filmography—omissions which suggest denial of paternity.

During the production, something—the need to hasten production, his failing eyesight, or perhaps an inability to speak Italian—caused Walsh to relegate a measure of authority to Bava. Perhaps it had to do with Bava's own performance on the set, which so impressed Walsh that he confided to a reporter, "As long as there are people like him working in pictures, there's no need to worry about the future of our industry. Anyone who knows as much as he does about film technique revitalizes the motion picture every time they work."[3] Whatever the reason, European references such as the *Dizionario del cinema Italiano* confirm that Bava directed additional scenes for the picture. Most of this material—second-unit type shots of slaves turning a wheel that opens the palace gates, picturesque scenes celebrating the female form, and assorted free-floating mayhem—is fairly apparent even on the first pass, not only because the footage is fraught with Bava's signature touches, but because it's the type of second unit material that would not have required Walsh's presence. The Italian version of the film, *Ester e il re,* credits the film's direction to both Walsh and Bava.

The Italian version is also unique in assigning its editing credit to Mario Serandrei—a curiousity, considering that the Italian version is identical to the version released everywhere else in the world, which is credited to Jerry Webb. (Webb's only other known editing credits appear on the American versions of Martin Ritt's *Five Branded Women* and Duilio Coletti's *Under Ten Flags*—both Italian-made films, both also filmed in 1960, and both credited to other editors in their Italian form. You tell me.)

So who was the film's ultimate *auteur*?

Ephraim Katz once wrote of Raoul Walsh, "He tackled a variety of genres but was at his best with virile outdoor action dramas, which he often mellowed with moments of genuine

Esther and the King

Filmed at Titanus Appia Studios (Cinecittà), Istituto LUCE, and on location
June 27 – September 15, 1960
First released: December 14, 1960 (US)
Color by Deluxe, CinemaScope, 2.35:1, 109 minutes

Production: 20th Century-Fox (US), Galatea (Rome). Producers: Raoul Walsh, Lionello Santi. Associate producer: John Twist. Director: Raoul Walsh. Co-director: Mario Bava. Assistant director: Ottavio Oppo. Screenplay: Raoul Walsh, Michael Elkins, Ennio De Concini (Italy). Dialogue coach: Harriet White Medin. Director of photography: Mario Bava. Camera operator: Ubaldo Terzano. Art direction: Giorgio Giovannini. Costume design: Anna Maria Fea. Makeup: Euclide Santoli. Hairdresser: Mara Rochetti. Production supervisor: Ferruccio de Martino. Production manager: Mike Holden. Production secretary: Franca Franco. Unit manager: Massimo De Rita. Editor: Jerry Webb, Mario Serandrei (Italy). Music: Angelo Francesco Lavagnino and Roberto Nicolosi, conducted by Carlo Savina. Distributor: 20th Century-Fox for all territories unless otherwise noted.

Joan Collins (Esther), Richard Egan (King Ahasuerus), Sergio Fantoni (Haman), Dennis O'Dea (Mordecai), Daniela Rocca (Vashti), Rick Battaglia (Simon), Renato Baldini (Klidrates), Folco Lulli (Tobia), Gabriele Tinti (Samuel), Rosalba Neri (Keresh), Robert Buchanan [Walter Williams] (Hagi, the eunuch), Aldo Pini (Captain of the Guards), Italo Tancredi (Gisko), Ombretta Ostenda (uncredited).

France: *Ester et le Roi*
Germany: *Das Schwert von Persien,* "The Sword of Persia," Deutsche Fox, 3/3/61, 102m
Italy: *Ester e il re,* 2/17/61
Spain: *Esther y el Rey,* Hispano Fox Films S.A.E., 4/2/62, 95m
UK: *Esther and the King,* 2/27/61



EXECUTIVE *producer Nello Santi and director Raoul Walsh converse with Mario Bava on the set.*

tenderness."[4] *Esther and the King* fits this description perfectly in terms of its scripting and general supervision, but it also belongs to its cameraman in ways that transcend visual style. It might best be described as a Raoul Walsh film interpreted by Mario Bava. It isn't a film Bava would have made without Walsh, yet it looks like a Bava film, sounds like a Bava film and, most significantly, has the distinctive limitations of a Bava film. To put it succinctly, it's the only Raoul Walsh picture that loses its sense of paternity whenever the action shifts outdoors.

Synopsis

Persia, "2,500 years ago."[5] King Ahasuerus is returning home with his armies after conquering Egypt. As they approach the city of Shushan, the King halts his troops and rewards Simon, a Judean soldier who saved his life in battle, with the Sword of the Golden Rooster. When Simon expresses his eagerness to reunite with his fiancee, Ahasuerus gives him a plundered Egyptian necklace as a gift for the bride.

Simon's homecoming is anything but happy: a dead man hangs by the neck from the rafters of his own home, a warning from the King's prime minister, Prince Haman, that all Jews must remember to pay their taxes. Simon is reunited with Esther, his virginal bride-to-be who boasts of never having looked at another man. As one who lived under the tyranny of the King's minister during the war, she scoffs at Simon's allegiance to the King and throws the monarch's gift ruefully in the dirt.

True to the King's suspicions, Queen Vashti has been unfaithful during his absence, sleeping with the power-mad, drug-sniffing Haman, who covets the throne. When the King returns, he demands the truth of Vashti's misbehavior from his chief counselor Lord Mordecai—uncle to Esther—who explains that his eyes do not penetrate into the Queen's bedchamber. Ahasuerus immediately storms into Vashti's rooms, calls her "adulteress" and declares that, from that moment on, she is dead to him. Angry and embittered, Ahasuerus calls a secret meeting with Haman and Mordecai, announcing his immediate plan to conquer Greece and destroy "that young upstart" Alexander. As the King lays out his battle plan, Mordecai inscribes his strategems on



KING AHASUERUS *(Richard Egan) loses his heart to Esther (Joan Collins), the abducted fiancee of a Judean soldier who once saved his life in battle.*

1 John Cary, *Spectacular: The Story of Epic Films* (Secaucus NJ: Castle Books, 1974), 71.

2 20th Century-Fox pressbook.

3 Raoul Walsh, as quoted in Pascal Martinet, *Mario Bava* (Paris, France: Edilig, 1984), 10.

4 Ephraim Katz, *The Film Encyclopedia* (New York NY: Harper Collins Publishers, 1990).

5 An historical error already. 2,500 years before 1960 would be approximately 540 B.C.—21 years before the acknowledged birth of the film's hero, King Ahasuerus—better known as King Xerxes I. The chronology of the synopsis in the 20th Century-Fox pressbook is even more askew, dating the action in 400 B.C.—65 years after the King's death.

tablets in Hebrew. Listening intently to the King's words, Haman concocts a plan to dispose of Mordecai, destroy the King, and usurp his throne.

That night during the celebratory revels, the spiteful Vashti dances provocatively before the court, strips herself naked before the King and spits at his feet. Hamar points out to the King that Persian law provides only two punishments for this offense: death or banishment. Ahasuerus banishes Vashti, but contrary to these orders, Haman instructs his henchman Gisko to kill her. He smothers her to death with a pillow.

Now, according to the ancient laws of Cyrus, a new Queen must be chosen from all the fairest virgins in the land, and Haman schemes to navigate his favorite courtesan, Keresh, into the throne he imagines will soon adjoin his own. He also busies himself with preparing a false set of battle plans, written in Greek and annotated in Hebrew, with which he plans to incriminate Lord Mordecai of treason. Meanwhile, he orders Klidrates, the Captain of the Guards, to raid the village and return with the requisite virgins, but not to pay too much attention to their beauty, lest they pose a threat to Keresh. In the Judean sector, royal guardsmen ride into town and abduct every young woman in sight, actually kidnapping Esther from her wedding to Simon before it is concluded. The outraged groom nearly murders a guard in trying to save Esther, and is advised by Mordecai to conceal himself until further notice in the ancient ruins of the City of the Dead.

Esther is taken to the palace. To ensure the success of Keresh's bid for the crown, Haman arranges for the three most beautiful captives—Esther among them—to be given to the guards for their pleasure. The King, sweaty from wrestling with his guards, witnesses the attempt and anonymously rescues the women. The next day, the court eunuch Hagi notices that Esther has dressed herself for the royal audition in a simple white garment. He admires her humility and rewards it by making her wear an ostentatious golden cape to her meeting with the King. As she models the garment, Haman instructs Gisko to remember the girl in the golden cloak . . . Just before Esther's appointment with the King, the scheming Keresh—determined to be noticed—steals the cloak and receives the fate intended for Esther. During her audition, Esther is recognized by the King as one of the women he rescued, and she is amazed to recognize her savior in this King whose reputation she has long abhorred. Almost immediately, they are attracted to one another, and the King announces the selection of his Queen.

Haman is displeased. After flogging Gisko for the murder of Keresh, he threatens Esther directly, warning her not to thwart him or he will inform the King that they have been lovers. Learning from Mordecai that Esther is preparing to wed Ahasuerus—with the blessing of her uncle, who hopes their union will establish a lasting peace between the Persians and the Judeans—Simon uses his Sword of the Golden Rooster to gain access to the palace, and tries to persuade Esther to escape with him. She refuses, and when Simon threatens to kill the King, Esther realizes that she does in fact love Ahasuerus and sounds a gong, forcing Simon to take flight.

King Ahasuerus celebrates the coronation of his new Queen by introducing a new and fairer system of taxation, and announcing that his forthcoming campaign against the Greeks will be funded not by additional taxes, but rather by spoils from the royal treasury at Persepolis. Fearful that his embezzlement from the treasury will be discovered, Haman suggests an alternate plan, based on an ancient law: that the coming war against Greece should be funded by annihilating the Jews and reaping their silver. The King declares this law archaic and hateful, and officially permits the Jews to worship their own God . . . until Haman charges Lord Mordecai of copying the King's secret military strategies and selling them to a Jew in Greece. At once, Ahasuerus angrily orders the arrest and execution of the Jews, starting with Mordecai, at which point Queen Esther shocks the court by confessing that she too is a Jew. The King asks her to renounce her faith and live, but she refuses, accusing Haman of treachery, and beseeching her husband to postpone Mordecai's execution until he returns from visiting the treasury at Persepolis. He agrees.

Haman casts Pur (colored tiles) for guidance, and a blood-red tile lands on the current month of the zodiac chart on his floor. Thus confirmed, he promises Klidrates 1,000 tallents of gold for the head of the King. Klidrates rides ahead to the City of the Dead with the intention of assassinating Ahasuerus as he rides by. Simon, in hiding there, overcomes Klidrates and notifies the King, who delivers the final blow and has Klidrates' severed head delivered to Haman at the palace. Reunited, Ahasuerus and Simon double back to overthrow Haman, who in the King's absence has staged the discovery of the false battle plans incriminating



HAMAN *(Sergio Fantoni), Ahasuerus and the Captain of the Guards (Aldo Pini) admire the beauty of their Jewish female prisoners.*

Mordecai and ordered his immediate hanging.

Having escaped an attempt on her life by Gisko, Esther joins her people at the Judean Temple, where they have assembled in defiance of the King's decree to observe the Sabbath. Simon arrives with the King's ring—his Seal of Empire—and orders the Master of Arms to supply the Judeans with weapons. The armed Jews storm the palace in time for Simon to save Mordecai, but as he removes the noose from the old man's neck, he is mortally wounded by a palace guard. Haman seizes a chariot to escape the bloody fracas, but finds his path of exit blocked by the King, who commands his guards to "Hang him . . . Hang him high!"

Simon is carried to the temple, where he dies in the lap of Esther. Lord Mordecai decrees that this day of the Jewish people's deliverance must never be forgotten, and since it was brought about by Haman's casting of the Pur, this day will henceforth be known as Purim.

One year later, on the first celebration of Purim, Ahasuerus returns home from the Grecian wars, defeated by Alexander. He is greeted by Esther, who explains to Mordecai, "It was not for his victories that I loved him."

Cast

The expert wrestling moves demonstrated in the film by King Ahasuerus are authentic. Born in San Francisco on July 29, 1921, rugged Richard Egan worked as an Army judo instructor during WWII and taught public speaking at Northwestern University upon returning to civilian life. He first appeared onscreen in Joseph Pevney's *Undercover Girl* (1950) and graduated to heroic leads in Fox adventure films and melodramas. Rugged, well-educated, and physically fit, he moved into costume roles as Dardanius in *Demetrius and the Gladiators* (1954, the sequel to the first CinemaScope film, *The Robe*, 1953). After *Esther and the King*, he returned to Rome to make *The 300 Spartans* for director Rudoph Maté. In later years, he was most frequently seen on American series television. He died of prostate cancer on July 20, 1987.

The role of Esther was won by Joan Collins, a British actress who made her screen debut in 1951's *Lady Godiva Rides Again* (1951). Born in London on May 23, 1933, she moved to Hollywood in her early 20s and became a 20th Century-Fox contract player, achieving her first major success opposite Jack Hawkins in Howard Hawks' Egyptian epic *Land of the Pharaohs* (a loan-out to Warner Bros., 1955). This was followed by major roles in *The Virgin Queen* and *The Girl in the Red Velvet Swing* (both also 1955), and various contemporary roles tailored to her sultry brand of sensuality. Collins, whose romances with Nicky Hilton and Warren Beatty were frequent grist for Tinsel Town publicity mills, was nearing 30 at the time she played the virginal Esther.

She recalls the film unkindly in her autobiography *Second* Act: "I thought the screenplay for *Esther and the King* was one of the most appalling I'd ever read . . . [it was] my final film for Fox and far and away the worst."[6] A true industry survivor, Collins continued to receive top billing throughout the 1970s in various British horror films (including *Tales From the Crypt*, 1972, and *I Don't Want to Be Born/The Devil Within Her*, 1974) and reinvented herself in the late '70s as the mature star of erotic films like *The Bitch* and *The Stud* (both 1979), based on best-selling potboilers by her younger sister, Jackie. She celebrated her 60th birthday by posing nude for *Playboy*, and found her greatest success on the American TV series *Dynasty* as archbitch Alexis Carrington Colby. She published two volumes of autobiography, beginning with *Past Imperfect* in 1978, which was followed in the late '80s and '90s with a series of torrid romance novels and a perfume of her own design.

Denis O'Dea, the stoic Irish actor who played Lord Mordecai, was born in Dublin on April 26, 1905. Although he made his first Italian film—Maurice Cloché's *Peppino e Violetta*—in 1950, he made several films in America during that decade, sometimes working as "Dennis O'Dea." He was an evident favorite of Raoul Walsh, who had previously used him for supporting roles in *Captain Horatio Hornblower* (1951) and *Sea Devils* (1953). Their reunion on *Esther and the King* may have been serendipity; at the time of production, O'Dea had relocated to Rome and was making a living in the dubbing industry. He dubbed his own voice in *Esther;* his dry, world-weary tones can also be heard in many other English-dubbed *pepla* of the period. This was apparently his final onscreen appearance, though he lived nearly another twenty years, until November 5, 1978.

Simon was played by Rik Battaglia, born Riccardo Battaglia in 1927, who made his screen debut in Mario Soldati's



HAMAN *warns Esther not to thwart his plans to overthrow the King.*

6 Joan Collins, *Second Act* (New York NY: St. Martin's Press, 1996), 125.

smoldering *La donna del fiume/Woman of the River* (1955), opposite Sophia Loren. Athletic with handsome, earthy features, Battaglia was a natural for historical pictures and he made many of them, including *Orlando e i paladini di Francia*, *Teseo contro il Minotauro/The Minotaur* (1960), Edgar G. Ulmer's *Annibale/Hannibal* (1961), and Robert Aldrich's *Sodom and Gomorrah* (1962). Between 1963 and 1968, Battaglia worked primarily in West Germany, appearing in a series of Westerns based on the writings of Karl May, the first of which was *Old Shatterhand* (1963). One of his few Italian film appearances during this period was a small, nothing role as Barbara Steele's ill-fated lover in *Amante d'oltretomba/Nightmare Castle* (1965). After appearing in Sergio Leone's *Giù la testa/A Fistful of Dynamite* (1971), his roles became fewer and he found himself working in sexploitation fare like *Il mondo dei sensi de Emy Wong/Yellow Emanuelle* (1976) and *Suor Emanuelle/Sister Emanuelle* (1978). *Esther and the King* is one of many films that credit his name as "Rick." Battaglia hasn't appeared onscreen since 1992.

Renato Baldini (Klidrates) is onscreen in *Esther and the King* more often than anyone viewing the pan-and-scanned home video release might expect. Watching this cropped version, one might well wonder what Baldini did to warrant such prominent billing, but when the film is viewed in its original widescreen format, Klidrates is often shown complementing Haman's position onscreen, giving Richard Egan's King the appearance of being subtly surrounded and quietly overwhelmed by his enemies. Born in 1921, Baldini was in fact one of the actors most active in the *peplum* genre, sometimes billed as Ryan Brennan or Rajan Brennan. Among his credits are Riccardo Freda's *Teodora imperatrice di Bisanzio/Theodora, Slave Empress* (1954), *Giuditta e Oloferne/Head of a Tyrant* (1958), Freda's *Agi Murad il diavolo bianco* (1959), *Il figlio di Spartacus/Son of Spartacus* (1963), and numerous Antonio Margheriti films, including *La freccia d'oro/The Golden Arrow* (1962), *I giganti di Roma/The Giants of Rome* (1964), *Anthar l'invincibile/The Devil of the Desert vs. the Son of Hercules* (1964), and *La morte viene dal pianeta Aytin/Snow Devils* (1964). Baldini's has not made a film since 1983.



QUEEN VASHTI *(Daniela Rocca) feels her grip slipping on the newly enamored King.*

Surprisingly, Gabriele Tinti—who plays the minor role of Samuel—had appeared in almost twenty features prior to *Esther and the King*. Born Gastone Tinti in 1932, he made his film debut in 1947 and is said to have played a small role in the Bava-photographed *Amor non ho! . . . però, però . . .* (1951). His first important movie was Alessandro Blasetti's 1952 comedy, *Altri tempi/Time Goes By*. (Looking over the familiar cast list of this film—Aldo Fabrizi, Gina Lollobrigida, Andrea Checchi, Folco Lulli—one imagines that Bava himself could not have been very far from the set.) Young and handsome, Tinti kept well-employed during the *pepla* boom, appearing in Mario Caiano's *Ulisse contro Ercole/Ulysses Against the Son of Hercules*, *David e Golia/David and Goliath*, and Edgar G. Ulmer's *L'Atlantide/Journey Beneath the Desert* in 1961, and *Sodom and Gomorrah* in 1962. Tinti clearly ingratiated himself to director Robert Aldrich, for whom he worked again in *Flight of the Phoenix* (1965) and *The Legend of Lylah Clare* (1968). In the early 1960s, he married Brazilian starlet Norma Benguell (who starred in Bava's *Terrore nello spazio* [1965] as "Norma Bengell"), and he would work again with Bava himself in 1973, playing the chauffeur in *Lisa and the Devil.* He was also known to work under such aliases as Gus Stone and Peter Gabriel (!).

Daniela Rocca, who had played roles of increasing prominence in such Galatea films as *La battaglia di Maratona* and *Caltiki il mostro immortale*, turns the minor but pivotal role of Queen Vashti into a showcase. According to actress Harriet White Medin, Rocca was the mistress of producer Nello Santi and their relationship would last several years, eventually precipitating a divorce that led to the dissolution of Galatea in 1965. Medin recalled an amusing story about the filming of Queen Vashti's defiant veil dance, a striptease in which the excommunicated Queen strives to embarrass the King before his court.

"I'll never forget that day!" Medin laughed. "Raoul Walsh hired a professional dancer—an Austrian—to do the actual dancing, and he planned to film Daniela dancing only in close-up. Well, the day came to shoot the dance and Daniela suddenly got it into her head that she would do the dance herself. There was some debate about it, but she had some influence with the producer, shall we say, so she finally got her way. Daniela was built like a brick you-know-what, and when she started wiggling and running around . . . well! I've never seen so many people on a set become so fascinated by their *shoes*! Everybody was looking straight down at their feet, because Santi was on the set, and if anyone had laughed, heads would have rolled!"

Rocca was indulged but, in the final cut of the film, almost none of her ungainly flitting and swooning was preserved onscreen. Virtually the entire performance consists of the lithe and limber movements of the aforementioned Austrian dancer, whose face can plainly be seen in several shots. In fact, the sequence is so disregarding of any attempt to persuade the audience that Rocca was doing her own dancing that one can almost believe there was an element of reprimand involved. This was Rocca's last movie to be filmed by Mario Bava, but she followed this role with her greatest international success, as the mustached wife of Marcello Mastroianni in Pietro Germi's *Divorzio all'italiana/Divorce Italian Style* (1961). She made a few other good films after breaking off with Santi in 1963, including Damiano Damiani's Alberto Moravia adaptation *La noia/The Empty Canvas* (1963) and Fred Zinnemann's *Behold a Pale Horse* (1964), and she also published some books of fiction and poetry. All that has been recorded of her later years is that she was a patient in a mental institution at the time of her death, on May 28, 1995, in Milo, Sicily.

"Robert Buchanan," who gives an amusingly fey performance as the King's much put-upon eunuch, was a *nom d'ecran* for American-born expatriate actor Walter Williams. He would work with Mario Bava again in *La ragazza che sapeva troppo/Evil Eye/The Girl Who Knew Too Much* (1963, as "Robert Buchanan") and *Diabolik/Danger: Diabolik* (1968, unbilled). In 1966, he was billed under his real name for his supporting role as one of Ursula Andress' advisors in Elio Petri's *La decima vittima/The 10th Victim*, and for a small part that yielded two short scenes with Barbara Steele in "Bridge of Spies," an episode of the NBC-TV series *I Spy*. He dubbed his own performance in *Esther and the King.*

The role of Haman's equally predatory mistress Karesh was entrusted to Rosalba Neri, born June 19, 1939, in Furli, Emiglia Romana. Neri made her first screen appearance as a teenager in Guido Leoni's *I pinguini ci guardino* (1955) and played small roles—sometimes uncredited, as in Luigi Comencini's *Moglie pericoloso* (1958)—until reaching maturity, when her face achieved an uncanny, sultry, sphinx-like aspect. Cast in a minor role in Fernando Cerchio and Anton Giulio Majano's *Il sepolcro dei re/Cleopatra's Daughter* (1960), she was far more physically deserving of the lead role played by Debra Paget. After her memorable supporting role in *Esther and the King*, Neri would be hired to work with Bava once again in *Ercole al centro della terra/Hercules in the Haunted World* (1961), but—although credited on some prints—she does not actually appear in the film itself. Neri's regal, feline looks would be well exploited throughout the *peplum* years of Italian film production, and she was able to balance B-movie assignments like *Ercole contro Molock/The Conquest of Mycenae* (1963) with the occasional important art house release like Pasquale Festa Campanile's *Voci bianche/White Voices* (1964). As the screen became more permissive in the late 1960s, Neri met its challenges head on, making a series of films with Spanish *enfant terrible* Jess Franco (beginning with 1967's Pop Art satire *Lucky il intrepido/Lucky the Inscrutable*) and agreeing to play a series of increasingly decadent characters, immoral or amoral, who felt no compunction about appearing completely nude; in 1971's *La bestia uccide a sangue freddo/Slaughter Hotel*, she revealed all in a startlingly graphic masturbation scene. For a brief period in the early 1970s, she adopted the screen name of Sara Bay, seducing her own brain transplant patient in Mel Welles' *Lady Frankenstein* (1971) and bathing in virgin blood in Luigi Batzella's *Il plenilunio delle vergini/The Devil's Wedding Night* (1973). Retired from films since the mid-1980s, Rosalba Neri is fondly remembered by many Euro cult fans as one of the most enticing women ever to grace the screen.



ESTHER *is prepared for her first audience with King Ahasuerus by the court eunuch (Robert Buchanan), as Keresh (Rosalba Neri) looks on.*

Production

According to its main titles, *Esther and the King* was filmed at Titanus Appia Studios, but the true production site in this case was Cinecittà. Harriet White Medin reflected fondly on a staple of studio life:

"They used to have these terrible box lunches—actually they were *wonderful* box lunches—at Cinecittà," she told me. "One day, Daniela was having lunch with me and she couldn't finish her bread. She hesitated for a long time, and finally, she *blessed* the bread. She made the Sign of the Cross on herself and then over the bread and then she threw it away! She looked over at me, somewhat embarrassed, and said, 'You know, in Sicily, we were so poor that it was considered a sin to throw bread away.' And I was very touched by that." These box lunches—called *cestine*, or *cestina* when singular—figure prominently in Federico Fellini's *Intervista* (1987), his moving tribute to the studio.

In an interview granted one year before his death, Bava looked back on the experience of working with Raoul Walsh on *Esther and the King*: "I always worked very quickly. Twelve days at the most it would take me to make a film. And with all the lines in my head. I always had the final assembly in mind, so that nothing was ever wasted, not so much as a meter of film. But the Americans—Walsh, for example—'covered' themselves, as they say. They didn't concern themselves with being creative, only with covering themselves. They would shoot the same scene twenty times, in case something went wrong. Once I said to Walsh, 'Maybe the camera should pan away to a brazier, so you can overdub the dialogue later and be sure of getting every word right.' He thought I was joking and laughed."[7]

Bava's opportunity to contribute more to the picture may have arisen from the script's unusual faithfulness to the Biblical texts that inspired it. The Old Testament account differs only in that Esther was an orphan adopted by Mordecai, and it was Mordecai (not Simon) who saved the King's life from Egyptian assassins, thus winning his favor as council to the court. Additionally, Queen Vashti was not an adulteress, nor did she shame the King with a torrid dance before the Court; instead, she lost her crown for speaking out of turn in court. She was banished, but never murdered on the orders of Prince Haman.

By examining closely the way the scenes are edited together, it appears that Walsh and his collaborator Michael Elkins originally intended to remain true to the Bible story, and to excuse Vashti from the narrative with her banishment. The scene where she spits on the floor and walks away from the King is as good an exit as any. When Gisko smothers Vashti with a pillow, it's one of those moments in the film where the guiding hand of Walsh cannot be felt at all. The aversion of the actress' face strongly suggests that the scene was a post-production insert, filmed without even the participation of Daniela Rocca.

The documentation of Bava's co-direction, combined with Mario Serandrei's editing credit and the shared credit for the film's musical score, suggests that, at some point after the film was completed by Walsh and scored by Angelo Francesco Lavagnino, Fox executives (or preview audiences) opined that the film was too long on talk and short on thrills. Consequently, Nello Santi may have been ordered to supply some reshoots, including a more violent demise for Queen Vashti. This material was shot at Cinecittà under the direction of Mario Bava, edited into the existing assembly by Mario Serandrei, and rescored with Lavagnino's tapes and additional music by Nicolosi.



MARIO BAVA *demonstrates his knife-throwing prowess to a gathering of cast and crew members (including an amused Joan Collins), then impresses them with Poloroid's newly introduced miracle of instant photography.*



The material Bava directed is fairly easy to pinpoint for anyone familiar with the music of Lavagnino, who was evidently not available or willing to rescore the extra footage. This material was then entrusted to Nicolosi, the composer of *La maschera del demonio.* Lavagnino's lyrical, heroic, uplifting score is an ideal accompaniment to the film, but during a number of brief scenes—Vashti's murder, Gisko peering through parted red velvet curtains for a glimpse of the golden cape, Haman sadistically whipping the brute for his mistaken killing of Keresh, and some individual shots of Simon entering the palace and fleeing the royal guards—the intrusion of Nicolosi's murkier, gloomier music jolts this Biblical epic into the alternative realm of Bavian horror. This scenario would also explain why Walsh might feel that *Esther and the King*—which he wrote, produced, and directed—was ultimately not his picture, and why he didn't include it with his other films in his autobiography.

If Nicolosi's ominous, baleful music can be taken as an indicator of where Bava's post-production tweaking was done, it begins as early as Simon's homecoming, when the returning hero is shocked by the sight of a Judean hanged from the roof of his house as Prince Haman's warning to other tax-payers. It's hard to tell what may have been added to this sequence, since the subsequent dialogue between Esther and Simon refers to the hanging—unless Walsh had elected to imply the horror rather than show it.

Some post-production sleight-of-hand is definitely discernible in the next instance of rescoring. After the King opts for the Queen's banishment, Prince Haman exits and is next seen entering a private corridor guarded by Gisko. He summons Gisko to his side and orders him to fetch the lady Keresh and bring her to his quarters, indicating that he has already forgotten Vashti and is now looking ahead to replacing her with someone more suitable for himself. The camera pivots away from them to Klidrates, who enters the corridor in good humor asking if he might sample some of the Prince's Syrian wine. Then the scene cuts back to Haman, who suddenly has a *new* priority: "There is another matter even more important," he tells Gisko. "It has to do with Queen Vashti." He whispers a short command

into the brute's ear as the scene dissolves. If this matter truly was more important, wouldn't it have been his first command to Gisko—to ensure that the Queen was truly out of the way, before inviting a pretender to the palace? By examining the shot continuity closely, it becomes clear that this last bit was added later, requiring the entire sequence to be rescored by Nicolosi.

Vashti's death scene is obvious as a post-production insert because it was filmed using a double for Daniela Rocca, who was very much in demand that year, also starring in Giuseppe Vari's *Le vendetta dei barbari/Revenge of the Barbarians* and Vittorio Sala's *La regina delle amazzoni/Love Slaves of the Amazons*. Indeed, Bava may have decided to have the Queen smothered with a pillow because it was the only way to keep the face of Rocca's stand-in hidden throughout the entire shot! The result is a glaring anomaly in the Bava catalogue: the violent death of a beautiful woman that does not pay reverence to the face of the victim.

Nicolosi's music can also be heard, coincidentally, in the two scenes pertaining to Prince Haman's scheme to frame Lord Mordecai with forged documents pertaining to the King's plans for war against Greece. The first is the conversation between Haman and Klidrates following the aforementioned scene with Gisko, wherein Haman explains his plans while forging the documents, and the second finds Klidrates leading a group of soldiers into the Jewish Temple and pretending to discover the inscribed tablets in a secret repository. Indeed, there seems to be no reason for this subplot at all, other than to lend additional intrigue and bring the film up to a respectable length, because after usurping the throne in the absence of Ahasuerus, Haman really needs no excuse to authorize Lord Mordecai's execution. Why stage the incrimination of Mordecai in front of a gathering of Jews who have already been sentenced to death?

The shots of Simon using his Sword of the Golden Rooster to gain access to the palace are also curiously scored with this horror music, perhaps to lend suspense to the procedure. Again, these would have qualified as second-unit material even had they been shot during production, and it's hard to imagine Walsh wasting his time on them under the best conditions.

The movie is unusually short on matte paintings and other visual effects, considering Bava's involvement. The upper levels of the King's palace are clearly a glass matte extension, and it also appears that the environs of the City of the Dead may have been partially matted—not to add, but to eliminate location details from view. The most impressive special effect in the picture is the severed head of Klidrates, an uncannily realistic prop which may have been sculpted by an uncredited Eugenio Bava.

According to the film's pressbook, the American release of *Esther and the King* was expected to coincide with the release of an original soundtrack album, but the recording was never released—not even in Italy. Nevertheless, Harriet Medin recalled that 20th Century-Fox spared no expense in promoting the film, flying Daniela Rocca and herself from Rome to the United States to participate in a publicity tour. "We came to New York . . . and went up to Boston for some reason," Medin recollected. "I had a brother, Franny, living at that time who was a paraplegic, and he was in a hospital for incurables at Idlewild. Of course, I went to visit him and Daniela wanted to come with me. I wasn't sure if I wanted her to do that, but she seemed to want to. So we swept into this hospital, one of those terrible places where people are too old or too weak to hold their heads up, run by the Order of St. John of God. I must say, Daniela caused quite a stir—this Italian movie actress wafting through the place, looking every inch like an Italian movie actress. It was quite a day! I still don't know if, by going there, she was being very kind or curious or what, but I'll never forget the look of happiness and excitement that her presence brought to my poor brother's face."

Commentary

20th Century-Fox was the birthplace of the widescreen religious epic, beginning with Henry Koster's *The Robe* (1953), the first film lensed in CinemaScope. In 1960, the genre had reached its zenith, William Wyler's remake of *Ben-Hur* (1959) having just swept the Oscars. *Esther and the King* has all the trappings of a religious epic, but it is not a Christian epic, so it offers none of the miracles and overt special effects that made the most famous of these films so popular. Instead, it's a love story with subplots of religious persecution and political intrigue, which never really explores the conflicting ideals of the Persians and Jews, eschewing the spiritual in favor of the humanistic.

The Judaism at the heart of its conflict—the source of Esther's, Mordecai's, and Simon's basic decency—

BEHIND *the scenes shot of Joan Collins and Rik Battaglia relaxing with dialogue coach, actress Harriet White Medin.*



7 Dante Matelli, *L'espresso,* May 1979.

is condensed into symbols, as when Bava's camera tilts up from a scene to a decorative Star of David, or when Mordecai presents Simon and Esther with the wedding gift of a *mezuzzah*. The point of Judaism, as far as this story is concerned, is to find happiness in one's work, one's brethren and one's God, and to contrast this happiness with the emptiness of the life and spirit of the King, "the most powerful man in the world."

Ahasuerus rules Persia with the codes of his forefathers, laws written and enacted (as Lord Mordecai says) in "an age of hatred." Essentially a good man, Ahasuerus feels himself burdened by these laws; when he is reminded by Haman that he must replace his banished Queen with another, he broods about "The dead hand of Destiny trying to thrust on me some unknown female." The emptiness of the Persian laws is emphasized by the King's ability to overrule them at will, further indicating that his problems are ultimately rooted in the emptiness of his own heart. As Mordecai expresses to Esther and Simon, "Something has changed him—a disillusionment, a despair . . . In all honesty, I think he would envy you." Though not particularly well conveyed by Egan's robust performance, the King is afflicted with the same *noia*, or ennui, that beset Princess Katia in *La maschera del demonio* and rendered her vulnerable to the manipulation of evil forces.

The Persian god is depicted in the form of a horned, half-human/half-animal idol allied to the casting of lots known as "Pur." Before he is shown deciding when to murder his King with a toss of these tiles, Haman boasts to Esther that "Mine is a life of hazard," two references that tie the Persian god to the restless, volatile energies of chaos, hazard, and chance. Other associations are evoked during the scene in which Haman bids Gisko to remember the girl in the golden cape; the wooden screen concealing them from view is composed of interlocking swastikas, an image ironically complemented later in the film in the Jews' Temple, as the men receive swords through a wooden screen in the configuration of interlocking Stars of David.

One of the film's most interesting characteristics, textually as well as visually, is this pervasive sense of irony. The movie's bookending images of Persian troops returning home after battle—the first carrying the spoils of victory, the second carrying the wounded on makeshift stretchers—is only one instance, of several, in which one scene is used to comment ironically on another. Similarly, when Esther is abducted from her wedding to Simon, the castaway groom is thrown by the raiding soldiers to the ground, where he falls in the same position as did Vashti, when Ahasuerus disregarded her; the complementary body language not only equates the two characters in relationship to the marriage of Esther and the King, but underlines the raid itself as a gesture of the King. Gisko's accidental killing of Keresh is yet another example, as is the eventual decapitation of Klidrates, which occurs in the City of the Dead not far from its centrally erected statue of an ancient soldier—whose fallen head lies upturned on the ground beside it. But the ultimate, and subtlest, of the film's ironies is the fact that Prince Haman's scheme is ultimately successful, despite King Ahasuerus and despite himself, and that the film manages to find its climactic happiness in a moment of humility and defeat.

During the musical and choreographed dance sequences that were *de rigueur* in Italian spectacles of the period—composed and lighted with painterly ingenuity by Bava, in ways that prophesy his handling of the Sibyl scenes in *Ercole al centro della terra/Hercules in the Haunted World*—the irony surfaces in the dialogue as well. King Ahasuerus surprises the viewer by leaning toward Haman and asking about the singer, "Who is the one that wails like a she-wolf baying at the moon?" When the song segues into kaleidoscopic, belly-jutting choreography, he ups the ante by demanding, "What court idiot decided to bore me with this sorry spectacle?" It's no wonder, under the circumstances, that no one accepts credit for the choreography, but this sequence is notable in that *Esther and the King* is the only Italian *peplum* to regard this now-obligatory display with open contempt. (Those who have read this book from the beginning may recall the young Mario's reaction to being entertained by dancing girls at a supper club where his family was dining: "When those idiots go away, call me!")

Because Bava's cinematography is so lush and beautiful, it's tempting to look no deeper than its surface, but *Esther and the King* reveals the depth of his appreciation of the psychological and ironical values of color and composition.

During the sequence of Simon's homecoming, his conversation with Esther (including his defense of the King) is filmed from a number of different angles, each of which features a different background image of Jewish people engaged in honest toil. This is then ironically contrasted with palace life, when the scene segues to Queen Vashti refreshing her appearance after a tryst with Haman. Similarly, after Ahasuerus calls Vashti an "adulteress," the irony is purely visual when he storms out of her royal bedchamber and plops down amid his concubines to sulk. Bava's eye for the



FRENCH VHS *cover adapted from the original French affiche, art by Georges Allard.*

female form is not only appreciative, but idealized, and when his camera attends to the abducted virgins being bathed and dressed for the King's choosing, the images convey the same voyeuristic *frisson* as the dressing room scenes in *Sei donne per l'assassino/Blood and Black Lace*. It is also worth noting, along these lines, that Bava was perhaps the first cameraman to use the widescreen dimensions of CinemaScope to pay homage to that other great panorama of the 1950s, the *Playboy* centerfold. Some of the film's most striking images are of Daniela Rocca, Rosalba Neri and other actresses captured from head to toe (or in one memorable composition, from thigh to toe) in delectable horizontal displays of sexual invitation.

The cinematography also showcases Bava's ability to combine actors, art direction, and color lighting in ways that reveal the psychology of character. During their secret war meeting, Ahasuerus, Lord Mordecai, and Haman are each presented in medium shots with tellingly different backgrounds: Ahasuerus is seated before a wall adorned with carved lions, bathed in gold and amber light evocative of wealth, warmth, and power; Mordecai is framed by two marble columns and the flame of a hanging lamp, suggestive of his support and wisdom; and Haman, whose false allegiance to the King has yet to be revealed, is flanked on either side by a violet curtain and a projection of green light falling on an ornamental horned idol, a literal illustration of his covert envy of all the King possesses. When Haman challenges Mordecai by daring to brandish his sword, Bava cuts to an alternate set-up from which only the green background and a madly flashing, contrapuntal vat of flame are visible. Similarly, when Esther meets Mordecai in the palace for the first time, and he attempts to persuade her that it might be best for their people were she to pursue the King's favor, Bava lights the wall behind their dialogue with a clash of red and green. Backgrounds are also imaginatively employed at the moment Ahasuerus first recognizes Esther: over his shoulder, bathed in amber light, is a large, ornamental molding of a female monarch—a eureka of the Queen of Persia.



ITALIAN *fotobusta featuring a conference between Haman, Mordecai (Denis O'Dea), and Ahasuerus. Note Bava's prominently displayed credit as director.*

Yet another instance of chromatic storytelling can be found in the scene where Ahasuerus expresses his love to Esther and asks if she has any affection for him. At this moment, Bava positions Richard Egan in a way that he appears to be emerging from the shadows into a field of intense red lighting—redolent of lust and candor—that limns his features; meanwhile, sitting beside him on the same couch, Joan Collins is not only dressed in white, but bathed in white light, making her look all the more virtuous, isolated, and unsure. A few moments later, after rejecting Simon's attempt to escape with her, Esther meets Ahasuerus again on the balcony of the throne room, and even in the moments before their first kiss, he and she are both ablush in red light. The only time the evil Haman comes into contact with red light is when he is whipping his hapless henchman, Gisko, within an inch of his life.

Although *Esther and the King* is a sumptuously visual experience, it is also a verbose film, overburdened with *faux* "historical" dialogue. The intimate scene between Ahasuerus and Esther, in which he brings her the gift of a lion cub, exemplifies the best and worst of this. The King is charming as he recounts his shortcomings: "I fear I could never imitate a lover. My hand was fashioned for a sword, and not the strings of a lyre. And these feet were not made to prance to music—they're uncommonly large, don't you think?" But he leans a bit too risibly toward *double entendre* when he responds to Esther's timid allowance of romantic interest with, "So I have gained the outer ramparts . . . yet you guard the inner citadel with more tenacity than the Greeks!" In a film this picturesque, the dialogue needn't be. In fact, the dialogue is so overwritten that it sometimes obscures the utterance of important plot details, which become clear only after repeated viewings.

The film's other great weakness may point to a more literal division of the directorial duties than English prints admit. There is an unmistakable schism between the major scenes involving the English-speaking actors—the ones that Walsh would have certainly commandeered—and those involving the Italian actors. The film's major stars (in all fairness, Joan Collins excepted) give hollow, stoic, over-rehearsed performances, while the Italian actors sparkle with freshness and spontaneity. They appear to have been *directed*.

But by whom? Bava may have obliquely answered that question in the brief memoir he contributed to the book *La città del cinema*. He did not exclude Raoul Walsh from his comments when he wrote, "I have worked with some American directors, and I never saw one of them stand up and tell an actor how a scene should be played. They just sit and shout, 'Action!' In Italy, however, the director does everything."





CAMERON MITCHELL, *the definitive hero of Bava's adventure films, hoists his sword high in Giacomo Gentilomo's L'ULTIMO DEI VICHINGHI—a film partly directed by Mario Bava.*

GIANTS, VIKINGS, AND THIEVES

I giganti della Tessaglia (Gli argonauti)
L'ultimo dei vichinghi
Il ladro di Bagdad

LA MASCHERA *del demonio* would not begin to make money and attract serious attention until its subsequent releases in France and the United States in 1961. Mario Bava took the initial non-returns of his directorial debut philosophically and was quite satisfied to continue working as before, accepting whatever offers that came his way. His next three jobs were uncredited.

I giganti della Tessaglia (Gli argonauti)

After working with Raoul Walsh, it must have felt like a homecoming for Bava when he was asked by Riccardo Freda to provide some special effects shots for his next film, *I giganti della Tessaglia (Gli argonauti)/The Giants of Thessaly,*[1] a film that anticipated the Ray Harryhausen adventure *Jason and the Argonauts* (1963) in much the same way Freda's *Spartaco* had preceded Stanley Kubrick's *Spartacus* (1960).

Freda's behavior on film sets could be erratic and quite volatile. It is said that Freda lost interest in directing films as he gained interest in horse racing, and that the films he did direct—after a point—were undertaken in the gambling spirit.

"[Freda] was a huge fan of race horses, owned some horses himself, and was also a gentleman rider," confirms Marcello Avallone, who served as his assistant director on *L'orribile segreto del Dr. Hichcock/The Horrible Dr. Hichcock* (1962). "I often went to the race track, and sometimes enjoyed running the horses, and he appreciated the way I trained them. He had a horse named Zignago, so one day he told me, 'If you will train Zignago every morning, I will make you my assistant director.'"

In fact, *Hichcock* was undertaken by Freda as another bet with producers Ermanno Donati and Luigi Carpentieri, *à la I vampiri*. "Freda said, 'I bet I can shoot a film in ten days,' and they bet him a race horse that he couldn't," recalls the film's star, Barbara Steele. "He wanted that horse very badly and we all felt obliged to help him. We were running at top speed through the entire movie."

Freda never really cared for the horror genre; he invested much more of his heart in historical costume pictures, and *I giganti della Tessaglia* was something of a return to this kind of production, and also Freda's initial effort in the *peplum* genre. It was a coproduction of Alexandra Produzioni Cinematografiche (Rome) and Societé Cinématographique Lyre (Paris), shot partially at Cinecittà and at the Istituto LUCE. Freda had not directed an entire feature since *Agi Murad il diavolo bianco* in 1958.

While Jason (Roland Carey), the King of Jolcus, sails in search of the fabled Golden Fleece aboard the ship Argos, his abandoned kingdom is seized by the evil usurper Adrasto (Alberto Farnese), who wants Jason's wife Creusa (Ziva Rodann) for his own. After surviving a terrible storm at sea, the Argonauts are greeted from an island shore by women who swim out to meet them. Jason is greeted by the island's queen, Gaia (Nadine Duca), who is actually an evil, withered crone bent on transforming the entire male crew into sheep. They eventually escape her clutches, but encounter yet another terror at their next port—a kingdom plagued by a hideous, one-eyed ape creature. Jason swears to slay the monster, and one of the young Argonauts—Eurystheus (Luciano Marin)—falls in love with the King's daughter, Atalanta (Cathia Caro). After Jason and his men slay the cyclops, they set sail, and one of the men, Telemachus (Pietro Tordi), discovers Atalanta has stowed away. He is stopped from taking sexual advantage of his discovery by Eurystheus, but all three are placed on trial. Telemachus is to be whipped, while the two lovers are to be set adrift together on a raft with two weeks of provisions. The couple survive and find their way back to Jolcus, where Eurystheus overhears the news of Adrasto's forthcoming marriage to Creusa, who has agreed only in order to protect the life of her only son. Eurystheus swims out to the Argos to inform Jason, and the Argonauts organize a surprise attack during the wedding ceremony.

Watching *I giganti della Tessaglia*, the viewer gets the immediate impression that an entire first reel is missing, and that a desperate attempt to disguise this unevenness was made with narration. It is an entertaining picture, nevertheless, but more of a succession of rousing scenes than a satisfying whole.

The cinematography is credited to two cameramen—Vaclav Vich (*La corona di ferro/The Iron Crown*) and Raffaele Masciocchi (who had photographed *La Venere dei pirati/Queen of the Pirates*, starring Gianna Maria Canale)—which may account for some of the film's imbalance. Another explanation is found in a footnote relevant to this title, which appears in the Freda filmography in the 17th issue of the French magazine *Présence du Cinema:* "Certain insert scenes were filmed by the assistants, at the producers' request, following Freda's departure." Thus, it is yet another instance of Freda starting a picture and walking away before it was finished.

When I first saw *I giganti della Tessaglia* in 1984, I thought I recognized the hand of Mario Bava in a number of special effects scenes. Since we were in touch at the time, I decided to telephone Riccardo Freda directly for confirmation. He was a little vague at first, but then he asked me for the Italian title, and to describe the scenes in question. "You have a good eye," Freda told me, laughing. His memory refreshed, he confirmed

I giganti della Tessaglia (Gli argonauti)

"The Giants of Thessaly (The Argonauts)"
Filmed at Cinecittà and Istituto LUCE
August – September 1960
First released: December 6, 1960
Eastmancolor, SuperTotalScope, 2.35:1, 95 minutes

Production: Alexandra Produzioni Cinematografiche (Rome), Societé Cinématographique Lyre (Paris). Distributor: Filmar.

Belgium: *De Reus van Thessalie*
France: *Le Géant de Thessalie,* 1961
Germany: *Das Schwert des Roten Giganten,* "The Sword of the Red Giant," 3/6/64, 86m
UK: *The Giants of Thessaly,* 1963
US: *The Giants of Thessaly,* Medallion Pictures, 1962, 86m

L'ultimo dei vichinghi

"The Last of the Vikings"
Filmed at Titanus Studios and on location
August – October 1960
First released: February 8, 1961
Eastmancolor, Totalscope, 2.35:1, 105 minutes

Production: Tiberius Film. Distributor: Galatea.

Belgium: *Die Laatste der Vikings*
Denmark: 4/29/63
Finland: 4/27/62
France: *Le Dernière des Vikings,* 9/15/61
Germany: *Der Letzte der Wikinger,* 10/13/61, 104m
Spain: *El Ultimo Vikingo,* 8/7/61
UK: *Last of the Vikings*, Mondial Films Ltd., 4/62, 100m, Certificate "A," passed with cuts
US: *Last of the Vikings*, American International Pictures, Eastmancolor/Dyaliscope, 5/62, 102m

Il ladro di Bagdad

"The Thief of Baghdad"

Filmed at Titanus Studios and on location in Kairouan, Tunisia
October – December 1960
First released: March 23, 1961
Eastmancolor, Techniscope, 2.35:1, 100 minutes

Production: Titanus (Rome), Lux de France (Paris). Distributor: Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer in all territories unless otherwise noted.

Argentina: *El Ladron de Bagdad*, CinemaScope, 1961
France: *Le Voleur de Bagdad,* Lux Cinématographique, 8/9/61, 95m
Germany: *Der Gauner von Bagdad,* 3/1/62, 88m
Iceland: *Pjofurinn frá Bagdao*
Spain: *El Ladrón de Bagdad,* 8/30/62
UK: *The Thief of Baghdad,* 12/62, 89m 58s, Certificate "U," passed with no cuts
US: *The Thief of Baghdad,* 8/10/61, 90m



BELGIAN *affiche.*

that Bava did indeed provide a few uncredited effects shots to the picture. These included:

• The shots of the ship Argos being tossed about on a stormy sea, or engulfed by fog (miniatures shot in water tanks).

• The long-shots of the Colossus, whose open hand holds the Golden Fleece, flanked on either side by four columns topped with flaming braziers (a matte painting including photographic elements, with the braziers and pathway filmed live on set, allowing the actor to approach the towering statue).

• An impressive shot of the Argos sailing into a city's harbor (a miniature ship positioned before an optically inserted background and behind a foregrounded photographic cut-out on glass), and so on.

The film's opening panoramic shot includes a backgrounded, smoking volcano that may also be Bava's handiwork, as it resembles the same working miniature that is glimpsed briefly through a fissure in the wall of Omphale's cave in *Ercole e la regina di Lidia.*

One of the movie's highlights is a fabulous encounter with a giant, cyclopean gorilla designed by Carlo Rambaldi, whose work up to this time had always been filmed under the supervision of Eugenio Bava. In fact, since the film's credits list the Istituto LUCE as one of its production headquarters, it is likely that Eugenio was placed in charge of these sequences and procured the services of Rambaldi and also Mario, who wasn't working on a project of his own at the time. Mario's participation is indicated by the bold red and green lighting scheme within the monster's cave, as his revolutionary ideas about saturated color lighting were not yet embraced by his peers. "When I started using red and green gels, everybody told me I was crazy," he complained to interviewer Dante Matelli in 1979. "Nowadays, when Fellini uses them, they're all speechless with joy!"[2]

Of all the film's special effects scenes, none is more clearly indicative of Mario Bava's creative presence than the scenes involving the witch Gaia, which suggest how similar transformation scenes in *I vampiri* and *La maschera del demonio* might have been handled technically, had Bava photographed them in color. For the first scene, actress Nadine Duca was positioned to the right of a sheet of glass and lit so that her own reflection shone brightly on the glass. Then, on cue, her lights were dimmed as the lights were raised on the other side of the pane, where an extremely aged double was seated and matched perfectly to Duca's reflection, as seen through the camera. The old woman (uncredited) beseeches Apollo for a short extension of her youth, drinks from a small phial, and the lighting schemes are reversed, restoring Duca's reflection. The magic of the transformation is further complemented with a subtle, red overprinting (or double exposure) of ordinary cigarette smoke bending in the air, but printed backwards to accentuate its unnatural quality. There is also a second transformation in the picture, but it simply cuts away from Duca to a close shot of Jason, then cuts back to the elderly double, with the strange smoke configurations replayed over her face and gestures as she curses him. Because age is suggested here by the real thing, and bolstered by Carlo Rustichelli's chilly score, the sequence is actually more effective here than in its earlier, more celebrated, black-and-white stagings.

At the time I spoke to Freda, my eyes were peeled only for special effects scenes; I inquired no further, because the picture had a credited director. In hindsight, and especially in light of the aforementioned *Présence du Cinema* footnote, I wish I had also taken notice of some scenes that

1 *I giganti della Tessaglia* is unique among films of its kind in having an onscreen alternate title in parentheses "*(Gli argonauti)*"—but it is not known to have played anywhere in the world under this title.

2 Dante Matelli, *L'espresso,* May 1979.



ITALIAN *fotobusta featuring Carlo Rambaldi's one-eyed gorilla creature and typical Bavian scenery.*

suggest Bava's possible involvement as a replacement director or cinematographer, and asked for Freda's confirmation of these, as well—but, of course, he might not have known what happened after his departure. One aspect that particularly caught my notice is the introductory scene aboard the Argos—as Jason (Roland Carey) and his crew fight against a terrible storm—which appears to have been photographed on the same minimal ship set later used in Vittorio Cottafavi's *Ercole alla conquista di Atlantide/Hercules and the Captive Women* and Bava's *Gli invasori* (both 1961), a largely suggestive set which Bava later took credit for designing. Also, the staging of two later scenes aboard the Argos are redolent with Bavian atmosphere: the trial of Eurystheus (Luciano Marin) and Telemachus (Pietro Tordi), with both men tied together to the ship's mast and with an eerie green light on the face of the former (anticipating the scene of a vestal virgin bound together with her lover in barbed wire in *Gli invasori*), and Eurystheus' reunion with Jason after swimming out to the ship to inform him of Adrasto's plan to marry his abandoned wife Creusa and seize his kingdom, which qualifies as a Bavian scene because the entire background is suggested by nothing more than fog.

All that is known for certain is that one of Freda's assistants directed some additional scenes following his departure, and that one of his assistants on this production was in fact Mario Bava.

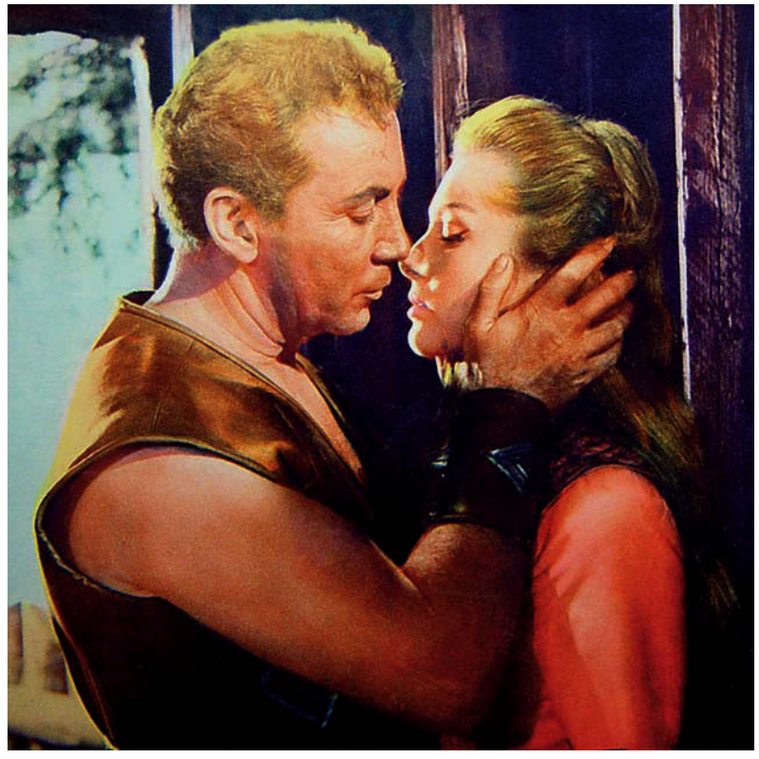
L'ultimo dei vichinghi

As the *pepla* prospered in Italy, expanding from the epicentral Steve Reeves to encompass a whole generation of bodybuilders ready and willing to fill his sandals, a new kind of costume picture arrived in Roman theaters to inspire a new wave of imitations: Richard Fleischer's *The Vikings*, starring Kirk Douglas and Tony Curtis.

Based on the novel *The Viking* by Edison Marshall, *The Vikings* was a $2.5 million dollar production filmed on location in Norway. It became one of the biggest boxoffice smashes of 1958, and when it finally reached Italy in 1960 as *Gli vichinghi*, it became one of the highest-grossing Italian pictures of that year. In accordance with Italian tradition, a host of imitations were rushed into harbor. The first of these—produced by Tiberius (Rome) and Criterion (Paris)—bore the ironic title of *L'ultimo dei vichinghi/Last of the Vikings*.

The film's director was Giacomo Gentilomo, who was born in Trieste on April 5, 1909. Like Mario Bava, Gentilomo turned to films after putting aside his dream of becoming a painter. He entered the film business in 1934, working as an assistant director, editor, screenwriter, and documentarian. Rising to the rank of director in 1939 with *Il carnevale di Venezia* (co-directed with Renato Simoni), Gentilomo's career included operettas, *commedia del'arte*, historical dramas, and such major films as *I fratelli Karamazoff/The Brothers Karamazov* (1947), *Enrico Caruso* (1951), and *Sigfrido* (1957), which marked the screen debut of special effects *maestro* Carlo Rambaldi, who devised a magnificent, life-sized mechanical dragon under the technical supervision of Gentilomo's old friend, Eugenio Bava. After *Sigfrido*, Gentilomo took a three-year break, returning to the director's chair with *L'ultimo dei vichinghi*. The film was produced by Galatea, which explains how Mario Bava came to be involved.

Cast in the lead role was American actor Cameron Mitchell, who was destined to become one of Bava's favorite colleagues. Born Cameron McDowell Mitzel on November 18, 1918, in Dallastown, Pennsylvania, he was the son of a minister who pursued a career



CAMERON MITCHELL *as Viking king Harald, who falls for Danish princess Isabelle Corey in L'ULTIMO DEI VICHINGHI.*



GIORGIO ARDISSON *(left) and Cameron Mitchell are featured in an unmistakably Bavian moment from L'ULTIMO DEI VICHINGHI.*

in the theater, though it meant incurring his father's displeasure. Mitchell reached the Broadway stage by the time he was 21, but his fledgling career was interrupted by World War II, in which he served as an Air Force bombardier. His theatrical and wartime experience helped him to land a choice supporting role in John Ford's *They Were Expendable* (1945), his screen debut. He continued to act almost exclusively in war-themed dramas (always in supporting roles) until he scored his first major Broadway success, playing Happy Loman in the original cast production of Arthur Miller's *Death of a Salesman*, directed by Elia Kazan. He reprised the role in Laslo Benedek's 1951 film version, worked again for Kazan in *Man on a Tightrope* (1953), and graduated to secondary roles in films of greater prestige. He supplied the voice of Christ in *The Robe* (1953) and played the second male lead in *How to Marry a Millionaire* (also '53), during which he introduced co-star Marilyn Monroe to Arthur Miller—a fact he was particularly fond of mentioning in interviews. Mitchell scored his first starring role as a heroin-addicted prize fighter in Andre de Toth's *Monkey On My Back* (1957), a success which helped him to land his own television series, *The Beachcomber*.

When the cancellation of *The Beachcomber* coincided with a failed marriage, Mitchell's personal life was further complicated by alimony payments and an escalating debt to the Internal Revenue Service. To escape these problems, he fled to Europe. He first went to Sweden, where he starred in *Mannen utan Ansikte/Face of Fire* (1959)—a moody adaptation of Stephen Crane's story "The Monster," directed by Albert Band (the pseudonym of French-born director Alfredo Antonini)—and had discussions with Ingmar Bergman to play the lead in a proposed film of Hermann Hesse's novel *Siddhartha*. When this project fell through, Mitchell moved on to Great Britain, where he busied himself with two films, followed by a film (*Raubfischer im Hellas/As The Sea Rages*) in West Germany. When Italy called, he went where the money was.

American actor–director Mel Welles, who worked with Mitchell later in the decade, remembers the actor's predicament: "He was having problems with the IRS. That's why he was in Europe, because they wouldn't let him keep any money. Everything he earned, they would grab. Working in Italy, he wasn't earning much, but he was treated like a star and the money that he did earn could go into a Swiss account. Eventually, he got enough money stashed away that he was able to start settling up with the IRS. He paid them a certain amount up front, and agreed to pay them something like ten cents on every future dollar earned, or something like that, and lived happily ever after."

Mitchell may have been, or felt, forced into working in Europe, but his period of European exile (1961–67) found him approaching each new role with utter conviction, creating an impressive gallery of historic knaves and nobles (including thoughtful interpretations of Cesaré Borgia and Julius Caesar), as well as an intriguing array of contemporary villains. His *dramatis personæ* ran the gamut from brash and boorish to aloof and mysterious, a diversity of roles that may well have eluded him had he remained in America, and which enabled him—unlike some of his colleagues—to maintain his leading man status well into his 50s.

Scripted by Luigi Mondello and Luigi Zurli, *L'ultimo dei vichinghi* was the story of Harald (Mitchell), heir to the throne of Viken, who returns home with younger brother Gunther (Giorgio Ardisson) after a three-year voyage to find his people obliterated, conquered by King Sveno of Norway (Edmond Purdom). Assisted by Gunther, Harald poses as a friendly Prince to infiltrate Sveno's castle and lay the groundwork



AN EXCRUCIATING *moment as Harald pries Gunther (Giorgio Ardisson) from the beams upon which he's been crucified.*



BELGIAN *affiche.*

for bloody revenge, but finds his plot complicated when he falls in love with a Danish princess (Isabelle Corey).

L'ultimo dei vichinghi is about 15 minutes longer than most Italian films of its type, and it contains about 15 minutes of footage that exhibit the unmistakable brushstrokes of Mario Bava. Cameron Mitchell confirmed for me that Bava was present on the set.

"My first film with Mario was *Last of the Vikings*," he revealed. "It was a big boxoffice smash over there. Gentilomo hadn't made a picture in a long time, and we were lucky on that one. Roberto Capitani and Luigi Mondello—a couple of pirates—made it and I worked for *twenty-two weeks* without getting paid!"

Mitchell's account is likely exaggerated, but such exaggeration could only be invited by a troubled production that ran wildly over-schedule. These problems would explain why Bava was brought in, and also why Gentilomo was assigned a co-director for his next picture, *Maciste contro il vampiro/Goliath and the Vampires*. It cannot definitively be said whether Bava was summoned to take over from Gentilomo, to direct inserts or reshoots after Gentilomo had finished to "punch up" the picture, or to take over for cameraman Enzo Serafin, who may have had to leave to meet another obligation. (The film credits Serafin only as "*direttore di luci*"—lighting director—not as the film's cameraman; in fact, the titles credit no cameraman, nor any members of the camera team.) Whatever the case, it is certain that Bava worked on the picture, and in several scenes, his touch is unmistakable.

In the homecoming sequence, Harald finds his father's home pillaged, a dismantled ruin livid with cobwebs, a squawking crow, rolling mist, and a stone-carved ledger of dead kings; a signature-like profusion of Bavian props. Other such scenes in *L'ultimo dei vichinghi* are frankly sadistic, including one insert—it literally interrupts the scene of a Viking celebration—in which a Norwegian prisoner (Fausto Tozzi) is cruelly interrogated by having a blazing torch pressed against his face. In the film's only POV shot, the torch is thrust directly at the camera, echoing a shot from Riccardo Freda's *Spartaco* and foreshadowing one of the unforgettable moments of Bava's 1964 film *Sei donne per l'assassino/Blood and Black Lace*. Unlike the latter film—where a similar sequence of a model's smoking, disfigured face being lifted from a red-hot stove was censored in nearly all world markets—the effect appears here completely intact.

"As I understand it, Bava masterminded a scene in *Ben-Hur* where a torch was stuck in somebody's face," Mitchell told me. "He could take a mold off of your face and give your face to me with nothing more than latex and sculpture." Mitchell evidently observed this process with some amazement, as Bava prepared a flame-resistant mask for the stunt actor in this sequence, and regaled him with the story of its earlier uses in the cinema. However, Mitchell's story doesn't necessarily prove that Bava worked on *Ben-Hur*. Bava might have mentioned to Mitchell that he had performed this task for "*Spartaco*" (meaning the Riccardo Freda film, which also includes a shot of a gladiator receiving a blazing torch in his face), which Mitchell could have confused in later years with Stanley Kubrick's *Spartacus* or, after additional decades, William Wyler's *Ben-Hur*. But you never know with Bava . . . *Ben-Hur* was filmed in Italy, and it does include a shot—during Charlton Heston's escape from the slave galley—of a blazing torch being thrust into a guard's face . . . I wish I could confirm that Bava worked on a William Wyler picture, but since Bava certainly had engineered such an effect for *Spartaco*, it would be careless to accept this story on faith.

Another distinctively Bavian highlight of *L'ultimo dei vichinghi* is an excruciating scene in which Harald uses the handle of his sword to pry a gruesomely crucified Gunther free of the nails that bind him. This is followed by a scene of Harald carrying the dead body of Gunther into



Sveno's court; the camera follows Gunther's lifeless arm down to his hand, a hole of light visible through its penetrated palm. Other gratuitous sequences appear: a group of bathing women whose frolicking under a waterfall is interrupted by a raid of Norwegians, who fire arrows into their eyes and necks and hurl spears into their backs, before the scene concludes with a shot of a woman's blood being carried downstream (recalling the death of Boris in *La maschera del demonio*); shots of men's and bears' heads being split with axes; and so forth.

During the filming, Mitchell and Bava took an instant liking to one another. "I never met a man I liked more personally than Bava," Mitchell effused. "I was impressed with him because of his humanity. My Italian was terrible, but I tried; his English was terrible, and I taught him all the bad words. 'Sonnabeech' was his favorite expression. 'Good morning, you sonnabeech,' he'd say. 'You sonbeech,' I'd say—all day it was like that! With Mario and I, there was something beyond speech or words. He was very sympathetic to me, and I think he liked me, because I did a number of films with Mario."

ITALIAN *due-foglia.*

Il ladro di Bagdad

In the early winter of 1960, Bava's need to stay busy prompted him to join a film crew in Kairuoan, Tunisia—a city on the edge of the Sahara Desert—where he would ultimately spend the better part of four months working on two different movies jointly produced by Titanus (Rome), Lux (France), and American producer Joseph E. Levine.

The first of these was the latest and biggest of the Steve Reeves extravaganzas, *Il ladro di Bagdad/The Thief of Baghdad*—coincidentally, a remake of a 1924 silent classic directed by Bava's co-director on *Esther and the King*, Raoul Walsh. For this film, Bava was not officially credited though he was responsible for the lion's share of special effects in the picture. In gratitude, his involvement was more formalized for the second film, *Le meraviglie di Aladino/The Wonders of Aladdin,* whose credits in European prints acknowledge him as the director or co-director.

Preproduction on *Il ladro di Bagdad* got underway in October 1961. Once again, Steve Reeves made it known that he preferred to work with an English-speaking director, so Arthur Lubin was flown to Tunisia to co-direct with line producer Bruno Vailati. Born in Los Angeles on July 25, 1899, Lubin had started out as an actor in silent films and became a director in 1934, cranking out his first picture—*A Successful Failure*—in only five days. Among his best-known works in the horror-fantasy field are *Black Friday* (1940) with Boris Karloff and Bela Lugosi, the 1943 version of *Phantom of the Opera* with Claude Rains and Nelson Eddy, and *The Spider Woman Strikes Back* (1946) with Gale Sondergaard.

At the time, Lubin was best-known for directing the "Francis the Talking Mule" series with Donald O'Connor, and series television like *Maverick* and *Bonanza*, but what really got him the job was his past experience at Hollywood costume drama (e.g., *Ali Baba and the Forty Thieves*, 1944, starring Jon Hall and Maria Montez), and the fact that he was experienced at filming in Italy (1953's *Stella dell'India/Star of India*).

Steve Reeves—who had commemorated his stardom by purchasing a horse ranch in Lucerne, Switzerland—was now at the stage of his career when he was being paid more for exerting himself less. For starring in *Il ladro di Bagdad,* he was paid the then-handsome sum of $200,000. He limited his film work to twice a year, once in the summer and again in the winter, and trained intensely for six weeks before each new film—riding, climbing, walking, working with weights—to tone his physique and bring himself up to his ideal working weight of 200 pounds.

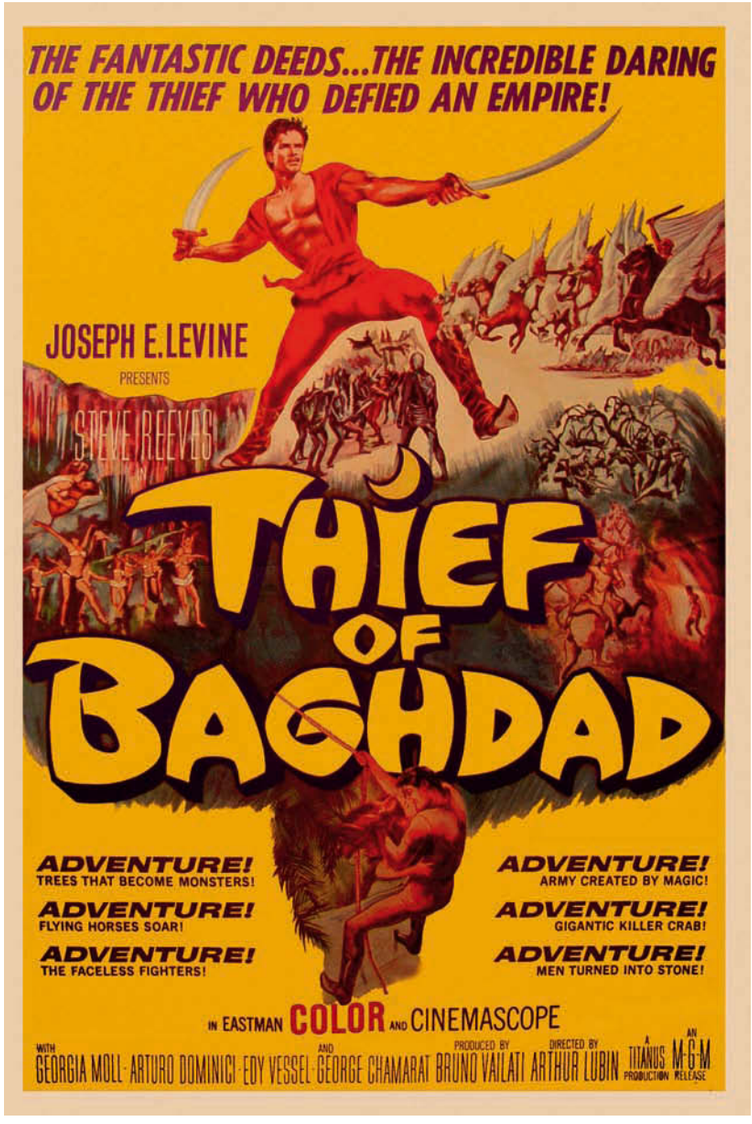
Only one film into his two-picture contract with Joseph E. Levine, the relationship between star and producer had already started to fray. After plastering *Hercules* and *Hercules Unchained* all over America, Levine liked to take credit for making Reeves a star, which annoyed the former Mr. America/World/Universe to no end. As he well knew, *Le fatiche di Ercole* had been popular enough to spawn a twice-as-costly sequel long before Levine's checkbook entered the picture. Further aggravating their relationship was a perceived backfire in Levine's contract with Reeves for *Morgan il pirata,* which had stipulated that the actor would be paid an additional $50,000 should the film gross in excess of $2,000,000. It did, and Levine refused to pay, hiring three lawyers to protect his interests against Reeves. Thanks to the careful accounting of Reeves' fiancee, it was quickly proven to Levine's legal team that the producer was withholding the actor's rightful due, and they advised their client to pay up. Reeves got the $50,000, but as a result, *Il ladro di Bagdad* got underway as something less than a pact between friends.

An early proponent of health and fitness through proper diet, Reeves had difficulties in adjusting to the eating conditions in Tunisia. "One day early on in filming *Baghdad* we all broke for lunch together," Reeves reminisced to biographer Chris LeClaire. "The luncheon was being served in this very large room that one would enter by means of this grand stairwell. From afar it looked as though a very large salad, heavily garnished with caviar, awaited us. But when we got closer, the caviar flew away! Flies! From then on, all I

ate in Tunisia was bread, sliced cheese, canned tuna and beer!"[3]

The film's pressbook glossed over the reality by describing Reeves as roughing it by subsisting on a diet of honey, nuts, and yogurt milked from camels. "I'm convinced that yogurt made from camel's milk has an energy-giving ingredient which can't be found anywhere else in the human diet," Reeves was quoted as saying. "I never felt better than when I was in Tunisia, despite the fact that *The Thief of Baghdad* was my most strenuous role." In fact, due to his ongoing shoulder problems, much of Karim's acrobatic derring-do in the picture was stunt-doubled by Sergio Ciani.

Il ladro di Bagdad was the third screen version of this story. After Walsh's silent classic, which had starred Douglas Fairbanks and featured the fabulous art direction of William Cameron Menzies and pioneering special effects of Hampton Del Ruth, the film was famously remade in the interim year of 1940. Alexander Korda's Technicolor production of *The Thief of Bagdad* (1940) starred Sabu, under the scattershot direction of Michael Powell, Menzies, and several others, including producer Korda. These early versions are remembered as two of the greatest fantasy films of all time. The Reeves version cannot be discussed on the same level, but in its own right, it is a remarkable and charming adventure fantasy. It features what may be Reeves' most charismatic performance, wry and sparkling throughout; the Byzantine sets are splendidly designed and detailed by Flavio Mogherini; the elegant, exotic costumes of Filippo Sanjust are his best work in films ("They were tailored with such expertise that you didn't want to give them back," Reeves said);[4] Carlo Rustichelli contributed one of his loveliest, most beckoning scores; and as a special effects spectacle, *Il ladro di Bagdad* is virtually unmatched in the annals of Italian popular cinema. Everything about the picture is uncommonly inspired . . . except the screenplay—by Augusto Frassinetti (*La battaglia di Maratona*), Filippo Sanjust, and Bruno Vailati—which has the feel of a warmed-over "greatest hits" of *peplum* fantasy situations. Just as the money was coming in, the field of Italian fantasy seemed to be reaching the limits of its imagination and began repeating itself.



US *one-sheet poster, promising a "gigantic killer crab" that never appears.*



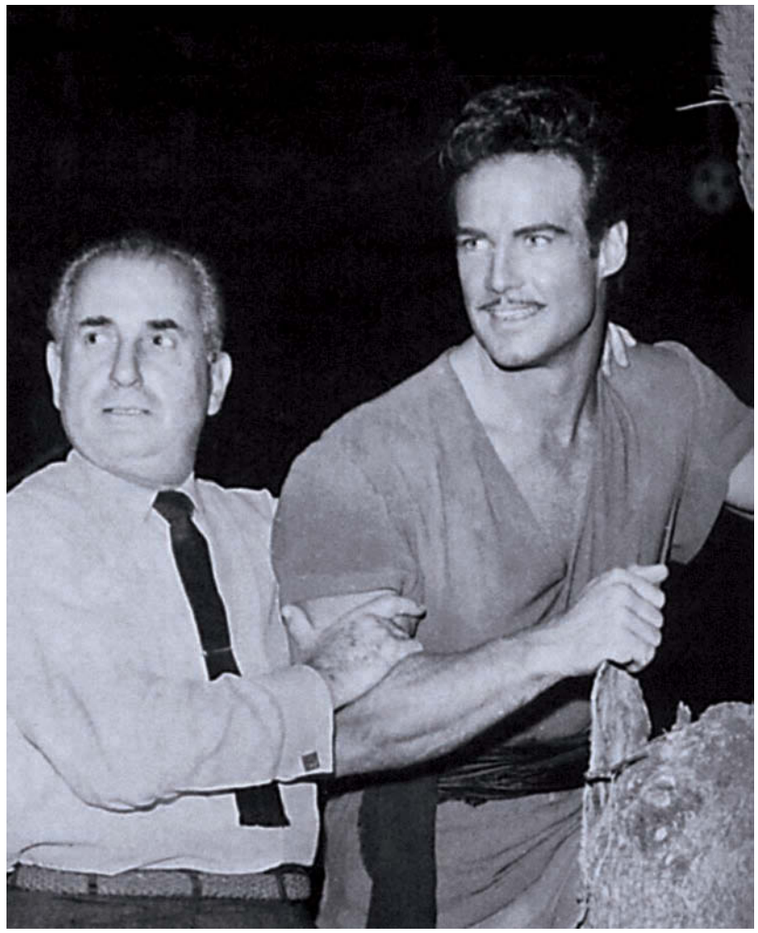
STEVE REEVES *and Georgia Moll, reunited for the first time since AGI MURAD, smile for the camera on the set of IL LADRO DI BAGDAD.*

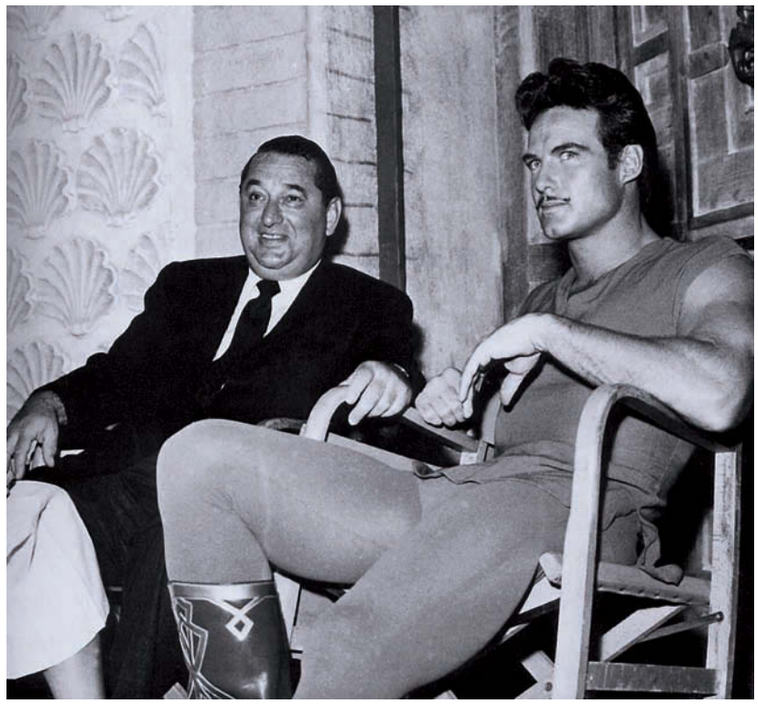
When the forthcoming marriage of Baghdad's Princess Amina (Georgia Moll) to Prince Osman (Arturo Dominici) is announced in the public square, the purse of the King's spokesman Gamal (Daniele Vargas) is stolen by Karim (Reeves), a local Robin Hood who takes from the rich and gives to the poor. Prince Osman arrives at the palace to discuss wedding plans with the King (Antonio Battistella), but is overcome by Karim, who impersonates the Prince. During his meeting with the King, Karim succeeds in fleecing the entire court of their jewels before being discovered, and Amina—spying on the meeting from a secret vantage—falls in love with "Osman" at first sight. Hoping to get a glimpse of Amina's face, Karim climbs to her room and, overhearing her love for him, introduces himself and returns her father's stolen ring to her.

Finding the Princess no longer willing to marry Osman, the ambitious

Gamal proposes that she be drugged with a potion guaranteed to make her fall in love with Osman—unless she is already in love with another, in which case it becomes a slow-acting poison that will cause her to waste away. Osman consents to this plan, imagining the cloistered Princess to have no other love, but it naturally backfires. The only known antidote to the poison is the legendary blue rose. Three men rise to the challenge of finding it: Osman (who boldly threatens to make Baghdad his own, win or lose), another Prince named Assan (Edoardo Bergamo), and of course, Karim—whom the King allows to join the hunt, over Osman's violent objections. Whoever discovers the blue rose, the King declares, shall have Amina's hand in marriage.

Karim proceeds with the assistance of an old man (Georges Chamarat) possessed of magical powers and ancient wisdom, whom the hero impressed by giving away the entirety of a plundered fortune to the needy folk of Baghdad. He tells Karim that the blue rose can only be reached through the fabled Seven Doors, the first of which "can be seen where it is not." In the desert, this portal materializes in the form of a mirage. Only by defeating a forest of tentacled, man-eating trees around their campsite does Karim discover the Second Door, Third Door, and so forth—leading him into a fiery inferno, the erotic clutches of a gorgon named Kadeejah (Edy Vessel), an invisible monster (Chignone) who guards a bridge, an army of faceless warriors, etc. After the various facets of his character have been tested—strength, perception, fidelity, dedication, and so on—Karim finds the blue rose and is presented with a winged horse to hasten him on his return to Baghdad. There he finds the city under imminent attack by Osman, who has abducted Amina and plans to take Baghdad (and his bride) by force. In acknowledgment of his victory, Karim's magician friend has given him a jewel with the power to grant a single wish, and Karim now uses it to generate a larger army of soldiers—identical in appearance to himself! Osman is promptly defeated, but succeeds in slashing the blue rose held in Karim's belt. Karim returns Amina to the King and confesses his defeat. In the palace, Karim sees a bust of his magician friend and is told that it is the likeness of a former kind and beneficent King who ruled over Baghdad hundreds of years ago. In parting, the hero presents the Princess with a white rose as a farewell gift—and it turns miraculously blue in her hand, proving to the King's satisfaction that the two truly are in love. In a splendid ceremony, Karim and Amina are married and the former Thief of Baghdad becomes its new and just King.





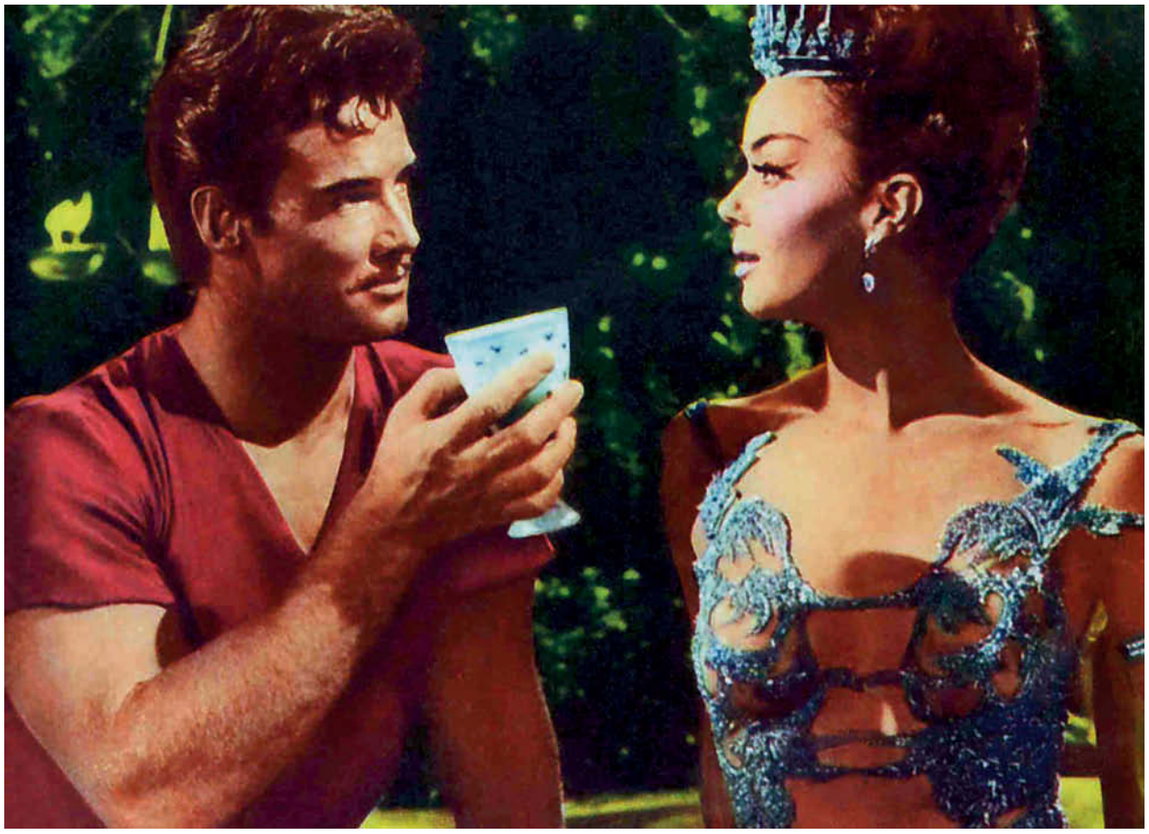
STEVE REEVES *with director Arthur Lubin.*

The film's special effects are credited solely to Thomas Howard, a technician typically credited with "special photographic effects" and active in the British film industry since 1940, when he contributed uncredited work to Korda's *Thief of Bagdad*. His later screen credits include *Blithe Spirit* (1945), *Knights of the Round Table* (1953), *Tarzan and the Lost Safari* (1957), *Suddenly, Last Summer* (1959), *Gorgo* (1961, scored by Angelo Francesco Lavagnino), *Captain Sindbad* (1963), *Children of the Damned* (1963), *The Haunting* (1963), and several English-language productions lensed in Italy, including *Quo Vadis* (1951) and *Light in the Piazza* (1962). Howard's specialties were miniatures, opticals, and pyrotechnics, all of which are present in *Il ladro di Bagdad*, but the extent of Howard's contribution to the picture is open to question. Italian references credit Joseph Natanson with being in charge of the film's miniatures, which is odd because his particular field of expertise was matte painting. Carlo Rustichelli and Giuseppe Maccari (who worked as a third camera assistant on the production) both confirmed that although he receives no screen credit

A TENSE *Reeves poses for a publicity shot with producer Joseph E. Levine, who had unsuccessfully tried to withhold a promised bonus for their previous picture.*

3 Chris LeClaire, *Worlds to Conquer: An Authorized Biography of Steve Reeves* (South Chatham MA: Monomoy Books, 1999), 208.

4 LeClaire, 207.



KAREEM *(Reeves) is held in thrall by Italy's latest mythological femme fatale, Edy Vessel as Kadeejah.*

on the picture, Mario Bava was not only involved but "in charge" of the film's special effects unit. Listed as a production assistant in the film's end titles is a "Mario Basil," which may be a real person or perhaps a deliberate garbling of Bava's identity.

Here is a partial listing of the film's special effects shots, in the order in which they appear, followed by the names of the technicians most likely responsible for creating them:

• The opening establishing shot of Baghdad (miniature, Howard).

• The establishing shot of the walled entrance to Baghdad, the city's minarets visible behind wall (horizontal split-screen trick shot incorporating live action below and hanging miniature above, Bava).

• The various appearances/disappearances of the magician (blue screen opticals, Howard).

• Exterior of Prince Osman approaching the King's palace (split-screen trick shot, Bava).

• Gamal's belt being transformed into a snake and back again (optical dissolve effect, Bava).

• The shooting star observed by the King's guards (animation, Bava).

• The materialization of the First Door (blue screen optical, Howard).

• The close shot of the First Door (glass matte painting, Bava or Natanson).

• Detail of the rose carved above the portal of the First Door (painting, Bava or Natanson).

• The forest of evil trees (mechanical effect, Bava and Carlo Rambaldi).

• Materialization of a landscape of smoking lava behind Second Door (blue screen optical, Howard).

• The fire engulfing Karim behind the Second Door (optical, Howard).

• The fabulous Daliesque city atop the waterfall that Karim exits (a spectacular glass matte painting by Natanson—distinctly his style).

• Kadeejah's metamorphosis into stone (matte dissolve optical, Howard and Bava).

• The destruction of Kadeejah's cave palace (on-set pyrotechnics and post-production opticals, Howard and Bava).

• The invisible monster's bridge between two mountains (the mountains are matte paintings, Bava).

• The cloak of invisibility effects (blue screen opticals, Howard).

• The winged horse taking flight (animation, Bava—possibly Eugenio Bava).

• Close-ups of Karim astride the winged horse (mechanical prop, Bava and Rambaldi).

• The cloud that emanates from Karim's jewel as he makes his wish (animation, Bava).

• The army of Karims (foam latex molds and masks, Bava).

• The transformation of the white rose into a blue one (matte dissolve optical, Howard).

The film also includes several animated insert shots—of the shooting star observed by the King's guards, a brace of spears flung across the sky, and the winged horse as it gallops into flight—and Bava was the only technician of the three who was at all experienced in animation effects. (Bava had also animated similar flying arrows and javelins for *Le fatiche di Ercole.*) The shot of the winged horse's flight has a distinctly old-fashioned look, stylistically similar to the wheel of angels at the end of *Cabiria*, that makes one wonder if the talents of Eugenio Bava were also recruited.

Il ladro di Bagdad was photographed by the returning Tonino Delli Colli, whose robust handling of *Morgan il pirata* was much appreciated by Reeves and Levine. As with that film, Delli Colli's visual style is so unlike Bava's that it is possible to identify shots—here and there—

ARTURO DOMINICI *as Prince Osman.*



where Bava took over. For example, unlike Bava, Delli Colli had no reputation as a cameraman who could make women look glamorous, and it appears that Bava was asked to shoot (or reshoot) various close-ups of Georgia Moll and second unit shots of her handmaidens. These are lushly colorful and dappled with laughing shadows and playful mystique, as are the scenes in Kadeejah's cave, particularly the parti-colored, dry ice choreography sequence featuring *Caltiki* dancer Gay Pearl. Bava's hand is also apparent in the scene of a man bringing a gift of Chinese fabric to the bed-ridden Princess, which is accepted by her old nurse, who is then approached by a young boy with a message from Karim—the mention of whose name raises Amina's weakened spirits.

The identity of the film's true editor isn't known. Italian and American sources credit the work to Gene Ruggiero, an Italian-American who worked as an editor at MGM for decades, cutting such films as Billy Wilder's *Ninotchka* (1939), several of MGM's "Tarzan" sequels, and Steve Reeves' early screen appearance in *Athena* (1954). I doubt the authenticity of his credit here because, although Ruggiero edited a couple of films with Italian locations, subjects, and co-funding—*The Great Caruso* (1951) and *Arrivederci Roma!* (1958)—these were principally American productions. Ruggiero never served as the sole editor of an Italian film. In 1964, he was credited with editing AIP's Italian acquisition *The Last Man on Earth* (1963, originally *L'ultimo uomo della terra*), which lists Lilia Silvi as editor on its original (and editorially identical) Italian prints.

Therefore, as opposed to being the film's editor, Ruggiero was more correctly the individual responsible for recutting the picture for America, which resulted in its tightening by more than 10 minutes. The differences between the US and European cuts are worth recounting.

• The US version adds two insert shots Georges Chamarat's "old magician" character in the market scene in the beginning, effectively introducing his character 10 minutes before he appears in the European cut (where we first see him blowing Prince Osman across the floor). They're just quick reaction shots, implying that the old magician is watching with pleasure as Karim outsmarts the Baghdad sheriff.

• In the European cut, the scene of Karim in the prison (where he pushes the cylindrical pillar) ends in the daytime and cuts to the scene of the "magician" introducing himself to the sultan as a wise man (by transforming his turban to a tall hat). Then we go back to the prison at night where Karim tricks the guards with his diamonds.

• In the US version, the scene with the magician as the wise man is placed before the prison sequence, which plays out as daytime pillar-turning right into the nighttime "diamond trick."

• In the European cut, at around 39:30, there's an additional short scene of the poor of Baghdad organizing to provide Karim (recently escaped from prison) with blue finery to wear into the palace, where he impersonates a nobleman and seeks permission to pursue the Blue Rose. This comes right before the scene where he marches into the palace, when the sheriff questions him about looking familiar.

• The European cut also harbors an additional scene of Prince Osman knifing the canteens of his fellow



EDY VESSEL *as Kadeejah, who turns her admirers to stone.*

AN AMERICAN *in Tunisia: Reeves filming the scene of Kareem's triumph, as he succeeds in obtaining the fabled blue rose.*



KAREEM *fights for the right to the winged horse, Pegasus.*





FRENCH *affiche, art by Jean Mascii—starring "Steves Reeves" and directed by "Arturo Lubin."*



KADEEJAH*'s ladies-in-waiting undulate amid dry ice, a dance sequence credited to choreographer Paul Steffen.*

seekers of the Blue Rose under cover of night, and riding away from the encampment on his own. In the Italian version, this scene is followed by a short cutaway to Princess Amina being consoled in her bed. In the US version, this cutaway is placed before the nighttime camping scene.

• Around 59:45, the Euro cut features additional footage following Karim's escape from the firewalls of the Second Door, showing him washing his face in a waterfall and following the sound of beckoning, female laughter to another falls (the Cascate di Montegelato, naturally) heralding the hidden realm of the sorceress Kadeejah. In the US recut, he leaves the lake and appears right at the doorstep as the seductive witch bids him entrance. In the original assembly, he is met by two toga-clad bathing beauties who lead him inside. The Kadeejah segment of the film also forfeited some footage from Gay Pearl's atmospheric dance.

It should also be noted that, judging by the way the two versions of the film are cut, that a scene of Princess Amina being drugged with the backfired love potion also appears to be missing. After the potion is explained, there is a cutaway scene of Karim, followed by our return to the palace, where the Princess has already been taken ill. If such a scene was shot at all (and given its importance, it should have been), it must have turned out unsatisfactorily to director Arthur Lubin, because the US and European cuts of this sequence are identical.

One of the film's intended highlights evidently also fell by the wayside. MGM's publicity campaign for *The Thief of Baghdad* sports an interesting anomaly. The earliest advertisements to be designed, including the one-sheet poster and a couple of large ad mats, list all of the film's highlights: "Army Created by Magic! Trees That Become Monsters! The Faceless Fighters! Men Turned to Stone! Flying Horses Soar!" However, one spectacle promised by the poster rings a sour note: "Gigantic Killer Crab" (which is rephrased in the ad mats as "Giant Killer of the Sea"). No such encounter appears in the picture, neither in the domestic nor European versions, though it probably would have followed Karim's escape from the possessive clutches of Kadeejah. (There is obviously something missing here, as Karim is shown fleeing Kadeejah's domain—shown atop the Cascate di Montegelato falls—by swimming to the surface from the bottom of the ocean. When he falls exhausted onto the beach, his shirt is inexplicably torn to shreds—perhaps by giant pincers?) One can only surmise from these details that such a scene was scripted, but was either dropped from the schedule before it was shot, or filmed but omitted from the final cut due to unacceptable results.

In August 1961, the month of the film's US theatrical release, Dell Publishing Co. released a comic book adaptation, illustrated by Reed Crandall, as well as a mass market paperback novelization written by Richard Wormser—the author of such Western novels as *Ride a Northbound Horse* and *Gone to Texas*. Knowing that novelizations are usually written from early draft screenplays and often contain scenes eliminated from the final cuts of the movies they adapt, some might turn to Wormser's book for answers to these questions, but it's a waste of time. The novelization is written in the first person by a "jinni," or genie, named Abu Hastin—a character that does not appear in the movie—and while the loose story manages to incorporate the right character names and some references to the Blue Rose, most of what occurs in the book has no corresponding scene in the movie. A choice example is the following encounter between the characters played by Steve Reeves and Georgia Moll, witnessed by the voyeuristic Abu Hastin:

"Karim crept slowly toward the Lady Amina, slowly and reverently, like a hadji approaching Mecca. Considering the trouble she had gone to, he could have hurried a little; or maybe he enjoyed the slow approach . . .

Then, slowly, softly, she lifted her face cloth.

Satisfied with what he saw, apparently, he kissed it. But softly, but gently.

Was this a true descendant of our Prophet, whose wives were only outnumbered by his concubines?

Maybe it was, because when he got through kissing Princess Amina's mouth, he moved a bit lower, and started nibbling gently on the section of bosom she had so considerately exposed for him."[5]

The Italian earnings for *Il ladro di Bagdad* amounted to 629,350,000 *lire* [$392,000], only a marginal improvement on *Morgan il pirata*. But the film's international earnings were significantly greater, owing to its attractions for the kiddie matinee circuit. In America, Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer went all-out with their promotions, creating an usually elaborate, four-color pressbook. To this day, *The Thief of Baghdad* remains one of Steve Reeves' most beloved films.

5 Richard Wormser, *Thief of Baghdad* (New York NY: Dell Publishing Co. Inc., 1961), 86–87.





ALADDIN *(Donald O'Connor) surprises some bullies by wishing himself as tall as a house in LE MERAVIGLIE DI ALADINO, a sequence executed by Bava and Carlo Rambaldi.*

Le meraviglie di Aladino

The Wonders of Aladdin

DURING THE PREPRODUCTION of *Il ladro di Bagdad*, the film's producers made the decision to get more for their money by shooting two Arabian fantasies at once. The principal crew members went on double-duty, with Flavio Mogherini designing the sets and Tonino Delli Colli behind the camera. The exact nature of Mario Bava's involvement in the second picture is obscured by the language of the film credits. In Italy, *Le meraviglie di Aladino* is "A Film by Henry Levin . . . Directed by Mario Bava." In France, *Les Mille et Une Nuits* is *"Un Film de Henry Levin . . . Mise en Scène de Mario Bava."* In America, where the film is known as *The Wonders of Aladdin*, Mario Bava is not mentioned at all.

The Italian edition is correct to the extent that Bava supervised the preparation (i.e., the dubbing, etc.) of the version released in Italy. The French explanation is also accurate because, as the phrasing implies, Henry Levin (1909–80)—fresh from filming *Where the Boys Are* (1960) in Ft. Lauderdale, Florida—was placed in charge of directing the bilingual cast, while Bava was primarily in charge of the second unit—that is, scenes featuring Italian actors, the special effects, and the supervising of the Italian technical crew.

"Bava was the director of the second unit, and I was his cameraman," explains Marcello Gatti. "The movie was directed by Levin—without question. He directed almost 80% of the movie, while Bava supervised the scenes involving special effects and situations. It's true that we also worked with actors, but we did only maybe 20% of the whole movie." [1]

A short list of credits in the American pressbook confirms Bava as "second unit director." This would explain why the major acting scenes in the film look a certain way, and why others—like the scene of Aladdin being chased through the marketplace at night—are marked by Bava's unmistakable lighting techniques. The presence of some charmingly naïve optical effects (not to be confused with some very bad blue-screen shots, credited in European prints to Technicolor Italiana) also strongly suggest that the film's post-production was left in Bava's capable hands, while Levin moved on to Austria to helm George Pal's Cinerama production, *The Wonderful World of the Brothers Grimm* (1962).

The lives and careers of Mario Bava and Henry Levin parallel one another in surprising ways. Both men began their directorial careers with horror films about women plagued by an ancestral curse; Levin's was *Cry of the Werewolf* (1944). In 1946, Levin directed *The Devil's Mask*; in 1960, Bava directed *La maschera del demonio* ("The Mask of Satan"). In 1959, Levin directed *Journey to the Center of the Earth*; in 1961, Bava directed *Ercole al centro della terra* ("Hercules at the Center of the Earth"). In 1967, the year after Bava directed *Operazione paura*, Levin directed *Operazione paradiso/Kiss the Girls and Make Them Die*. (After writing this film for Levin, screenwriter Dino Mauri went to work for Bava as one of the writers of *Diabolik*.) Both men made their last films for television. The final coincidence came when Bava and Levin died during the same week in 1980—Bava on April 25, Levin on May 1—from the same cause: a heart attack.



ALADDIN, *another thief of Baghdad, steals some food from the local market to take home to his mother.*

Le meraviglie di Aladino

"The Wonders of Aladdin"
Filmed at Titanus Studios, Cinecittà and on location in Kairouan, Tunisia
December 18 – March 1961
First released: October 31, 1961
Technicolor, CinemaScope, 2.35:1, 99 minutes

Production: Lux Film (Rome) and Lux Compagnie Cinématographique de France (Paris). Directors: Henry Levin (US), Mario Bava (France/Italy). Assistant directors: Alberto Cardone, Franco Prosperi. Screenplay: Franco Prosperi and Sylvano Reina, based on a story by Stefano Strucchi and Duccio Tessari. [Some sources also credit Marco Vicario.] Director of photography: Tonino Delli Colli (and Mario Bava, special effects sequences). Camera assistant: Franco Delli Colli. Second Unit Camera assistant: Marcello Gatti. Art direction: Flavio Mogherini. Wardrobe: Giorgio Desideri, from designs by Rosine Delamare. Makeup: Eligio Trani. Hairdresser: Gustavo Sisi. Choreography: Secondina Cavallo. Production manager: Massimo Patrizi. Music: Angelo Francesco Lavagnino, conducted by Carlo Savina, performed by L'Orchestra Cinefonica Italiana. Editor: Maurizio Lucidi. Sound: Fonolux-Rome. Distributors: Lux Film (Italy), and Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer in all other territories unless otherwise noted.

Additional credits: France: Paul Véry and Paul Tuckahoe. US: "Joseph E. Levine Presents . . ." Screenplay: Luther Davis. Editor: Gene Ruggiero, A.C.E. Music: Angelo Lavagnino, conducted by Mario Ammonini.

Donald O'Connor (Aladdin), Vittorio De Sica (Genie), Aldo Fabrizi (Sultan), Noëlle Adam (Djalma), Mario Girotti (Prince Moluk), Fausto Tozzi (Grand Vizier), Michèle Mercier (Zaina), Raymond Bussières (Magician), Milton Reid (Omar), Alberto Farnese (1st bandit), Marco Tulli (Fakir), Franco Ressel (Vizier's lieutenant), Vittorio Bonos (lamp vendor), Adriana Facchetti (Mamma), Giovanna Galletti (midwife).

Belgium: *De Duizend en een Nacht*, "The Thousand and One Nights," Eastmancolor/CinemaScope, 1962
Denmark: 2/25/63
Finland: 6/14/63
France: *Les Mille et Une Nuits*, Lux Cinématographique, Eastmancolor/CinemaScope, 2/21/62
Germany: *Aladins Abenteuer*, "Aladdin's Adventures," M-G-M Film Verleih, 6/1/62, 93m
UK: *The Wonders of Aladdin*, Eastmancolor/CinemaScope, 2/17/62, 92m 57s, Certificate "U," passed with cuts
US: *The Wonders of Aladdin*, Eastmancolor/CinemaScope, 12/13/62, 93m

Synopsis

In a marketplace in Baghdad, an old woman haggles with a vendor over the price of a lamp. He drops his price, but presents her with an older, humbler lamp which has been frequently returned by customers, claiming that it made strange noises. The woman gives it to her starstruck son Aladdin, who is awed by the impressive caravan of Prince Moluk as it arrives in town. Learning that his mother has gone without food to buy him the lamp, Aladdin decides to return it—but a more tempting opportunity presents itself, to steal bagels and fruit from a vendor. A sound emanating from the lamp, which he thinks is the growling of his stomach, gives him away, and Aladdin is chased through the city streets by an angry mob. After hiding in a dog kennel, Aladdin is infested with fleas and scratches himself with the lamp, producing a genie. The genie grants him three wishes, and he uses the first of these to get out of his predicament. When the genie says, "Pffffft!" Aladdin grows to giant size and chases away the mob by flicking a giant flea in their direction. One of his pursuers, the burly Omar, pleads for his life and swears to serve Aladdin for the rest of his days.

As his slave, Omar's meager possessions become Aladdin's own, and he orders his servant to buy passage in a caravan bound for Bassora, where Prince Moluk is soon to marry Princess Zaina. Omar is poor, so they travel in a lowly sheep cart. Aladdin's girlfriend Djalma dances to raise

travelling money of her own. Being beautiful, she is granted a place in the Prince's own entourage. But the evil Grand Vizier is against the coming marriage: he conspires to marry Princess Zaina himself and use her to gain the throne of Bassora. He has hired a band of cutthroats to raid Moluk's caravan and capture the Prince. A talented military strategist, Prince Moluk anticipates the attack and trades places with a lowly soldier, surviving with Djalma as an anonymous hostage. The Vizier immediately recognizes the "Prince" as an imposter, and drops him into a pit of tigers.

Meanwhile, Aladdin and Omar are abandoned by their caravan in the middle of the Desert of Tribulations, where they are rescued by a bevy of Amazon women. After being massaged and lavished with wine, they learn of their fate—to be skinned for clothing after a single night of pleasure—and summon the genie to their rescue. Aladdin asks that they be sent close to Prince Moluk . . . and wind up as fellow prisoners of the Grand Vizier. The Vizier goes to the Sultan, Zaina's father, with the clothes of the "dead" Prince, and offers himself as a replacement husband. The aging Sultan's wife is expecting a child, and needing a sire, he agrees to the marriage only if his own child is born female. The Vizier agrees to this condition, boasting that he has sired twenty-seven sons—and plots to abduct the infant, if born a male, and replace it with a female.

A magician cohort of the Vizier has manufactured two lifesize, mechanical dolls—one male, one female—as wedding gifts, the former to amuse, and the latter to kill the Sultan with a bone-crushing embrace. Using a tree as a catapult, Moluk escapes custody, followed by Aladdin, Djalma, and Omar, who are captured before they can get away. The Vizier takes Djalma to the magician's lair for private torture. The Prince is recognized and befriended in town by a fakir who sleeps on a bed of nails. The fakir helps him to find a secret passage into the magician's lab, where they find Djalma (who is gagged and dangling naked from the ceiling) and free her. They find Aladdin and Omar imprisoned in cowskins, meant to shrink in sunlight and suffocate them, and cut them down.

The baby-switching scheme is successful, and the Princess is compelled to marry the Grand Vizier. Prior to the wedding, Aladdin invades the court by posing as the mechanical doll; he entertains the Sultan with a dance. When Prince Moluk shows up alive, the Vizier's evil plot is exposed. Aladdin is knocked unconscious in an ensuing scuffle with the Vizier's men, and Djalma is abducted once again.



ALADDIN *rescues Djalma (Noëlle Adam) from the evil Grand Vizier.*

The Sultan names Aladdin as new Grand Vizier for his acts of valor, and the genie allows him to bend his last wish to encompass two desires: to save Djalma and to defeat the former Vizier. After besting the Vizier in a magical showdown in the desert, Aladdin finds Djalma tied nude in the Vizier's tent. "Why did I always think of you as my sister?" he asks himself. Freeing her, the genie sends them into the sky on a magic carpet, where they kiss to the hurrahs of the people of Bassora far below.

The various international prints of *Le meraviglie di Aladino* credit its screenplay to as many as nine different men. The original treatment was written by Stefano Strucchi and Duccio Tessari, from which a complete script was prepared by Sylvano Reina and Franco Prosperi, who used this leverage to land himself a position as Bava's assistant director. (Some sources also mention Marco Vicario, the husband of *Helen of Troy* actress Rosanna Podestà and later the producer of several Antonio Margheriti films, including *La vergine di Norimberga/Horror Castle*, 1963.) French prints extend credit to Pierre Véry and Paul Tuckahoe, perhaps to satisfy the quota demanded by Lux-Rome's co-production agreement with Lux-Paris. Furthermore, when Henry Levin became involved as director, he hired American screenwriter Luther Davis to write polished English dialogue for the actors, all of whom either played their roles in English or spoke their lines phonetically.

Cast

One of the most beloved actors ever to appear in a Bava film, Donald O'Connor was the son of circus performers. He was born on August 28, 1925, in Chicago, Illinois, and paid his dues in vaudeville before making his screen debut at age 11, in 1937's *Melody for Two*. He continued to juggle small juvenile roles for Paramount and vaudeville engagements for a couple of years, before becoming a Universal contract player in the 1940s. He became a bona fide star in 1952, when his antic musical numbers (such as "Make 'Em Laugh") repeatedly stole the show from co-stars Gene Kelly and Debbie Reynolds in MGM's *Singin' in the Rain*. But this was rare honey indeed, as O'Connor spent the bulk of the decade back at Universal, starring opposite the irrepressible Francis the Talking Mule, in a series of B-pictures that made more money than good reputations. (O'Connor was likely tapped for the role of Aladdin by *Il ladro di Bagdad* director Arthur Lubin, who had directed all of O'Connor's "Francis" pictures.) Later in the decade, the actor began to complement

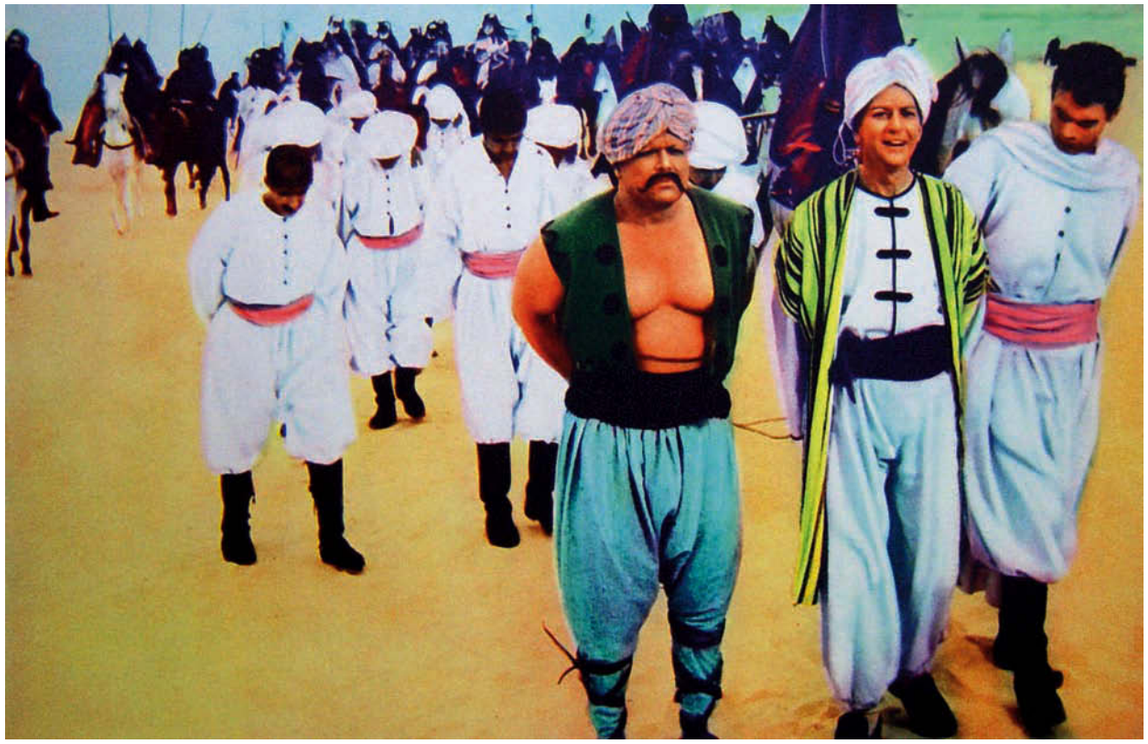
1 Marcello Gatti interviewed by Luca Rea, August 1999.

his slipping career by composing classical music; in 1956, he conducted the Los Angeles Philharmonic's performance of his premiere symphony, *Reflections d'un Comique*. In his later years, O'Connor was seen primarily in television commercials as a celebrity endorser of products; in the early 1990s, he allied himself with a worthy but short-lived plan to dub into English a number of classic fairy tale films from Russia's Mosfilm Studios, which were to be sold by subscription. Unfortunately, the program fell apart after the first title was completed: *Father Frost*—originally Aleksandr Rou's *Moroshka*—which O'Connor dubbed with Phyllis Diller and others. Donald O'Connor died of an apparent heart attack in Los Angeles, on September 26, 2003.

Actor–director Vittorio De Sica—born July 7, 1902 in Sora, Latium—had previously worked with Bava in Pietro Francisci's *Natale al campo 119* and *Villa Borghese*. Raised in Naples, he became a screen actor as early as 1918, and rose to the status of matinee idol as his good looks matured. His stardom was assured on the strengths of light comedies, but as he began to direct his own films in the early '40s, the impact of the second World War aroused a more serious, socially minded dimension in his art, first expressed in the neorealist films *Sciuschia/Shoeshine* (1946) and *Ladri di biciclette/The Bicycle Thief* (1948). Another of his early acclaimed films, *Miraculo a Milano/Miracle in Milan* (1951), which he also co-produced and co-authored, was a rare and splendid attempt to infuse neorealism with elements of fantasy—an important signal that the Italian spirit was healing after the war. His 1952 masterpiece *Umberto D.*—the story of an old man who worries what will become of his dog when he dies—is one of



ALADDIN*'s initial meeting with friend Omar (Milton Reid) is not at all friendly.*



ALADDIN *and Omar are taken into custody by the Grand Vizier's soldiers.*



ALADDIN *and Omar are rescued from the Desert of Tribulations by a bevy of Amazon women.*

Mario Girotti was born March 29, 1939, in Venice—and, incidentally, is not related to actor Massimo Girotti, as some published sources claim. He started acting in 1952 and appeared, as did De Sica, in the Bava-photographed *Villa Borghese*. Prior to his role as Prince Moluk in *Le meraviglie di Aladino*, he had played minor roles in *Annibale/Hannibal* and *Cartagine in fiamme/Carthage in Flames*, both produced in 1959. Afterwards, he took advantage of his German ancestry to appear in some of the Karl May Westerns being produced in West Germany, notably *Winnetou II* (1964) and *Old Surehand* (1965). His success in German Westerns prompted a mid-career transformation: Mario Girotti became "Terence Hill"—star of Italian Westerns. After Hill had appeared in a couple of films, he was cast as the lead in *Lo chiamavano Trinità* (1969), an early comic Spaghetti Western directed by former cinematographer Enzo Barboni under the pseudonym

the most unbearably poignant human dramas ever filmed. As a director, De Sica helmed many important pictures that gained popular recognition in America, probably more than any other Italian director to date: *Stazione termini/Indiscretion of an American Wife* (1953), *La ciociara/Two Women* (1960), an episode of *Boccaccio '70* (1962), *Il Boom, lere, oggi, domani/ Yesterday, Today and Tomorrow* (1962), the Galatea production *Matrimonio all'italiana/Marriage, Italian Style* (1964), *Caccia alla volpe/After the Fox* (1966), and the Oscar-winning *Il giardino dei Finzi-Contini/The Garden of the Finzi-Continis* (1971). He died on November 13, 1974, shortly after playing the amusing role of the Marquis De Fiore in Paul Morrissey's *Blood for Dracula* a.k.a. *Andy Warhol's Dracula*. Actress Harriet White Medin, who worked with De Sica as a dialogue coach on several films made in the 1950s, described him to me as "the finest human being" she ever met in the Italian film industry.



"E. B. Clucher." When the film was released in the US as *They Call Me Trinity*, Hill and co-star Bud Spencer (a.k.a. Carlo Pedersoli) became international stars. This success was followed by a sequel—*Continuavano a chiamarlo Trinità/Trinity is Still My Name* (1971)—and countless imitations, including Clucher's own *Figli di Trinità/Sons of Trinity* (1995).

Both of the film's female leads, Noëlle Adam and Michèle Mercier, were French and had started acting after brief careers in ballet. Mercier was born Jocelyne Mercier on January 1, 1939, in Nice, France. She made her first film in 1957, but her first international success came a few years later, when she played the small role of Clarisse in François Truffaut's second feature *Tirez sur le Pianiste/Shoot the Piano Player* (1960), in which she ensured that she would be remembered by boldly baring her breasts—a scene cut from the original American release. She is one of the extraordinary presences in *Le meraviglie di Aladino*, and looks absolutely exquisite in the wedding gown designed for her by Rosine Delamare. Bava must have been impressed, as well; Mercier worked for him again, giving a superbly edgy (and erotic) performance as Rosy in the "*Il telefono*" segment of *I tre volti della paura/Black Sabbath*.

Fausto Tozzi is a superbly menacing Grand Vizier, who brings a tongue-in-cheek quality, worthy of Vincent Price, to the prospect of burning a woman's bare legs with acid. Tozzi also worked with Bava again, as the villainous Aghen in *I coltelli del vendicatore/Knives of the Avenger* and as Menelaus in the miniseries *Odissea*.

Le meraviglie di Aladino also marks the earliest appearance of character actor Franco Ressel in a Bava film, as the walrus-mustached lieutenant of the Grand Vizier. Ressel was born Domenico Orobona on February 8, 1925, in Naples. His earliest-known Italian film was a forerunner of the *giallo*, a crime thriller entitled *L'assassino*, directed by Elio Petri and co-starring *La maschera del demonio*'s Andrea Checchi. Bava took a liking to the smug, effete quality of Ressel's face and subsequently cast him as the ill-fated King Lotar in *Gli invasori/Erik the Conqueror*, after which he was bumped up to his definitive role, as the superbly slimy Marquis in *Sei donne per l'assassino/Blood and Black Lace*. Ressel appeared in over 80 Euro horror, Western, and sexploitation features, including Riccardo Freda's *Maciste alla corte del Gran Khan/Samson and the 7 Miracles of the World* (1961) and *Caccia al'uomo/Roger La Honte* (1961), Antonio Margheriti's *I criminali della galassia/Wild, Wild Planet* (1965), Sergio Corbucci's *Il mercenario/The Mercenary* (1968), Mario Caiano's *L'occhio nel labirinto/Eye in the Labyrinth* (1971), and Federico Fellini's *E la nave va/And the Ship Sails On* (1983). His last film was Sergio Corbucci's *A tu per tu* (1984), made one year before his death at the age of 60.



DISGUISED *as a mechanical man, Aladdin reveals the Vizier's plot to the Sultan (Aldo Fabrizi), as Princess Zaina (Michèle Mercier) looks on.*

British actor Milton Reid (b. 1917) gives a wonderful comic performance as the bald, hulking Omar, but he did not become a fixture of the Italian cinema. The brawny, shaven-headed Reid started out as a weightlifter and stuntman before he landed his first significant role as the Executioner in Val Guest's *The Camp on Blood Island* (1958), a Hammer Films production. This was followed by another Hammer film, *Terror of the Tongs* (1961), where he attended Christopher Lee's utterance of the famous line, "Have you ever had your bones scraped?" After *Le meraviglie di Aladino*, Reid continued to turn up infrequently—but always memorably—in such British films as *Dr. No* (1962), *Captain Clegg/Night Creatures* (1962), *Deadlier than the Male* (1967), *Dr. Phibes Rises Again* (1972), and *The Spy Who Loved Me* (1977).

Production

Le meraviglie di Aladino is noteworthy in Bava's filmography as the occasion of his meeting with Franco Prosperi, who subsequently became his assistant director for a run of pictures.[2] "I worked closely with Mario for a period of his career, in the early 1960s," he reminisced to the editors of the Italian magazine *Nocturno*. "We communicated in English, so that he might become more comfortable with it; I had worked as an assistant on a lot of American films. I made five films with Bava: *La ragazza che sapeva troppo*, *Ercole al centro della terra*, then a very beautiful one that isn't often seen, *Gli invasori* with the Kessler Twins and Cameron Mitchell, followed by a horrendous Western, *La strada per Fort Alamo*—the producer did not have a *lira* to his name! For *Le meraviglie di Aladino*, Mario shot the second unit and I was the assistant of Henry Levin . . . I had to act as interpreter between him and Levin, and in this way we became fast friends. Mario was a very good man—the best of men—and a superb director of photography. In those days, the film stock had only 40 ASA of sensitivity and Bava could photograph anything with the least amount light. He knew everything there was to know about cinema, truly."[3]

The filming took place over a ten-week schedule, partly on location in Kairouan, Tunisia. Alas, the production turned out to be anything but a vacation. Filming was repeatedly plagued by upsets that made the crew wish they had never left home. On one occasion, the production became embroiled in a border incident when



ALADDIN *pleads with his lamp for one more wish. Note the bed's ornate headboard, which figures in many other Bava films.*

Donald O'Connor, Vittorio De Sica, and Noëlle Adam accidentally crossed the border into Algeria during a desert scene, causing them and other crew members to be detained for three unpleasant hours by Algerian frontier troops. On another day, shooting was disrupted by a medium-sized earthquake. While participating in an action sequence, O'Connor ruptured a blood vessel in his throat, putting him temporarily out of action.

But the production's most harrowing situation arose when the company was granted permission by Governor Amor Chachia to film inside the sacred, 1300-year-old Grand Mosque of Kairouan at the end of January. To photograph the interior of this sacred temple, to bring food and drink inside this spiritual place, which was also forbidden to women—all of these innocent transgressions were regarded as a desecration by Muslim leader Grand Mufti Abderrahim Khalil, who loudly protested the filming and was placed under arrest by the Governor for inciting a riot. The film's American pressbook politely described the resulting fracas as "a minor Muslim revolution." According to *Variety*, after the Grand Mufti's arrest, "an angry mob of [Muslims] broke into [the Governor's] palace, killed one of his guards, then overturned and burned ambulances, trucks, and cars as Tunisian troops rushed to the scene, opened fire on them, killing four civilians." The story might have been contained, but the film's publicist Harvey Matofsky promptly phoned the story to the Associated Press and United Press International, for which he was personally threatened with arrest and promptly banished from the city by the Governor. [4]

No members of the cast or crew were injured, but ten years later, in an interview with Ornella Volta, Mario Bava looked back on this incident as the one time in his life when he was most truly afraid. "We had invaded the Grand Mosque in Kairouan with a full crew—cameras, lights, elephants, makeup kits, ham sandwiches—everything that makes Muslims upset! Suddenly, I found myself on the ground with fifty furious Arabs standing above me, all armed with spears! Fifty spears—pointed at me! They were the procession for a scene we were supposed to have filmed, which was subsequently scrapped. Those Arabs were supposed to have flung themselves into a fire in the scene we were going to shoot, and they demanded to be paid whether we filmed it or not, because of the terror they had all suffered from imagining it!" [5]

On the positive side, art director Flavio Mogherini worked wonders on location, transforming Kairouan's Foire du Tapis Palace—renowned for hosting an annual exhibition of hand-woven carpets and rugs—into a Baghdad market place as long as a city block. The ambitious set reportedly included a fully appointed bath house (where Djalma works for her father) and fourteen different shops. Mogherini did his usual magnificent job on this production, giving the film a marvelously Byzantine look, and providing a wonderfully spooky and atmospheric lair for Raymond Bussières' evil magician.

Special Effects

The "wonders" of *The Wonders of Aladdin* were the doing of Mario Bava and Carlo Rambaldi. According to Marcello Gatti, Bava's special effects duties were not limited to the obvious. Especially after the Grand Mosque incident, the film company was limited in its scenic options—but if Mario could not be taken to the required scenery, the scenery would come to Mario.

"Bava was an absolute genius," says Gatti. "When we were making the movie, he bought a lot of tourist postcards—you know, the typical local landscapes—and he spent an entire evening cutting up these postcards with a small scissors. We all wondered what the hell was he trying to do! Then he glued all the pieces on various panes of glass, creating a series of perfect mattes that perfectly matched shots we had scheduled, providing wonderful backgrounds and landscapes! He put a mirror at a certain angle to the camera and told me how to shoot the mirror. I had an actress that was standing at a completely different angle to the camera, but she was somehow projected into the midst of another incredibly prepared background! Yes, that's how it was—I would follow his instructions and try to figure out what he was doing, but I was never really able to anticipate him. I just waited for the dailies to see what the hell we had really shot!"

To suggest the limbo experienced by Aladdin as his wishes transport him from one place to another, Bava employed a water tank.

2 One of the greater sources of confusion for those of us who chronicle the field of popular Italian cinema is the presence of two Franco Prosperis on the scene. Bava's assistant director, Francesco "Franco" Prosperi, who was also a screenwriter and later became a director in his own right, should not be mistaken for the Franco E. Prosperi who co-directed *Mondo Cane* (1962), *Africa addio* (1966), *Addio zio Tom* (1971), and other so-called "mondo movies" with Gualtiero Jacopetti. The Prosperi who worked with Bava later directed such films as *Tecnica di un omicidio/Hired Killer* (1966), *Dick Smart 2.007* (1967), *La settima donna/Terror* (1978) and *Il trono di fuoco/Throne of Fire* (1982), sometimes using the pseudonyms "Frank Shannon" and "Charles Price."

3 Manlio Gomarasca and Davide Pulici, "Il Talento di Mr. Bava," *Nocturno Dossier* 24, July 2004, 6–32.

4 *Variety*, January 25, 1961, 11.

5 Ornella Volta, "Conversation avec Mario Bava," *Positif* 138, May 1972, 44–48.



The shots appear to have been filmed in 16 mm and then transferred to 35 mm anamorphic stock, resulting in a deliberately grainy and distorted, taffy-pull imagery. The giant flea—one of the film's comic highlights—was constructed by Rambaldi, with a small catapult built into its underside to help it leap. As with *Il ladro di Bagdad*, Bava was not responsible for the uncharacteristically sloppy blue screen work seen in the picture—which causes De Sica's genie to float and Aladdin's magic carpet to fly—which was done during post-production, after Bava had moved on to other projects.

Variants

In America, the distribution rights to *The Wonders of Aladdin* were initially sold by Joseph E. Levine to Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer. MGM was apparently uncomfortable with some aspects of the production and hired American editor Gene Ruggiero to re-edit the picture. The resulting variant is true to *Le meraviglie di Aladino* in terms of story and dialogue, but it differs from the European prints in some striking ways. The following is a list of shots and scenes included in the European versions, signed by Bava, which are not included in the US Levin cut:

- Medium shot of Prince's carriage interior, as Moluk offers one of the harem girls painting his fingernails a taste of his ice cream.
- When Aladdin leaves to take back the lamp, the scene cuts to a silhouetted rear view of Aladdin exiting a keyhole-shaped doorway into the market place. On the threshold, he blows out the flame of his lamp and a fire-eater entertaining the locals responds by blowing a large arc of flame into the sky. He then eats flame from the end of a stick. Aladdin looks around, and we cut to the lamp vendor, seeing Aladdin and hiding—not wishing to refund money for the lamp once again.
- While running away from the mob, Aladdin pauses to stash his stolen goods in an alcove.

FRENCH *affiche with prominent billing for Mario Bava.*

• Aladdin drops his lamp while running over the fakir on his bed of nails. As his pursuers grab their feet in pain after running over the tacks he has spilled in the street, Aladdin is brought the lamp by the friendly fakir.

• Chased onto the rooftops, Aladdin tries to descend a ladder to the streets, but Omar and the others are at the other end, climbing up. He grabs a handy basket and dumps an enormous load of red chili peppers onto them, and dashes to the next roof.

• An added shot of Aladdin's giant hand closing the door after the flea chases most of his pursuers away.

• After chasing Aladdin out of her shop, throwing fistfuls of flea powder after him, Djalma sees some women dancing for coins in the street. In order to make money to accompany Aladdin to Bassora, she performs an exotic dance, removing a series of veils. Prince Moluk is one of her admirers, and he throws her a silver coin—her biggest contribution. She thanks him, and he comments on her beauty. [She does not dance, and she does not make the Prince's acquaintance at this point in the US version.] Later, when he notices Djalma looking for a caravan to join, he points her out to his assistant as "the little dancer."

• An extra dialogue scene in the magician's tent between the Grand Vizier and the raider leading the attack caravan.

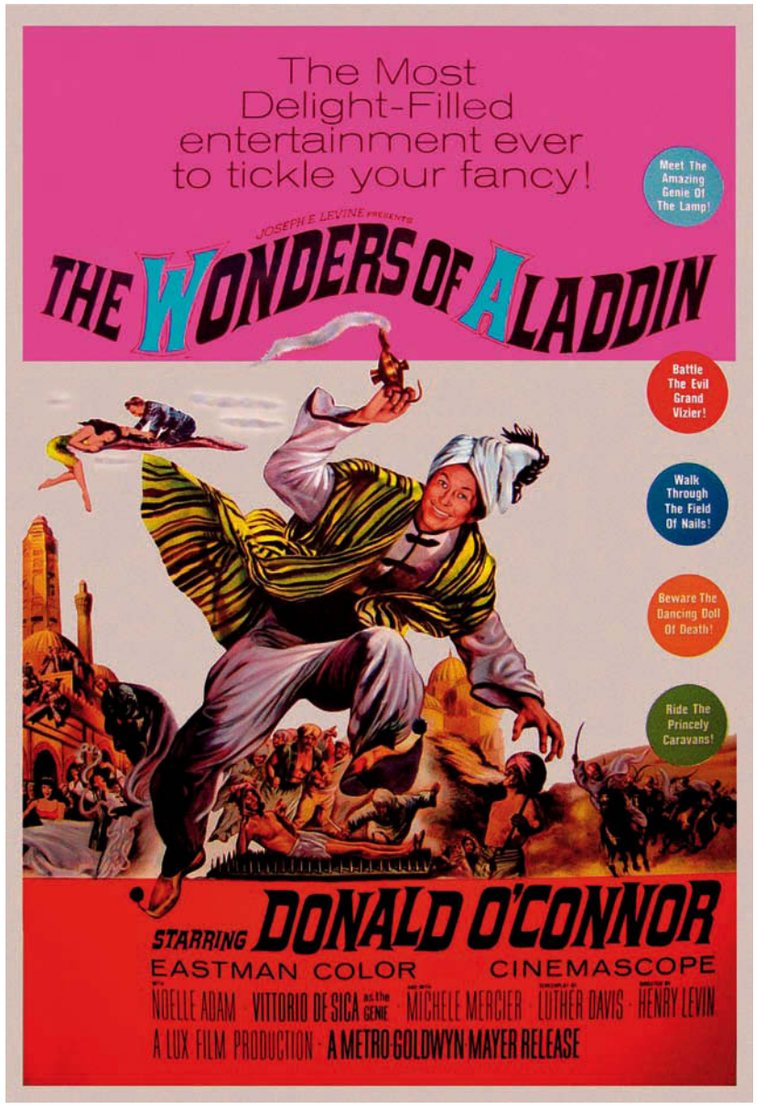
• A shot of Prince Moluk lifting Djalma helpfully onto her mule.

• As the bandit leader watches the Prince's caravan through a telescope, the European prints add a Bavian point-of-view shot through the telescope lens as Djalma passes before it. The bandit mentions that he might take the beautiful girl for himself.

• When Aladdin and Omar encounter the Amazon women pouring water in the desert, there is an additional shot of their hands roaming up their legs.

• After the genie helps Aladdin to fade out of the Amazon Queen's bedroom, he stays behind—and walks suggestively toward her! Dissolve to next scene.

• After the Grand Vizier enters the magician's lair and climbs the stairs to its mezzanine, he playfully taps the foot of a dangling skeleton and unravels the scrolled portrait his emissary has sketched of the secluded Princess Zaina.



US *one-sheet poster with no billing for Bava.*

• When Aladdin uses a handy bellows as a makeshift flame thrower, there is an extra shot of the burned soldiers backing away and being met by the whip of the Grand Vizier, urging them on to battle.

• A shot of the flame-throwing bellows running out of fire, and Aladdin discovering that his oil supply is exhausted. Followed by additional shots of elephants being used to topple the walls of their barricade.

• After the Vizier leaves with Djalma, there is an additional sequence of an elephant lifting Aladdin's lamp and dropping it beside him. He tries to reach it, but a guard interferes, and another elephant hoists it over the wall with its trunk, out of our hero's reach.

• A group of soldiers has formed a search party. Once they pass, the Prince—who has been breathing through a reed—emerges from the water and runs in the opposite direction.

• When the Vizier abducts Djalma again from the wedding fiasco, there are additional shots of his associates mounting their horses and galloping away, and a shot of Djalma being thrown unconscious across his saddle.

• When Aladdin finds Djalma shackled naked in the Vizier's tent, there is an additional shot of her—after she turns her back to him—looking over her shoulder and imploring him not to look.

• As Djalma and Aladdin sail away on their magic carpet, there is an extra shot of the fakir waving to them from below, and them waving back, before kissing one another two or three times. In the US version, Aladdin sees Djalma naked, but never kisses her!

Aside from these mostly minor omissions of violence and mild eroticism, Joseph E. Levine ordered *The Wonders of Aladdin* to be rescored. Angelo Lavagnino's score was retained but, in a separate session conducted by Mario Ammonini, the music was arranged and re-recorded to sound brighter and more cheerful in tone, de-emphasizing the fabulous, mysterioso qualities for which Lavagnino's name is renowned by soundtrack collectors. Thus the reorchestrated score also shares some responsibility for making the film's eroticism to feel more tasteless and inappropriate than they actually are.

As with *The Thief of Bagdad*, Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer arranged for a Dell "Movie Classic" comic book adaptation of the film to be released. This fifteen-cent comic book (illustrated by Luís Dominguez) is of interest for being true to the synopsis . . . with one major exception, which alludes to a scene that may have been scripted and shot, but was not included in the final assembly.

When Aladdin and Omar encounter the Amazons in the Desert of Tribulation, the water-bearing women are shot dead with arrows and our heroes are taken into custody. They are put up for auction, and the auctioneer draws the attention of the crowd to Aladdin's talent for dancing. Aladdin's performance so impresses the Amazon Queen that she acquires him for herself. He is taken to her tent, where the genie rescues Aladdin by turning the Amazons into cats—and the Queen into a woman with a cat's head! A battle royal ensues, during which Aladdin and Omar make their escape. One can easily imagine how poorly executed the Queen's cat head effect might have been, and understand why it had to be dropped, but as a result, the final film offers a much sketchier explanation of why Omar also happened to be saved from the Amazons.



ITALIAN *fotobusta.*

Commentary

The film's American pressbook contains a quote from director Henry Levin about the hopes he had attached to this "multi-million dollar" production. "*The Wonders of Aladdin* reflects a return, in a sense, to the slapstick and hi-jinx comedy of costume movie-making that you just don't see any more," Levin waxed wistfully. "It's a pity too, because these were the kind of pictures that attracted mass audiences everywhere. We feel our picture has caught that same spirit of humor, excitement and spectacle."

It's easy to see why Levin's promotional statement could not quite untangle its promises of a good time from a sense of lament. Despite the best intentions of everyone involved, *Le meraviglie di Aladino* is a failure—particularly in its Americanized version, which was one of Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer's year-end holiday offerings of 1962.

In America, adult audiences were becoming more sophisticated in their tastes for comedy, and *The Wonders of Aladdin* was no *Some Like It Hot*. In the European version, Donald O'Connor's slapstick comedy feels perfectly at home in an entertainment suitable for all ages, because his performance is consistent with broad comedy trends still popular in France and Italy. In America, however, O'Connor's impish, daringly physical performance was considered too broad for adults and had to be re-addressed to juvenile ticket-buyers—the fans of Jerry Lewis and the Three Stooges.

In a film geared toward children, one is startled to see the nude bathing girls in Princess Zaina's pool (however vaguely glimpsed), the bosomy Amazons massaging O'Connor's bare shoulders, and the film's heroine dangling naked in the villain's tent. In the original version, these elements work harmoniously as part of a sensuous and straightforward Arabian Nights entertainment. But *The Wonders of Aladdin* is a pasteurized, condescending kiddie's matinee interpretation, in which these same elements are made to seem inappropriate and prurient. Aggravating the matter further is the leering tone of such dialogue as "Torture these two men till they talk . . . I'll, uh, torture the girl at home." Another line that never fails to astonish American audiences is Prince Moluk's advice to a soldier struck by an arrow: "Chew a little hashish; it will diminish the pain." (As *Variety* critic "Pit" sighed, "For audiences, gum will have to do.")[6]

With nine screenwriters involved in the film's preparation, it's a miracle that *Le meraviglie di Aladino* plays at all harmoniously—yet numerous plot elements are left unresolved. The most noticeable loose ends are the two mechanical dolls, an invention borrowed (along with much else) from the Alexander Korda production of *The Thief of Bagdad*. Here, the robots never fulfill their promise, being given nothing to do but dance and lend a sense of decorative menace to the magician's lair. The one scene in which the female doll crushes one of the Grand Vizier's soldiers is so blandly executed, it's obvious that Bava had no part in its staging. In the English-language version, the Magician and the Vizier never offer a clear-cut explanation for the dolls' role in their scheme. Likewise, when Aladdin disguises himself as one of the robots, he is also given nothing practical to do, though it gives Donald O'Connor a brief opportunity to showcase the kind of madcap dancing that defined his stardom at Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer in the 1950s. (We also have no explanation of how Aladdin even knows about this dancing robot, which he has never seen—much less how he has obtained its costume!) This scene incidentally foreshadows another in Bava's 1966 *Le spie vengono dal semifreddo*, in which Franco Franchi impersonates a dancing robot.

Another continuity problem concerns Omar, who appears in blackface during the wedding scene, but



THE FILM*'s Belgian affiche carries no mention of Bava—unusual for a European release.*

is portrayed as Caucasian in every other scene. Is he disguised as a Nubian in this scene (the film offers nothing to support such an interpretation) or was this the first of Omar's scenes to be filmed, shot before wiser minds prevailed and decreed blackface to be no longer acceptable?

The troubled location shooting of *Le meraviglie di Aladino* was completed at Titanus Studios in March 1961, and Mario Bava was greatly relieved to be able to return home with body and soul intact. After the sustained uneasiness of this production, culminating in the trauma he had experienced in the Grand Mosque, it would be many years before he could be persuaded to work outside of Rome again.

By this point in time, Bava's professional life was back in high gear, as it had been before he interrupted his career as a cameraman to "play 'director.'" He might even have begun to assume that his brief adventure as a movie director had been nothing more than a lark, destined to be forgotten. But he was happy to be doing what he was doing; he took refuge in work where he was comfortable, well-known, and respected, and worked as often as there was something for him to do.

Meanwhile, Bava's homelife was anything but calm. In 1961, his son Lamberto—at the precocious age of 17—married his high school sweetheart, Fiamma Giovagnoli, the daughter of a renowned Italian art restorationist. It was through Fiamma that Lamberto met and befriended a young film buff named Dario Argento, the son of producer Salvatore Argento.

As Argento told Alan Jones: "We met because we were all in the same class—Lamberto, Fiammetta, my future wife Marisa [Casale], and myself—also my sister. We had a similar story because I married Marisa, then he married Fiammetta. We also had something else in common, because both of our fathers worked in the cinema. But after we got married and left school, we didn't see each other again for many years."

The news of Lamberto's early marriage must have concerned Mario greatly. By this time, Mario's own marriage had grown discontented and, especially in a country where divorce was not only illegal but considered a sacrilege, he must have agonized over his teenage son's rash decision to tie himself so early in life to one woman, particularly as the marriage was not motivated by pregnancy, accidental or otherwise.

Around this same time, Eugenio Bava reached the venerable age of 75 and formally stepped down from his long-held post as head of the Istituto LUCE's optical effects department. (His successor was Adriano Pischiutta.) Like his son, Eugenio was not well-disposed to inactivity. Sensing his father's creative restlessness in retirement, Mario began to involve him more and more in his own projects. Eugenio seems to have had a few irons of his own in the fire, and returned the favor.

6 Pit., "The Wonders of Aladdin" review, *Variety*, October 26, 1961.



Thrice the Might!

Maciste contro il vampiro
Maciste alla corte del Gran Khan
Ercole alla conquista di Atlantide



GORDON SCOTT *as Maciste, mustering all his fabled strength against the Blue Faced Men in Giacomo Gentilomo's* MACISTE CONTRO IL VAMPIRO.

BY 1961, much had transpired in the arena of Italian spectacle films in the years since Mario Bava had filmed Steve Reeves in his star-making performances as Hercules. The success of the Hercules films was unparallelled in its impact on Italian cinema. Between 1957 and 1959—due entirely to the international boxoffice success of *Hercules* and *Hercules Unchained*—the *peplum* genre grew from three productions annually to thirteen, and musclemen like Brad Harris, Ed Fury, and Mickey Hargitay were imported to play the likes of Samson, Ursus, and Hercules. Generally speaking, these productions were thinly veiled excuses to recycle leftover sets, props, and wardrobe from costly international co-productions like *Helen of Troy*, *Esther and the King*, *The Colossus of Rhodes*, and *Sodom and Gomorrah*. A select few achieved more as entertainment than was either expected or necessary, and one of these was Giacomo Gentilomo's *Maciste contro i vampiri/Goliath and the Vampires*.



ITALIAN *locandina, art by Enrico DeSeta.*

Maciste contro il vampiro

This film was scripted by the two-fisted team of Sergio Corbucci and Duccio Tessari under the working title of *La rivincita di Maciste* ("Maciste's Revenge"), which remained the film's title until shortly before its theatrical release. The script was the third to reinvent Maciste—the heroic Nubian slave of Giovanni Pastrone's *Cabiria*—as a mythic, white-skinned demigod worthy of standing shoulder-to-shoulder with Hercules, Samson, Ulysses, and the rest; it was preceded by Carlo Campogalliani's *Maciste nella valle dei Re/Son of Samson* (1960, starring Mark Forest) and Antonio Leonviola's *Maciste nella terra dei Ciclopi/Atlas in the Land of the Cyclops* (1961, starring Gordon Mitchell), which featured special effects by Joseph Natanson.

Maciste contro il vampiro

"Maciste vs. the Vampire"
Working title: *La rivincità di Maciste* ("Maciste's Revenge")
Filmed at Dino De Laurentiis Cinematografica, and in Yugoslavia
March – April 1961
First released: August 24, 1961
Technicolor, Totalscope, 2.35:1, 97 minutes

Production: Società Ambrosiana Cinematografica (Milan). Distributor: De Laurentiis

Germany: *Maciste Grösstes Abenteuer,* "Maciste's Greatest Adventure," 8/14/64, 92m
Spain: *Puños de Hierro,* "Fists of Iron," 9/24/62
UK: *Goliath Against the Vampire,* Gala Film Distributors Ltd., 7/64, 92m, Certificate "X," passed with cuts
US: *Goliath and the Vampires,* American International Pictures, 1964, 91m

Maciste alla corte del Gran Khan

"Maciste at the Court of the Grand Khan"
Filmed at INCIR–De Paolis Studios
May – July 1961
First released: October 31, 1961
Technicolor, Dyaliscope, 2.35:1, 94 minutes

Production: Panda Cinematografica (Rome), Gallus Productions (Paris). Distributors: Unidis, Jolly Film.

France: *Le Géant à la Cour de Kublai Kan,* 3/15/63, 92m; *Hercule le géant des Mongoles* (video title)
Germany: *Maciste in der Gewalt des Tyrannen,* 3/23/63, 95m
Mexico: *Sanson y los Siete Milagros*
UK: *Samson and the 7 Miracles of the World,* Anglo-Amalgamated via Warner Pathé Ltd., 12/62, 77m 34s, Certificate "U," passed with cuts
US: *Samson and the 7 Miracles of the World,* 12/62, 76m

Ercole alla conquista di Atlantide

"Hercules at the Conquest of Atlantis"
Filmed at Cinecittà and on location
December 1960 – February 1961
First released: August 19, 1961
Technicolor, Technirama, 2.35:1, 101 minutes

Production: SPA Cinematografica (Rome), Comptoir Français du Film Production (Paris). Distributor: Regionale

Finland: 4/6/62
France: *Hercule à la Conquête de l'Atlantide,* Comptoir Française du Film Production, 2/14/62, 98m
Germany: *Herkules Erobert Atlantis,* "Hercules Conquers Atlantis," Rolei, 2/2/62
UK: *Hercules Conquers Atlantis,* Golden Era Films, 1962, 101m 9s, Certificate "U," passed with cuts
US: *Hercules and the Captive Women,* Woolner Brothers, Allied Artists Pictures Corporation, 4/15/63, 93m

As the American titles of these films show, the name Maciste meant nothing in English-speaking countries. Therefore, when *Maciste contro il vampiro* was exported, the hero was renamed "Goliath" in the English dubbing (American International having staked a claim on this fictional character with the earlier *Goliath and the Barbarians*).

Giacomo Gentilomo had also previously worked with Eugenio Bava on *Sigfrido*, and the onscreen evidence of *Maciste contro il vampiro* suggests that Gentilomo invited the newly retired Eugenio to keep himself busy by lending the film a creative hand; the scenario required a number of lifelike human sculptures. While Eugenio's contribution is perhaps more noticeable here than that of his son, the film contains some trick shots which indicate that Eugenio farmed out some matte painting work to his son, who was between assignments at the time this film was in production.



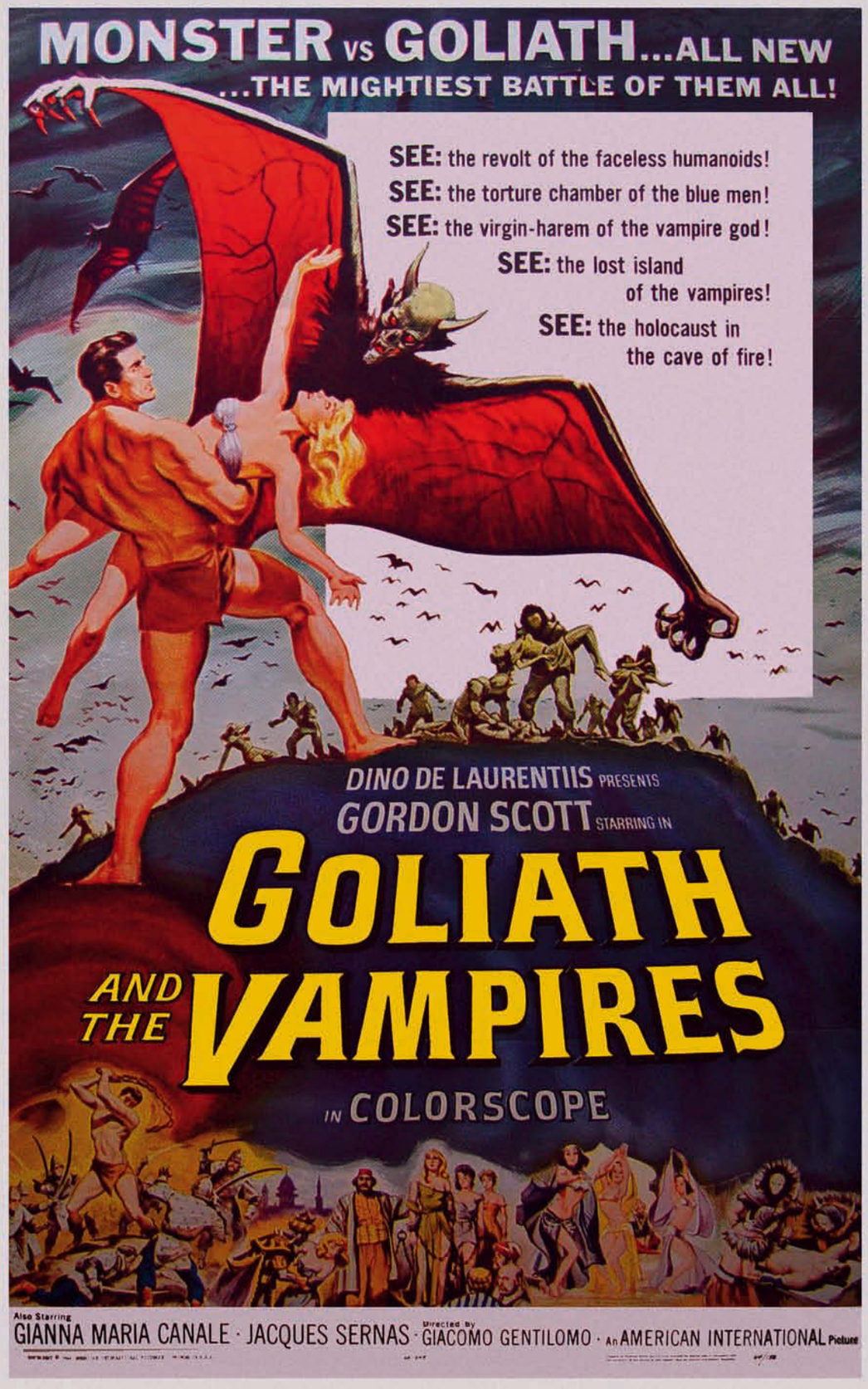
WOMEN *are abducted and bled to feed the hellish appetite of Kobruk in MACISTE CONTRO IL VAMPIRO.*

Maciste (Gordon Scott) and his boy companion Giro (Rocco Vitalazzi), the young brother of his fiancee Julia (Leonora Ruffo), ride back to their home to find their entire village in flames, its people either missing or murdered—the victims of the evil raider Amahl (Van Aikens). As they sail back to their island of Salmanac, Amahl's soldiers slay the old and the very young abductees, feed the useless men to the sharks, and collect the blood of the young women in a chalice to be drunk by the demonic Kobrak (Guido Celano), a vampire belowdecks who compels the people of Salmanac to do his bidding.

Maciste and Giro journey to Salmanac, where they see Julia's friend Magda (Annabella Incontrera) being auctioned in a public square; they enable her to escape, with the escort of the mysterious interloper Kurtik (Jacques Sernas). Maciste and Giro escape Amahl's soldiers by hiding behind a door that leads to Kurtik's domain—a fantastic alchemist's laboratory, stocked with bubbling potions and curious wax figures. Kurtik explains his dedication to destroying Kobrak, and Maciste agrees to accompany him to a tavern where Amahl's soldiers are known to congregate. Shortly after they leave, consigning Giro to Magda's care, the young woman finds a parchment in Kurtik's laboratory, and by pronouncing the dread name of Kobrak, she summons the vampire, who tears out her throat. Salmanac is ruled by Sultan Abdul (Mario Feliciani), a guilty authority figure dominated by Kobrak and his flesh-and-blood associate Astra (Gianna Maria Canale). Astra arrives at the tavern before our heroes, spiriting Julia away to the Sultan's palace before Maciste can rescue her. Maciste tracks Julia to the palace, and the Sultan is so impressed by their mutual love that he grants their freedom—much to the displeasure of Kobrak, who kills the ruler. Astra blames Abdul's death on Maciste,



GIANNA MARIA CANALE *as Astra, Kobruk's imperious associate.*



who is pursued with Julia into the desert, where they become disoriented in a sandstorm. They fall underground and discover a secret race of Blue Men—humanoids bred by Kobrak from the bodies of abducted victims. Among them is Kurtik, who is himself a more human, white-skinned Blue Man who rules their legion, determined to cure the others with a potion only one ingredient shy of perfection.

Kurtik has abducted Astra from the palace and lowers her into a pit with a giant insect creature, but Maciste intervenes, refusing to see her murdered. He promises to find the ingredient and leads an army of Blue Men back to Salmanac, but in a haunted forest outside the kingdom they are overcome by a larger horde of Kobrak's faceless warriors. Young Giro is actually killed in this battle. Maciste is placed in a pit, where Kobrak tries to deafen him with strikes against a giant lowered bell, but Astra (who has found her way back to the monster's side, but has fallen in love with Maciste) saves the hero by secretly providing him with wax to plug his ears. Thinking himself victorious, Kobrak assumes the form of Maciste to take a false and destructive chemical to Kurtik, but the real Maciste arrives in time to best the demon in battle, unmasking him and delivering the ingredient needed to complete Kurtik's formula. Humanity is restored to Maciste's people and his victory is celebrated with the unveiling of a statue in his likeness.

Produced by Paolo Moffa for Società Ambrosiana Cinematografica at the newly built studios of Dino De Laurentiis Cinematografica. *Maciste contro il vampiro* is an entertaining *peplum* that finds the genre wildly fusing aspects of horror, fantasy, and science fiction, in ways that exceed even the fecund imagination of Francisci's *Ercole e la regina di Lidia*.

Gordon Scott was born Gordon Werschkul, in Portland, Oregon, on August 3, 1927. Though he matured into quite a good actor, he never aspired to be a movie star; he was a former Las Vegas lifeguard who, after

US *one-sheet poster, art by Reynold Brown.*

being discovered by producer Sol Lesser, played Tarzan in a half-dozen pictures for RKO and Paramount, culminating in the excellent *Tarzan's Greatest Adventure* (1959) and *Tarzan the Magnificent* (1960). Scott came to Italy earlier in 1961 when Steve Reeves suggested him to producer Tonino Cervi as the ideal actor to portray the role of his jealous, headstrong brother in Sergio Corbucci's *Romolo e Remo/Duel of the Titans*—the story of Romulus and Remus and the founding of Rome, scripted by no less than eight screenwriters, including Corbucci, Ennio De Concini, and Sergio Leone. Scott, who had been unceremoniously replaced as Tarzan after spearheading the long-running series' two finest entries, grabbed the opportunity with both hands and played the role of Remus to the hilt, giving arguably the finest performance of his career. After this impressive *peplum* debut, Scott was offered *Maciste contro il vampiro* and became one of no fewer than four actors who were portraying Maciste on Italian screens at the same time: the others were two Americans, Mark Forest and Gordon Mitchell, and one Italian, Kirk Morris (whose real name was Adriano Bellini). Of the four, there is no question that Scott was the best Maciste; he was the best actor and a formidable stunt man as well, which he would demonstrate beyond any question in his next picture, *Maciste alla corte del Gran Khan/Samson and the 7 Miracles of the World* (1961). Scott is seen here in his best-ever physical condition, attacking the role of Maciste with gusto. [1] He could also act, and there is never a sense (as one often gets with Steve Reeves) that he is merely going through the poses. Scott would remain a working actor on the continent through 1967, the time of his retirement from the screen, playing an appreciably broad range of roles: not only Maciste and others of his ilk, but Julius Caesar, Zorro, Coriolanus, and Buffalo Bill. His career following much the same trajectory as that of his friend and sponsor Steve Reeves—from *pepla* to swashbucklers to Westerns—Scott eventually won the role that made Reeves famous in Albert Band's unsold TV pilot *Hercules and the Princess of Troy* (1965), in which he fought an elaborate sea monster built and operated by Carlo Rambaldi. As Italy's premiere monster-builder, it is likely that Rambaldi was responsible for manufacturing the monsters glimpsed in *Maciste contro il vampiro*, though he received no screen credit.



GORDON SCOTT *and stunt double Giovanni Cianfriglia (who later had his own screen career as "Ken Wood") grapple as Maciste comes face-to-face with his own evil doppelgänger.*

What is most startling about *Maciste contro il vampiro*, even today, is the unexpected cruelty and ferocity of its images: the village raid with its wall-to-wall atrocities (an arrow fired into a man's eye, another man suspended by one leg and set ablaze); Amahl's rampant slashing of women's arms in the hold of his ship to fill a chalice with blood; Kobruk's monstrous hand emerging from the curtains of a canopied bed to receive the chalice; Magda's unwitting summoning of the vampire in the alchemist's lair, his talons shredding her throat; Astra being lowered into a pit as fodder for a gigantic, gibbering insect; the demon's eyes malevolently peering through a window in the bell intended to deafen Maciste; and the surprisingly bloody death of young Giro, to name a few. The nightmarish quality of these moments is further intensified by hellish lighting, credited to Alvaro Mancori, which accompanies most of Kobrak's appearances with a saturation of red that scalds the screen. The film's aggressive use of color, its stylized aura of supernatural cruelty, and some of its specific images—like Kobruck's curtained presence and the alchemist's lab where an unsuspecting woman is torn to ribbons—anticipate the garishly colored supernatural works of Dario Argento: *Suspiria* (1977) and *Inferno* (1980).

Given his past associations with Gentilomo, Eugenio Bava may have contributed some, if not all, of the lifesize wax figures to the picture, including a couple of detailed, elderly examples seen in Kurtik's underground laboratory. Some of these, considering their otherwise unnecessary advanced age, may well have been the statues of Saints which Eugenio had recently finished, or was then in the process of sculpting. Meanwhile, Mario's signature style can be detected in a glass matte of Amahl's ship shown anchored offshore during the village raid (this may well have been a reused matte executed for an earlier picture—it looks familiar), and he may have been involved in photographing some shots, such as the various summonings of Kobrak, which utilize the same technique Bava used to film Arturo Dominici's materialization out of thin air in *La maschera del demonio*. These required that actor Guido Celano—in costume, off camera—have his lighted reflection aligned with the on-set action on a sheet of glass placed at a 45° angle in front

1 In Germany, the film was released as *Maciste grösstes Abenteuer* ("Maciste's Greatest Adventure"), because Scott's earlier Tarzan film had been very popular there, under the title *Tarzan grösstes Abenteuer.*

of the camera, enabling him to "appear" or "disappear" by raising or lowering the light on the reflected element. Mario may have also had a hand in creating the latex masks worn by the Blue Men (as he had done with the many Steve Reeves lookalikes in *Il ladro di Bagdad*), which give them a uniformly passive appearance.

Maciste alla corte del Gran Khan

Gordon Scott's next Maciste project, *Maciste alla corte del Gran Khan*, was produced by Luigi Carpentieri and Ermanno Donati's Panda Cinematografica and made possible by another Panda production: Piero Pierotti's *Marco Polo* (1962). The principal screenwriter of both projects was Oreste Biancoli (1897-1971), best-known as the author of Vittorio De Sica's classic *Ladri di biciclette/The Bicycle Thief* (1948); Biancoli was also a longtime friend of Bava, having written his early photographic assignment *Sant'Elena, piccolo isola* (1943) and, since the second World War, served as the artistic executive of Scalera Film, where Bava did much of his studio filming.

Starring American actor Rory Calhoun as the 13th century Venetian adventurer, *Marco Polo* was a resplendent production, the most ostentatious ever undertaken by Carpentieri and Donati. It yielded such magnificent sets (by Zoran Zorcic) and costumes (by Mario Giorsi), and featured so many Asian extras, that the producers saw the wisdom of extending these resources into a second feature. The presence of Gordon Scott in Rome prompted the idea of featuring him in another Maciste film, thus taking advantage of the publicity surrounding the picture he had just completed for Dino De Laurentiis. To American sensibilities, the notion of having Maciste turn up without explanation in 13th century China was far-fetched, but as Oreste Biancoli understood, such an idea was faithful to the screen career of the original Maciste, Bartolomeo Pagano. After his screen debut in *Cabiria*, Pagono parlayed his success as Maciste into a long career, always as Maciste, who became a timeless figure of the might of right. Maciste could walk the streets of Rome in a toga or a suit and tie; his spirit could be manifest in all lands, in all eras, throughout history, whenever such selfless strength as his was required to counter the forces of evil. Biancoli proposed the storyline, and signed the script with Ennio De Concini, Duccio Tessari, and others.



GORDON SCOTT *and Yoko Tani bring the body of the assassinated Prince Ti-sung to a Holy Man in Riccardo Freda's* MACISTE ALLA CORTE DEL GRAN KHAN.

The female lead of *Marco Polo*, the exquisite Yoko Tani, was carried over to the new picture, as were cameraman Riccardo Pallottini and other key personnel. The director's chair was awarded to Carpentieri and Donati's gambling buddy Riccardo Freda.

Although *Maciste alla corte del Gran Khan* was made possible by the splendors of *Marco Polo*, so extensive was the larger film's post-production period, the subsidiary feature beat its progenitor into Italian theaters by six months.

In 13th century China, the evil Mongolian pretender Garak (Leonardo Severini) stages a coup that results in the death of the Emperor and sets him up in the palace at Panjan as the regent protector of the Princess Lei-ling (Yoko Tani) and her younger brother, Prince Ti-sung (Chiu Lai Chit). When the children come of age and stand to pose a threat to his control of the throne, Garak is advised by his paramour Liu Tai (Hélène Chanel) to invite the young Prince on a tiger hunt rigged to end in his own demise. She likewise proposes that the murder of the Princess take place during a raid on the convent, which can be rumored as a hiding place for the rebels living in the mountains. Garak's soldiers, led by Bajan (Dante Di Paolo), have Ti-sung bound and leave him as bait in a tiger trap. Just in time, Maciste (Gordon Scott) emerges from the forest to fight the tiger to the death and rescue the Prince, physically uprooting a tree to shake the Mongol soldiers from its branches. He carries the inert form of the Prince to a nearby Buddhist monastery, where the high priest Tao (Valerij Inkijinoff) accepts him thankfully. Tao proposes that the Prince's blood-stained clothing be taken to the palace as "proof" of Ti-sung's demise, and that Maciste join forces with the leader of the rebels, Cho (Gabriele Antonini). Maciste is directed to the House of the Swan, where his meeting with Cho is interrupted by a drunken Mongol soldier who demands a room to share with an unwilling Chinese woman he has commandeered—it is Lei-ling, who fled the convent as it was being raided. She is saved from the brute by Cho, with Maciste's help, neither of them realizing her true identity. Cho offers sanctuary to Lei-ling, to whom he is greatly attracted, and he is humbled when she confides her identity to him. Bajan, looking for the woman taken from his soldier, is led to Cho's home by an informant. Cho, not recognized as the rebel leader, is merely beaten,

while Lei-ling is taken to Panjan to be tortured. But when her tattoo is exposed, Garak intervenes and frees her, proposing that they marry instead—much to the chagrin of the ambitious Liu Tai.

Tao, having taken the Prince's gruesoaked robes to Garak, sends a carrier pigeon back to the monastery with word of the impending marriage. Liu Tai witnesses this, and intercepts the return message announcing Maciste's imminent arrival. The strong man reaches Panjan when a group of rebel prisoners are ceremoniously buried up to their necks in the arena and set to be decapitated for Garak's amusement by a chariot with a blade affixed to its underside. Maciste wrests the chariot from its driver and overturns it before the blade or the horses can reach the vulnerable men. He then flees the scene to the secret entrance to Panjan where he was to meet Tao, whom he finds dead—shackled to the ceiling. He is met instead by Liu Tai, who takes him to Princess Lei-ling. They make a successful escape and thank Liu Tai, who shuns their gratitude and says she did not do it for them. She is promptly arrested and sent to the dungeon for torture at the hands of Garak himself.

In the meantime, Cho and Ti-sung have regained their strength at the monastery, which is now the secret headquarters of Cho's rebel forces. Maciste and Lei-ling arrive with Bajan's army in hot pursuit—Ti-sung insists on joining Cho's men in an effort to fight them off, despite his sister's pleas to the contrary. As the Mongol soldiers invade the monastery on horseback, flailing their swords against the defenseless Buddhist monks, Ti-sung is felled by an arrow. Maciste uses his strength to open a fissure in the wall to permit the escape of the Princess and the others, then allows the ceiling to fall on the Mongols and the Buddhist monks who refused to abandon their temple. He carries the dead body of the Prince through the caverns beyond, until they discover the throne of the Buddhist divinity known as the Wise One (Luang Ham Chou), who reveals the secret of restoring order. Maciste must perform the miracle of ringing the Bell of Freedom at Panjan, an ancient bell encircled by centuries of vines, whose toll will signal to one and all the restoration of Chinese rule and the end of enslavement to the Mongols. Having imparted these words of hope, the Wise One dies. With no unobstructed path to the bell, Lei-ling offers to provide a distraction by returning to Panjan to keep her promise of marriage to Garak.

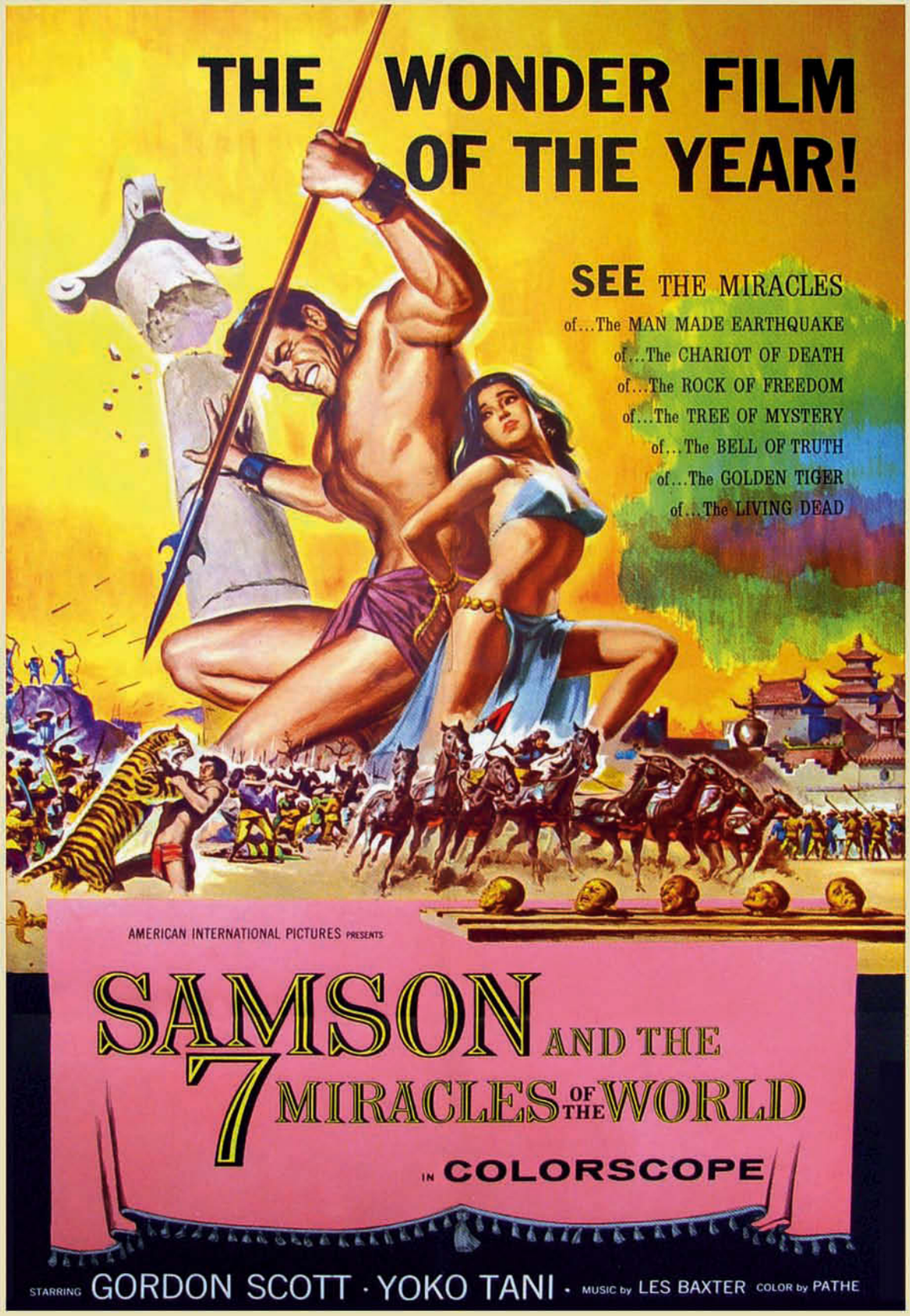
Finding the bell, Maciste uses all his strength to free its ornate clanger from a profusion of thick vines and rings freedom in, triggering a revolt among the slaves of the Mongols. Garak realizes at once that Lei-ling's return has been a diversion and he orders her sent to Liu Tai's cell. Garak's guards converge around the Bell of Freedom to arrest Maciste; as he turns to challenge them, the bell's heavy clanger swings, striking the back of his head and killing him. Garak makes a show of his dead body to the two imprisoned women and orders his burial in the deepest foundations of the palace. There, the voice of the Wise One resonates within Maciste's dead body, pleading for the miracle of his life to be restored. Maciste awakens from death and summons the strength to escape, his exertions causing a subterranean quake that topples much of the palace grounds during the planned execution of Cho and his rebels. In the confusion, Cho succeeds in hurling a spear into Garak's back, killing him.

Princess Lei-ling and Cho later marry. During the elaborate ceremony, Maciste sees that his work is done and exits in search of the next cause where his strength and integrity will be needed.



AS BAJAN, *American actor Dante Di Paolo dispenses tortures to the captives of the Grand Khan.*

Riccardo Freda was at his best in the realm of historic adventure and *Maciste alla corte del Gran Khan* is one of his finest pictures. Impeccably designed, it is also acted with style and conviction. Though Leonardo Severini is hardly convincing as the Grand Khan, he does convince as one of Freda's trademark sadistic villains. The role of the Grand Khan was originally to be played by Dante Di Paolo, who angered Freda by refusing to shave the full beard he was contracted to grow for his next picture, Irving Rapper's *Ponzio Pilato/Pontius Pilate* (1962). He was replaced by Severini and given the role of Bajan instead. The imperiously seductive Hélène Chanel is well-cast as Liu Tai, less for her distinctly non-Asiatic appearance than for her resemblance to the actress who usually played such roles in Freda's films, Gianna Maria Canale. (Canale's absence from the picture might be explained by the fact that she and Freda had a child around this time—a daughter named Jacqueline.) Purists might quibble over the casting of Japanese-born, French-raised Yoko Tani as a Chinese princess, yet she lends an aura of tender nobility to the character of Lei-ling and gives



what is perhaps the most feeling lead female performance to be found in this entire male-dominant genre.

Freda's direction is proud, stoic and exemplary, yet not without humor. In the wake of the fistfight at the House of the Swan, he lets the scene linger on the proprietor surveying a business where everything has been wrecked . . . except for a single vase, which he then voluntarily smashes over the head of a reviving Mongolian troublemaker, losing everything. His Sadean sense is particularly acute here, especially in the scene of Garak administering a solution of salt and vinegar to Liu Tan's flogging welts on the edge of a feather, and going so far as to indulge in the black humor of a cut from the plummeting of a headsman's axe to a shot of a court entertainment juggling an array of head-sized balls.

Dante Di Paolo remembers that on the last day of filming, Freda demanded that he and a team of more experienced horsemen ride in their Mongolian makeup through a field rigged with explosives. Di Paolo was confused, as no such scene appeared in the script and later learned that it was an action scene Freda was directing for Andre de Toth's *I mongoli/ The Mongols* (1961)!

Notable among the Maciste film's many strengths is that, if not for some blatantly Western casting (particularly Di Paolo as Bajan), it could pass for a film actually lensed in Asia. This illusion was partly the contribution of Mario Bava, who assisted credited cameraman Riccardo Pallottini with a number of unacknowledged trick shots. He created the maquette of the palace at Panjan; painted the palace and other pagoda-like buildings (such as the convent) onto the hilltops of various country roads, sometimes adding to the verisimilitude with a foregrounded tree branch; added a gigantic stone sculpture of an elephant (actually a tiny thing carved by Freda himself) to the foreground of another exterior shot; and employed artful double exposures to multiply the number of extras in epic shots of Asian slaves engaged in toil. He appears to have

US *one-sheet, art by Reynold Brown.*

replaced Pallottini for two scenes that stand out strikingly from the rest of the film's photography: Maciste's covert rescue of Lei-ling from the Grand Khan's palace, which includes a stunning composition of three actors radiant in unique primary color—Tani in yellow, Scott in red, Chanel in blue—while framed on either side by silhouetted sprays of potted plants; and the rain-soaked scene in the cave where Maciste carries the fallen Prince, pierced by an arrow, to the throne of the Wise One and pleads for guidance.

Maciste alla corte del Gran Khan was acquired for US release (as *Marco Polo* would be) by American International Pictures, who cut nearly 20 minutes from its running time and, as was becoming a tradition, scrapped Carlo Innocenzi's original score in favor of a more boldly orchestrated re-recording by Les Baxter, for which he was accorded sole credit. (*Marco Polo* had the further indignity of having its direction credited on AIP and British Warner Pathé prints to Hugo Fregonese, who never set foot on the set and merely supervised the recutting and dubbing of the picture. The AIP pressbooks for both films are astonishing in their gall, their publicity stories focusing exclusively on the contributions of Baxter and Fregonese.) Known in America as *Samson and the 7 Miracles of the World* and abroad as simply *Samson and the 7 Miracles*, the dubbed version imposed the concept of the miracles on the picture, but they are identified only in the film's advertising: "See the Miracle of—The Golden Tiger! The Tree of Mystery! The Chariot of Death! The Rock of Freedom! The Living Dead! The Bell of Truth! The Man-Made Earthquake!" (The tiger is an ordinary Bengal tiger, and the only possible "Tree of Mystery" is either the one that Maciste uproots to shake some Mongol soldiers off its branches, or the heavy vines ensnaring the Bell of Freedom.) These miracles were presumably conceived as a Samsonesque counterpart to the labors of Hercules, but the first four are incidental rather than miraculous, and only the fifth and sixth are specifically alluded to as miracles in the dialogue (and called the "sixth" and "seventh," incidentally).



While renewing their acquaintance on this production, Mario Bava and Oreste Biancoli resolved to work together again, and they did: Biancoli would script Bava's forthcoming Viking saga, *Gli invasori/Erik the Conqueror* (1961).

Ercole alla conquista di Atlantide

At the very moment that other film companies began to produce their variations on the *peplum* genre he had fostered, Galatea mogol Nello Santi became embarrassed by the series whose success put his company on the map. He dumped Hercules, and set his sights on making more sophisticated fare like Roberto Rossellini's *Viva l'Italia!* (1960) and Pietro Germi's *Divorzo all'Italiana/Divorce Italian Style* (1961).

Mario Bava found this kind of behavior hard to understand: "After *Ercole e la regina di Lidia*, Santi said, 'Enough of these Hercules films! I won't make any more!' And yet, because of Hercules, he didn't have to work for anyone else for ten years!" [2]

Santi washed his hands of Hercules by selling the franchise to another Italian production company, SPA Cinematografica, which had the distinction of being founded by Giovanni Battista Enrico Antonio Maria (1897-1978), then a member of the College of Cardinals and destined to ascend to the papacy as Pope Paul VI in 1963. SPA's executive producer was Achille Piazzi, who had achieved international success with his first production, Michelangelo Antonioni's *Il grido* ("The Outcry," 1957). A neorealist drama starring Steve Cochran and Alida Valli, *Il grido*—scripted in part by the ever-fertile mind of Ennio De Concini—won the Grand Critic's Prize at the 10th Locarno Film Festival and launched Antonioni (who had been directing films since the early 1950s) as one of Italy's most

ITALIAN *locandina.*

2 Alberto Abruzzese, et al., *La città del cinema—produzione e lavoro nel cinema italiano 1930–70* (Rome, Italy: Napoleone, 1979), 83–89.

innovative filmmakers. Unlike Santi, Piazzi quickly showed a preference for more commercial entertainment, following *Il grido* with espionage and action pictures including *Tunisi Top Secret* and *Il raccomandato di ferro* (both 1959). SPA's big title for 1960 was announced as *La vendetta di Ercole*, presumably to star Steve Reeves.

As Reeves later explained, "I never refused the offer to star in a third Hercules film. I was willing to do it, but I wanted to do it with Pietro Francisci, not with some other director."

Reeves' stubborn allegiance to Francisci was unfortunate for several reasons. First of all, SPA's choice to succeed Francisci was Vittorio Cottafavi. Born January 30, 1914, in Modena, Cottafavi wrote his first produced script in 1939 and had been directing since 1943's *I nostri sogni*, which starred Vittorio De Sica and Paolo Stoppa. By the 1950s, he came to specialize in costume pictures and swashbucklers and, apace with Francisci, *pepla*. He was more talented than Francisci, though films like *La rivolta dei gladiatori/The Warrior and the Slave Girl* (1958), *Messalina venere imperatrice/Messalina* (1959), and *Le legioni di Cleopatra/Legions of the Nile* (1960) did not prove as popular with audiences. While Francisci had Steve Reeves, Cottafavi had Georges Marchal. A collaboration between Cottafavi and Reeves might have resulted in the greatest *peplum* of all, but it was not to be. Reeves had become too much an icon of the Italian cinema to be devastated by the loss of his signature role. Anywhere he went, his physique would follow. As we have seen, his retirement as Hercules freed him to pursue new avenues of cinematic heroism.

Meanwhile, the role of Hercules was inherited by another American body-builder, Brooklyn-born Lou Degni (b. 1933), who adopted the screen name of "Mark Forest." According to American International Pictures producer Samuel Z. Arkoff, "The Italian prejudice against local talent was so intense that only *American* bodybuilders were being hired for films. You couldn't star a man with an Italian name—even if he was an Italian-American!"



HERCULES *is attacked by the vampire god Proteus, first in the form of a vulture . . .*

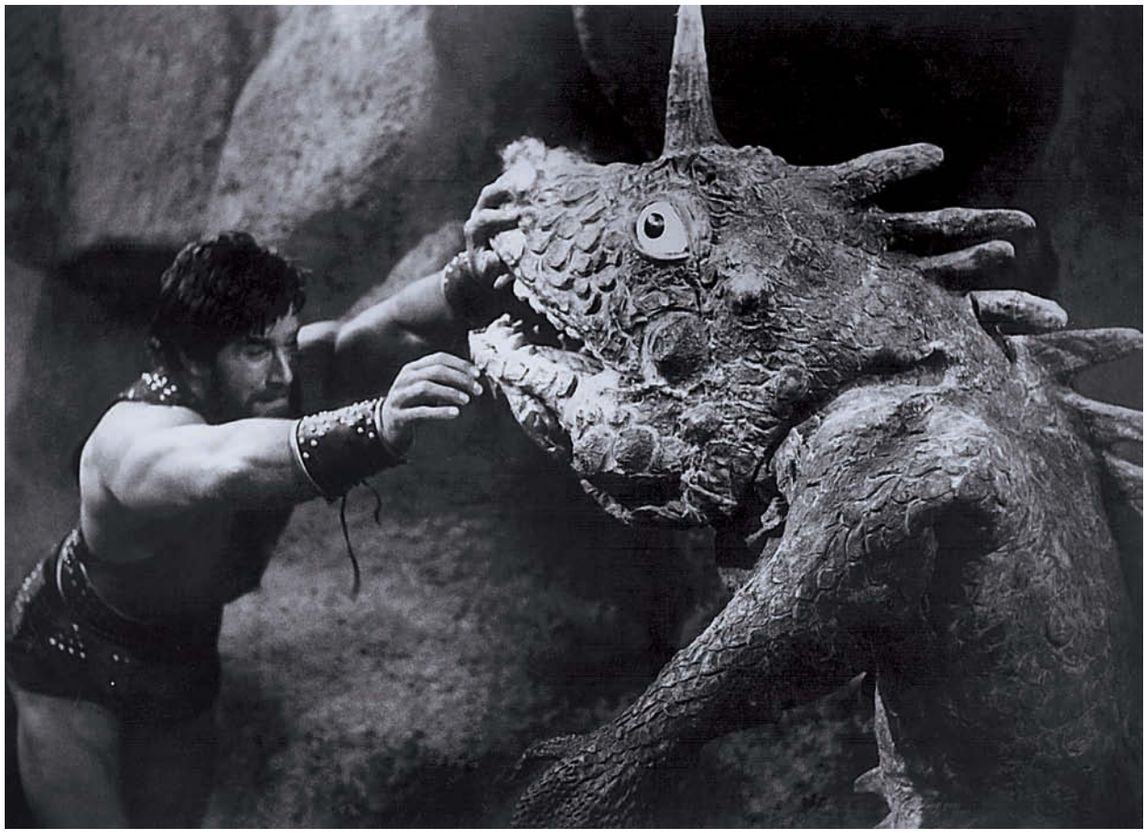
Degni had an impressive physique but never won a major bodybuilding title. His accomplishments in this field were coming in 27th in the 1952 Mr. America competition (at age 19), and being named "Mr. Venice Beach" in 1954. He made his acting debut in Cottafavi's *La vendetta di Ercole* ("The Vengeance of Hercules," 1960). While not one of Cottafavi's best films, it is one of the better *pepla*, emulating the colorful cinematography, imaginative set design, and weird comic strip goings-on of the Hercules films Bava had photographed. Degni also proved himself a charismatic successor to Reeves. While his bulbous physique lacked Reeves' trim, chiselled perfection, Degni's demeanor was less rigid, more natural and easygoing, resulting in a warmer, more approachable Hercules. But Degni too was fated to lose the coveted role, after gaggling with Achille Piazzi over some of the labors described in the already-completed script for the series' fourth entry.

"It was extremely demanding," Degni complained. "In and out of water, and fighting, and—oh, it was just terrible! I said, 'I can't work under these conditions.' And they said, 'Well, we're going to get Reg Park,' and I said, 'Go ahead and use him . . . I don't care,' because I had other obligations to other companies."[3]

Degni made good on his threat by travelling to Zagreb, Yugoslavia, in November 1960 to star in *Maciste nella valle dei Re* ("Maciste in the Valley of Kings," 1960), which was later released in the United States as *Son of Samson*. He continued to work as "Mark Forest" in similar films through the mid-1960s, primarily in the reactivated role of Maciste, and he remains one of the most admired stars of an admittedly minor genre.

Achille Piazzi likewise made good on his threat—by dispatching a telegram to world-famous bodybuilder Reg Park at his gymnasium in Johannesberg, South Africa.

Born in Leeds, England, on June 7, 1928, Reginald Park had been a talented teen athlete. He managed to run the 100-yard dash in slightly more than 10 seconds at age 16. He won Britain's "Perfect Boy" competition the next year and, after spending his military service in Scotland and Malaya, he returned to England and won the Mr. Britain bodybuilding competition at the age of 21. At the time of the events covered in this chapter, Park had twice won the coveted Mr. Universe title (in 1951 and 1958); he had also tried for the title in 1950, coming in second place to the victorious Steve Reeves. (After the events covered in this chapter, he would win the title an unprecedented third time, in 1965.) In addition to these distinctions, by 1961, Park had married and settled down in Johannesberg, where he became the successful owner of a gymnasium and mail order business. Unlike Steve Reeves, Park had never entertained fantasies of an acting career. His success enabled him to respond to Piazzi's



screen test invitation with demands not often met by the *lire*-pinching Italian film industry.

"Send me a First Class round trip ticket, a room in a 5-star hotel, and my expenses for the test, and I'd be happy to come," Park cabled back. [4] No reply was immediately forthcoming, so Park forgot about it and went on with his life. Then, on Christmas Eve, Piazzi telegrammed back, agreeing to meet Park's demands, and flew Mr. Universe to Rome on Boxing Day, December 26.

The resulting film, *Ercole alla conquista di Atlantide*, was not directed by Mario Bava but Bava's signature style is present in a number of scenes, indicating that he was either hired as an anonymous special effects hand while the film was still in production, or brought in afterwards—perhaps at the time he was hired to direct its sequel, *Ercole al centro della terra/Hercules in the Haunted World*—to shoot additional material.

While riding home with son Hylas (Luciano Marin), Theban king Androcles (Ettore Manni), and the dwarf Timotheus (Salvatore Furnari), Hercules (Park) witnesses a frightening vision of the world bathed in blood and fire, as a voice utters warnings that the cities of Greece are imperiled by a threat from the heavens. The three men decide to go to the prophet Tiresias (Nando Tamberlani) for an explanation, and he informs them that the threat extends from across the ocean and a place from which no man has returned. Androcles decides to sail into those forbidden waters, and wary of usurpers, Hercules shatters the king's throne so that no one will sit upon it until his return. Tired of battles, Hercules vows to his wife Deianara (Luciana Angiolillo) to settle down and not sail with Androcles. He awakens on the deck of Androcles' ship, out to sea with a minimal crew of ne'er-do-wells, having been drugged and abducted by his adventure-hungry son (who hides belowdecks, so as not to be punished). The hero takes the surprise in good stride, but refuses to lift a finger in assistance—until the crew attempt to steal the ship while Hercules and Androcles are ashore on an island, collecting provisions. Hercules pulls the escaping ship back to shore with its own anchor chain. The pirates are left behind, and the four-man crew advance into the unknown—with Hercules once again refusing to assist. That night, the ship is engulfed in a terrible storm that washes Androcles overboard and separates Hercules from Timotheus and the son he does not yet realize has accompanied them.

Hercules awakens on a chunk of the ruined ship, and follows the delirious cries of Androcles to a foggy shore where he finds a girl (Laura Efrikian, billed as Laura Altan), half-imprisoned in stone, begging to be killed. She is tormented by the evil, vampiric god Proteus, who appears to Hercules as an old man before attacking him in the guises of a horned lizard, a python, a lion, and a vulture. The hero defeats them all, freeing the girl from the stone. She is Ismene, daughter of Queen Antinea (Fay Spain) of Atlantis, who was placed there as a sacrifice to protect the people of Atlantis. With the death of Proteus, the veil of fog protecting Atlantis from discovery is lifted, and Hercules escorts Ismene home. She is not a welcome sight to her mother, however, as it is written in the sacred books of Atlantis that if Ismene survives her mother, the island kingdom will be destroyed. Out of Hercules' sight, Ismene is seized by guards. He later sees Androcles in the corridors of the palace, but as he pursues the phantom, he walks into a mirror image of himself, and then again into one of the Queen's strange-looking, heavy-browed companion officers (led by Mimmo Palmara).

Ismene is taken to a precipice by guards and tied to a tree, where Hylas and Timotheus overcome the guards and free her. Meanwhile, Antinea amuses Hercules with dancing girls and philosophical discussion, but the hero yearns to find his lost friend; the Queen promises him a ship, but that night in his room, an attempt is made on Hercules' life—by Androcles! The king reprises the rhetoric of the earlier vision, about the coming rains of blood and fire, which he more explicitly ties to the fated conquest of the god Uranus. Hercules overcomes his former friend, and Antinea explains that she kept Androcles' presence a secret because he was driven mad by the storm, and is no longer himself. She hopes to calm Hercules with some drugged wine, but he has the foresight not to swallow it. Left alone, he escapes his barred room and follows the soldiers carrying Androcles to a distant pit, meeting Hylas, Timotheus, and Ismane on the road. The soldiers dump meat into a pit of men with burned faces and open sores, and lower Androcles among them. Hercules pummels the gate imprisoning the men, and carries Androcles out—fulfilling the vision of himself. One of the men tells Hercules of a rock, high in

. . .**THEN** *in the form of a reptilian monster.*

3 William Connolly, "Forest in the Valley of Italians," *Spaghetti Cinema* 31, August 1988, 5–6.

4 John Turner, "Tribute to a Big Man I," Spaghetti Cinema 35, June 1989, 4.

the mountains, which Antinea uses to change men; they, with the burns and sores, resisted the rock's influence and were placed in the pit to starve, while others were transformed into evil, invincible creatures.

As Hercules climbs toward the place of the rock, the freed prisoners decide to attack Antinea's palace. Hylas tries to stop them, but to no avail. Hercules finds the cave that harbors a large crater emitting an eerie, radium-like light with the power to destroy some ordinary men and mutate others into sons of Uranus. Zenith (Mario Petri)—a priest of Uranus—appears, telling Hercules that the rock was formed from a single drop of blood from the god Uranus; he will continue to worship it until a stronger force appears. Hercules demonstrates his invulnerability to the light, and Zenith admits that only the light of the sun can bring an end to it. Hercules returns to the palace, littered with the corpses of the men from the pit, and combats an army of soldiers, all with the same light hair and heavy brows that mark the sons of Uranus. They overcome him and send him into an underground cell that also holds his son, Hylas. Gas is let into the cell, and the stone ceiling begins to descend, but Hercules succeeds in tipping the ceiling into a ladder, enabling them to climb free. Hercules orders his son to go to safety, but he once again disobeys by disguising himself as a Uranian soldier and getting aboard the ship where Ismene is once again held hostage. Hercules steals a chariot and flees, pursued by Uranian soldiers, who are thwarted by fiery traps and collapsed passages. He makes his way back to the cave of the rock, climbs to the top and tears a chunk from the stone ceiling, letting a ray of sunlight fall near the crater, which will reach it in time. As the heroes are united and the abductors are overcome, the sun reaches the crater, triggering vast volcanic eruptions, earthquakes, and the ultimate destruction of Atlantis. Antinea is crushed by the toppling likeness of her own false god, and Androcles is freed from his amnesia. Unable to remember anything since the storm, the Theban king has his memory refreshed by Hercules: "You saved all of Greece!"

Ercole alla conquista di Atlantide was co-scripted by Vittorio Cottafavi, Alessandro "Sandro" Continenza, and Duccio Tessari. Continenza had previously co-written several films photographed by Bava, including *Graziella* (1954), *Le avventure di Giacomo Casanova* (1955), *Mio figlio Nerone* (1956), and *La morte viene dallo spazio* (1958), and he had also scripted a number of successful *pepla*, including Edgar G. Ulmer's *Annibale/Hannibal* and Carlo Ludovico Bragaglia's *Gli amori di Ercole/The Loves of Hercules* (both 1960). Duccio Tessari, like Mario Bava, had entered the business as a cameraman of documentaries and co-wrote his earliest scripts with the industrious Ennio De Concini, including those for Mario Bonnard's *Gli ultimi giorni di Pompei* and Sergio Leone's *Il colosso di Rodi/The Colossus of Rhodes* (1961). He had worked with Bava more recently than Continenza had, as co-author of *Le meraviglie di Aladino*. Tessari's subsequent works as a screenwriter and director—particularly his impressive debut, *Arrivano i titani/My Son the Hero* (1961)—indicate that he was responsible for the tongue-in-cheek depiction of Hercules and the supporting character of Timotheus. Cottafavi, the helmsman of *La vendetta di Ercole*, returned as director, and several crew members from that earlier production also returned, including production designer Franco Lolli and editor Maurizio Lucidi.

Tessari described his working and personal relationship with his director: "The idea to make an ironic Hercules was mine and Cottafavi's. In fact, it's very difficult, when there are two people working together, to establish which of the two came up with an idea, because perhaps it was just a minor thought, a prompting I gave him, or a suggestion, or perhaps one that he gave to me . . . The ideas, when you work together, always come from the whole partnership, because they are stimulated by that circumstance. Cottafavi was a delight, a true gentleman, who was not called Vittorio (like he tells you), but as I discovered, Benedetto Vittorio Emanuele Secondo, and therefore must have come from a monarchic line. He loved me greatly, above all because I smoke cigars and, when I went to dinner at his home, his wife felt obliged to withdraw so that I could smoke, which meant that he was able to smoke too, without being forced to go outside onto the terrace. Cottafavi was a very cultured man, very prepared, very intelligent—which did not go well towards making a film of great commercial success, but he always had the ambition to make a more committed film. He had made films of this sort before, but they hadn't been understood; they performed very badly."[5]

Filming commenced in late January 1961, allowing Reg Park time to get into top condition at the Roman gym on Via Archimede and to grow the required beard. Behind the camera was Carlo Carlini (Fellini's *I vitelloni*), who shot the picture in Technicolor and Super Technirama, a process introduced by King Vidor's *Solomon and Sheba* in 1959. A product of Technicolor, Super Technirama (sometimes called Super Technirama 70) utilized special cameras which were fed standard 35 mm negative stock horizontally, resulting in an image more than 2.5 times the size of conventional film, which could be printed directly to 70 mm stock or printed anamorphically on 35 mm stock with a slight squeeze or slight cropping. *Ercole alla conquista di Atlantide* is sometimes mistakenly referred to as a 70 mm production, but it was actually shot on standard 35 mm stock and never released in 70 mm anywhere in the world.

Park's co-star Fay Spain (1932–83) was an American actress who had been playing teenage roles only a few years earlier—in Roger Corman's *Teenage Doll* (1957) and Anthony Mann's *God's Little Acre* (1958)—and was now, at age 29, already portraying the mother of a teenage daughter. Ettore Manni (1927–79), cast as Androcles, had previously played the brother of Anthony Quinn's eponymous character in Pietro Francisci's *Attila* (1954), and had proved himself a favorite of Cottafavi in *La rivolta dei gladiatori* and *Le legioni di Cleopatra*. Manni subsequently appeared in many more *pepla*, including Carlo Ludovico Bragaglia's *La vergini di Roma/Amazons of Rome* (1961, co-directed by Cottafavi), Giuseppe Vari's *I Normanni/Conquest of the Normans* (1962), Andre de Toth's *Oro per i Cesari/Gold for the Caesars* (1964), and Antonio Margheriti's *I giganti di Roma/The Giants of Rome* (1964). Manni was playing a role in Fellini's *La città delle donne/City of Women* at the time of his death in a shooting accident.

The young Luciano Marin was already an experienced hand at *peplum* roles, having played opposite Steve Reeves in *Il terrore dei barbari/Goliath and the Barbarians* and in Riccardo Freda's *I giganti della Tessaglia* (1960). Cottafavi's clout was sufficient to attract amusing guest-star appearances by Enrico Maria Salerno, Ivo Garrani, and Gian Maria Volonté as the decadent kings of Megara, Megalia, and Sparta. A winning addition to the cast is Salvatore Furnari as the dwarf Timotheus, with whom Park demonstrates a fond and respectful rapport. Furnari had previously appeared in *I sette nani alla riscossa/Seven Dwarfs to the Rescue* (1951) and *I giganti della Tessaglia*.

Many fans consider *Ercole alla conquista di Atlantide*—later released in America in condensed, revised form as *Hercules and the Captive Women*—to be the finest of all *pepla*. From the very beginning, it takes the viewer by surprise with a pleasingly ironical perspective as a spectacular tavern brawl erupts: fists are flung, chairs are broken over heads, men are hurled into wine barrels, while sitting placidly in the middle of the fracas is Hercules, oblivious to the action as he eats a meal. When one thrown fellow accidentally sweeps Hercules' dinner away, we expect a big change in attitude, but when the man apologizes and returns the meal, Hercules continues with his repast as though nothing happened. Only when he finishes dining does Hercules intrude, stopping the fight with a single outstretched hand that knocks an entire battering ram retinue onto its backsides. Audiences conditioned by the spectacular, show-stopping displays of Steve Reeves' physique were presented here with a strength so self-confident that it didn't need to



ALL *Uranians look alike to Hercules (Reg Park), as he comes face-to-face with Zenith's soldiers.*

show off—and when he was forced to do so by circumstance, Reg Park's Hercules humbly apologized to Zeus in advance for his seeming lack of humility.

Again, there is no question that Steve Reeves was the more handsome, better-sculpted, definitive Hercules, but even under the best circumstances, his acting never fully transcended the woodenness instilled in him by his past experience in competition posing and still photography modelling; these were his ideal *milieux*. On the screen, Reg Park transcends Reeves in every other way. He is fully at ease in front of the camera, projecting a personality full of warmth, wit, and humor, and not the slightest inclination to take himself too seriously. In one dialogue scene with Antinea, Park wears an effeminate cloth cowl that strikes an amusing counterpoint to his burly image, but it is also entirely in keeping with his whimsical personality. The twinkle in his eye also extends to surprising the audience, as when he is apparently drugged by the wine of a *femme fatale* (a trick that got the best of Reeves in *Ercole e la regina di Lidia*) only to spit it out in a jubilant arc at the moment Antinea exits his chambers. Park's past success in athletics as well as bodybuilding also enabled him to perform virtually all of his own stunts. The only real exception is Hercules' high dive into the ocean from a mountain peak, for which Park was doubled.

Park attributed his success in the role to Vittorio Cottafavi: "He used to say to me, 'You *are* Hercules,' and I had no doubt that I *was* Hercules. I had scenes where I pushed back a group of nineteen guys holding a log, using just my one hand. I pulled a chain [attached to] a boat out at sea. I was really digging into the sand . . . I worked like Hercules, pulling this bloody thing! Cottafavi made me believe I was Hercules and I really *was* Hercules! I used to walk around and everyone was saying, 'Hey, Ercole!' and I really loved it."[6]

5 Franca Faldini and Goffredo Fofi, "The Fofi Papers," *Spaghetti Cinema* 72, July 2000, 2–12.

6 Turner, 13–14.



THE FIGHT *against Proteus rages on in this shot, later used as the basis for the film's German release poster.*

There is an onscreen credit for the film's special effects, but often in Italian films, this credit is given to technicians responsible for on-set effects—controlling the fire, rigging the collapsing walls, creating the monster suit of Proteus, and so on. Mario Bava's province, as always, was the in-camera trick shot. His uncredited presence is first felt—strongly—during Hercules' vision of the world being bathed in a rain of the blood of Uranus. There is a red-tinted shot of the sun, low in the sky over some mountains, and the camera zooms adroitly in and out as Gino Marinuzzi Jr.'s score begins percolating with queer, electronic impulses. Then the screen turns completely red, and behind the dense veil of color we see an animated bolt of lighting strike a tree, which dissolves into flames, followed by the delirious image of Hercules carrying the fallen Androcles, emerging from the ripples of heat. The scene is something of a ringer in context, because Cottafavi filmed no "moment of recognition" when Hercules later does carry Androcles from the pit of radiation-scarred men, so it ultimately feels like clever padding—a set-up for a moment that does occur, though not with the importance portended.

The scene in which Hercules first glimpses Androcles in a corridor in Antinea's castle, and bumps into his own reflection—which relies on an effective but simply achieved trick mirror shot—may also reveal Bava's hand. This scene (and indeed, the vision sequence previously described) taps into a disorienting, metaphysical vein not elsewhere explored by Cottafavi, while clearly anticipating the celebrated "Mobius strip" sequence of Bava's own *Operazione paura/Kill, Baby . . . Kill!*.

Bava also executed several matte paintings for the picture: the ceiling of the hall in which the various kings meet to discuss the vision; the arch of stone on the beach where Hercules pulls the ship back to shore (the arch was created by painting a bridge of stone between a mountain on the left, and a large boulder on the right); Ismene's imprisonment in stone on the isle of Proteus (which dissolves optically, allowing the viewer to see the exact areas Bava painted); the establishing shot of Atlantis (painted on glass facing the open sea); the fleet of ships surrounding Atlantis; a columned alcove above the entrance to Antinea's cavern palace; the fiery dissolution of a character when he dares to come into contact with the light from the crater; and the ray of sunlight shining down toward the open crater.

Most of the special effects seen during the climactic volcanic destruction of Atlantis were a combination of volcanic stock footage (somewhat distorted by virtue of having been filmed in a different widescreen gauge) and reused footage from the climax of *L'ultimi giorni di Pompei*.

Ercole alla conquista di Atlantide was reasonably successful in Italy, earning more than half a billion *lire* [$312,000] in its initial release—not as much as Steve Reeves' latest, *Il ladro di Bagdad*, but enough to suggest that Hercules had a strong chance of survival apart from the man who made the role famous.

An English-language version of *Ercole alla conquista di Atlantide* (entitled *Hercules Conquers Atlantis*) was prepared in order to attract international sales. By this time, American International Pictures' James H. Nicholson and Samuel Z. Arkoff were buying Italian genre films almost by the dozen, but they flatly refused to consider *Hercules Conquers Atlantis* as an acquisition due to a sour past business relationship with producer Achille Piazzi. To explain this situation, we must go back one or two years, before either Mark Forest or Reg Park had arrived on the scene.

Sometime in 1959–60, Achille Piazzi and Gianni Fuchs had approached Arkoff and Nicholson with an invitation to co-produce an original *peplum* film in Italy using an American cast and an American screenplay. George Worthing Yates (*The Amazing Colossal Man*) was hired to write an original script entitled *Goliath and the Dragon*, conceived as a sequel to their successful acquisition, *Goliath and the Barbarians*.

"Steve Reeves was Goliath in our first film, and we planned to use him again if we could get him," Arkoff explained, "but, by the time everything was ready, Reeves had become aware of the success of *Hercules* in America and he suddenly became very expensive and very busy. We finally wound up with Richard Harrison, a Muscle Beach devotee, who hadn't been to Italy yet. We were also going to use Debra Paget, who was a well-known actress and already in Italy making a picture."

An elaborate, life-size, fire-breathing dragon's head was constructed for the picture by AIP's resident monster maker Paul Blaisdell and Marcel Delgado, a veteran master of special mechanical effects who had worked on *The Lost World* (1925) and the original *King Kong* (1933). The immense prop was crated and flown to Rome in the belly of a TWA airliner.

"Anyway," Arkoff continued, "I flew over to Italy to make a deal with the same team responsible for the first picture, and we were all set to go. Then, out of the blue, Achille Piazzi and his cohort Gianni Fuchs upped our budget by 50%! 'You always make certain changes'—that was their excuse! They were used to big American companies coming over to make *Ben-Hur*, where money was never a problem. I said, 'Nothing doing! I don't operate that way. I have a deal with you, and I want to make this picture with you, but I'm not going to be blackmailed!' They expected me to give in, because American companies always give in on these deals. Nobody ever went to Italy without coming back with a picture . . . *but I did!* After all, the company was mine, and I didn't have to answer to anybody. So *Goliath and the Dragon* was disbanded and everybody went back to the States, and nothing was filmed."

After returning home to Los Angeles, Sam Arkoff collected his wife and children and took them on a trip to Japan (where AIP was preparing to co-produce a film), followed by side trips through India and Bangkok. When the Arkoffs arrived in India, Sam found a telegram waiting for him, sent by his Italian liaison Fulvio Lucisano. "His wire reported that there was a Hercules film being made in Rome which had suddenly run out of money, and there was an opportunity for AIP to acquire it," Arkoff recalled.

The film turned out to be Achille Piazzi's next production, *La vendetta di Ercole*, starring Mark Forest. "The picture was about half-done, and what had happened was . . . the completion bond company . . . all of the money hadn't been in the kitty, and the company got caught. They no longer had the money and they were desperately looking for someone to take the picture over. So I told them that American International would take the picture over . . . *if* they used our dragon!"

And so George Worthing Yates' screenplay of *Goliath and the Dragon* was never filmed. Instead, AIP funded the completion of *La vendetta di Ercole* and had an additional scene scripted, in which Mark Forest grappled with AIP's dragon head. The scene is not included in European versions of the picture. AIP got their picture, but they had no intention of working again with Achille Piazzi.

Consequently, the US distribution rights to *Hercules Conquers Atlantis* fell to Bernard and Lawrence Woolner, two theater chain owners who had just set up their own releasing company—Woolner Brothers—whose product would be distributed by Allied Artists, much as some of Roger Corman's Filmgroup productions were distributed to theaters by American International. The Woolner brothers had in fact entered the movie-making business through Corman's auspices. Bernard Woolner (1910–77) served in production capacities on Corman's *Swamp Women* (1955) and *Teenage Doll* (1957, which had starred Fay Spain), the latter of which marked the entry of brother Lawrence (1912–85) into the business as associate producer. Bernard later produced the infamous sci-fi cheapie *Attack of the 50 Foot Woman* (1958, directed by Nathan Juran as "Nathan Hertz"), which marked the beginning of his relationship with Allied Artists. *Hercules Conquers Atlantis* was the Woolners' first overseas acquisition. After undergoing a series of cosmetic alternations for the US market, it became the first Woolner Brothers release, under the title *Hercules and the Captive Women*.

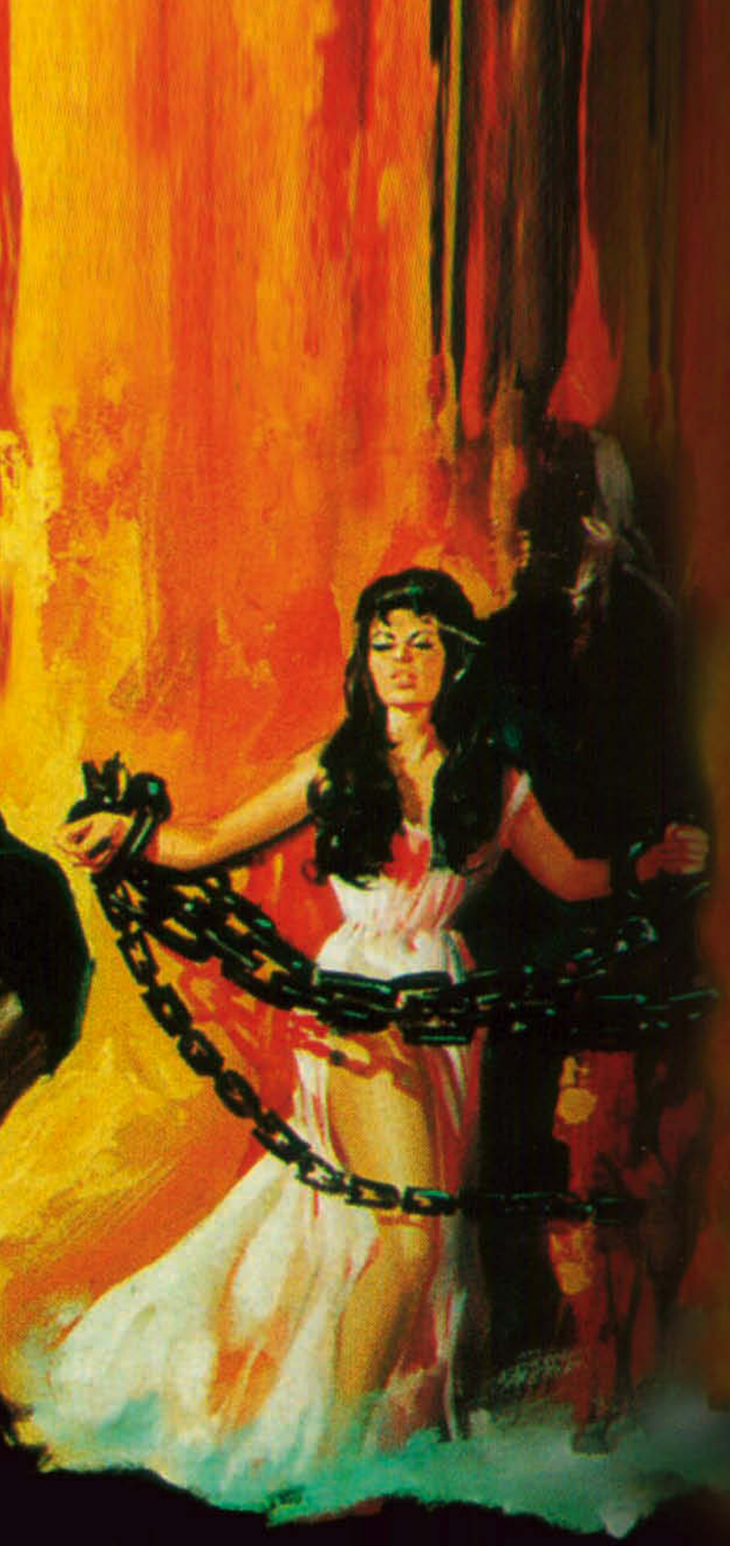
Hercules and the Captive Women was made under the "executive supervision" of Hugo Grimaldi, who had some prior experience with this sort of film doctoring, having "supervised" *Gigantis, the Fire Monster* (the American edit of Ishiro Honda's second Godzilla film *Gojira no gyakushu*, 1955), *Mill of the Stone Women* (the US version of Giorgio Ferroni's 1960 Italian horror classic *Il mulino delle donne di pietra*) and *Assignment: Outer Space* (a re-edit of Antonio Margheriti's seminal 1960 Italian science fiction space opera, *Space Men*).

The original, cheap-looking title sequence, which accompanied the tavern brawl, was replaced in the Grimaldi cut by a new animated title sequence by Filmation Associates. The titles (which credit the direction to "Vittorio Cottafan") are followed by a map of Greece and narration introducing Androcles (whose original introduction was more obscure and unflattering), Hercules and Hylas, via clips from the excised brawl sequence. ("Good natured brawling was a necessity to keep the warriors fit and strong," we're told.) The re-edit races to Bava's blood-tinted vision sequence as quickly as possible, and also abbreviates the scene of the meeting between the Grecian rulers so that most of Ivo Garrani's and Enrico Maria Salerno's exaggeratedly fey approach to their characters line is eliminated. The choreographed dance sequence, staged for Hercules by Antinea, is also abbreviated. The US version also rethinks the original scoring of the picture, keeping most of the original score, while adding a bizarre patchwork of library music to previously unscored scenes. The scene of Hylas' initial rescue of Ismene is largely scored with familiar "thrill" cues from Universal's *Creature From the Black Lagoon* (1954). Although the Woolners acquired the picture in 1961, Grimaldi's work and other considerations held it back from actual release in America until 1963.

Bernard and Lawrence Woolner were only two of the international film people who expressed financial interest in the production as it was ongoing. "While we were filming, there were distributors from all over the world coming in—from Japan, India, America," Reg Park remembers. "And before the film was finished, they were already making bids for it. And [the production assistant] said to me, 'Why don't you do another one?' So I signed a deal to do another one, called *Hercules in the Center of the Earth*."[7]

7 Ibid.





PROMOTIONAL *art (we assume) for the original Italian release of ERCOLE AL CENTRO DELLA TERRA—the hardest-to-find Italian poster material for any Bava film.*

ERCOLE AL CENTRO DELLA TERRA

Hercules in the Haunted World

THEN IT HAPPENED. Virtually overnight, Mario Bava became an international success.

In February 1961, American International pictures released *Black Sunday* in the United States, where it quickly became the top-grossing film in the company's history. This was an unheard-of level of commercial success for an Italian picture in America, and it was suddenly the talk of the Italian film community. Achille Piazzi, the producer of *Ercole alla conquista di Atlantide,* must have been astounded to discover the director of this international hit working anonymously on his shaky payroll. Furthermore, Bava was the man who had photographed the first two Hercules films with Steve Reeves! While the rest of the Italian film industry scrambled to respond to the success of *Black Sunday* with the sincerest form of flattery, Piazzi signed Bava to photograph, provide the special effects for, *and direct* Reg Park's second Hercules picture.

Even before *Ercole alla conquista di Atlantide* had completed filming, screenwriter Sandro Continenza set to work on a treatment for the sequel, under Bava's supervision. Subsequent drafts were hammered out by Duccio Tessari and Bava's assistant director, Franco Prosperi. Bava may not have been entirely pleased with the script he was given to film, but he approached every new project gamely.

"He was very modest, even modest about the things he knew, and he knew a great deal," observes Bava's friend Andrea Piazzesi. "Every film he made began with him saying, 'Why not?' He simply tried to make them as best he could. He would never dream of turning down a script, or saying that it wasn't good enough for him. He would more likely say, 'Who am I to say this isn't a good script?'"

Bava's second solo directorial effort proves the extent to which he was capable of imbuing a film with his own personality, even when the script came together in haste. Quite the opposite of Reg Park's first Hercules film, which relied heavily on actual beachfront locations and brightly lit sets, *Ercole al centro della terra* would reflect its maker by being shot almost entirely in the studio, and to an almost miraculous extent within the camera itself, delving into realms of *trompe-l'oeuil* not explored on the same elemental level since the pioneering days of the silent cinema.

Synopsis

Hercules and his friend Theseus are attacked by blundering mercenary troops, unaware of whom they've been paid to kill. When Hercules hurls an entire wagon in their direction, the attackers recognize the demigod and retreat to Ecalia, where the evil Lico punishes their failure with death. Hercules sets out for Ecalia to wed Deianara, daughter of the late King Uretes, [1] *unaware that Lico—her uncle—has preempted her (and Hercules') ascent to the throne by hypnotically enslaving her to a state of living death. Lico explains to Hercules that Deianara was driven mad by his long absences, uncertainties about his faithfulness, and her father's death. Kyros, a friend of the couple, promises to bring other facts to Hercules' attention later that night, but he is found dead at their meeting place, with Lico not far away. Lico explains that Ecalia is under a curse and suggests that Hercules consult the oracle Medea, who may channel good counsel from the lips of Zeus.*

Medea refuses to speak at first, but when Hercules offers to surrender his immortality for information about how to break the spell over Deianara, she responds favorably. She informs him that Deianara's soul is imprisoned by evil forces and may only be restored by the Stone of Pluto—a rock that glows like white fire, which can be found only in Hades, the Kingdom of the Dead. To enter and exit Hades safely, he must first obtain the Golden Apple of the Hesperides. Hercules is joined in his quest by Theseus and Telemachus, a buffoon who is vying for the affections of Theseus' girlfriend Jocasta. After commandeering a magic ship from the ogre Sunis, the three men sail for Hades. They grow sleepy, the blood-red skies darkening as a seam in the ocean opens to ensnare their vessel, swallowing them.

They awaken in the Garden of the Hesperides, daughters of the Sun who have been damned to live in eternal night for their acts of cannibalism. While Hercules climbs a Sacred Tree to reach the fabled apple, the Hesperides deliver his companions to the torture chamber of the golem-like Procrustes. After falling from a high branch, Hercules collects a boulder, unbridles a chariot and uses the leather straps as a makeshift slingshot, asking Zeus to guide his hand if his cause is just. The Golden Apple falls to the ground. Thus, Hercules frees the Hesperides from their curse, and they warn him of his friends' endangerment. They tell him that no one has ever defeated Procrustes, but to do so will open the gates of Hades. Indeed, when Hercules destroys Procrustes by hurling his stone body against a stone wall, the impact clears a portal to Hades.

Telemachus is sent back to the ship to guard the Golden Apple, while Hercules and Theseus enter Hell. The advice of the Hesperides ("Believe only in what you do yourself; do not believe in what you think you see") is valuable as they brave illusory canyons of fire



LEONORA RUFFO *as Deianara.*

Ercole al centro della terra

"Hercules at the Center of the Earth"
Working title: *Ercole nel regno dei morti,* "Hercules in the Realm of the Dead"
Filmed at Cinecittà and on location
May 29 – July 1961
First released: November 16, 1961
Technicolor, Totalscope Super 100, 2.35:1, 91 minutes

Production: SPA Cinematografica (Rome), Omnia Deutsche Film Export (Germany). Producer: Achille Piazzi. Director: Mario Bava. Assistant director: Franco Prosperi. Screenplay: Alessandro Continenza, Mario Bava, Franco Prosperi, Duccio Tessari. Continuity: Bona Magrini. Director of photography: Mario Bava. Camera operator: Ubaldo Terzano. Camera assistants: Giuseppe Berta, Luciano Brebbia. Art direction: Franco Lolli. Assistant art director: Giuseppe Ranieri. Set construction: Antonio Sarzi Braga. Special effects [uncredited]: Eugenio Bava, Mario Bava. Wardrobe: Mario Giorsi. Wardrobe assistant: Sylvano Giusti. Makeup: Franco Palombi. Makeup assistant: Renzo Francioni. Production manager: Danilo Marciani. Production inspector: Giorgio Baldi. Production assistants: Giovanna Pelligrino, Alfredo Petri. Production secretary: Dino Di Salvi. Editor: Mario Serandrei. Assistant editor: Lina Caterini. Music: Armando Trovajoli [Fonolux]. Sound: Luigi Puri. Sound effects: Tonino Cacciottolo. Publicity: Giuseppe Di Martino. Distributor: Imperialciné.

Additional US credits: Executive supervision: Hugo Grimaldi. Title animation by Filmation Associates.

Reg Park (Hercules), Leonora Ruffo (Deianara), Christopher Lee (Lico), Giorgio Ardisson (Theseus), Franco Giacobini (Telemachus), Ida Galli (Persephone), Ely Draco (Jocasta), Mino Doro (Keros), Aldo Pedinotti (Sunis), Marisa Belli (Aretheuse), Gaia Germani (Medea), Monica Neri (Elettra/Helena), Raf [Rafaelle] Baldassare (mercenary), Elisabetta Pavan (Tamar), Grazia Collodi (Electra), Claudio Marzulli.

Australia: *Hercules in the Centre of the Earth*, KGH Presentation, 1963, 77m
Austria: *Herkules Gegen die Vampire*, "Hercules vs. the Vampire"
Belgium: *Herculus Tegen de Vampiers*, "Hercules vs. the Vampire"
Denmark: *Herkules i Underverdenen*, "Hercules in the Underworld," 11/26/62
France: *Hercule Contre les Vampires*, "Hercules vs. the Vampires," Comptoir Français du Film Production, 5/9/62
Germany: *Vampire Gegen Herakles*, Rolei, 4/27/62, 83m, Atlas (16 mm); *Vampiren gegen Herkules* (TV)
Mexico: *Hercules al Centro de la Tierra*, Distribuídora Sotomayor S.A., "Filmida con el Ultramoderno Sistema di 70 mm" ["Filmed in the Ultramodern System of 70 mm"]
UK: *Hercules in the Centre of the Earth*, Golden Era Distributors Ltd., 11/62, 76m 34s, Certificate "U," passed without cuts
US: *Hercules in the Haunted World*, Woolner Brothers, Allied Artists Picture Corporation, 4/64, 84m

and demonic winds. Separated from the Stone of Light by an ocean of lava, Hercules cuts a length of vine that (as in Dante's Inferno) houses the screaming, bleeding souls of the damned, ties it to a boulder and hurls it to the other side. Theseus falls during their precarious crossing, seemingly killed in this vortex of illusion. He awakens elsewhere in Hades in the presence of a beautiful woman. Instantly enamored of her, he vows to rescue her from Hades, with or without Hercules' permission. Meanwhile, Hercules obtains the Stone of Light and returns to the ship, happy to find Theseus still alive—but unaware of the stowaway. The three men sail back to Ecalia, ignorant of the fact that the woman on board is Persephone, "the favorite daughter of Pluto."[2] *The seas erupt in a great storm of Plutonian anger, which Theseus calms by throwing the Golden Apple into its depths.*

In their absence, Ecalia has succumbed to accursed droughts and Hercules is jeered by the masses upon his return for bringing them bad luck. Theseus also turns against Hercules, boasting that he will do anything to defend his love for Persephone, even if it means killing his friend. Hercules successfully revives Deianara with the Stone of Light, and is told by Lico that Pluto has cursed Ecalia for something the demigod has done. In search of answers, Hercules seeks the counsel of Medea once more. With Hercules out of the way, Lico murders Deianara's handmaiden Helena and abducts the princess, carrying her to a sacrificial altar where he plans to cement his rule of Ecalia by drinking her royal blood at the moment of the lunar eclipse—"when the moon is devoured by the Great Dragon." Medea warns Hercules that Theseus must renounce Persephone or else the Dead will walk the Earth; he races back to the palace and finds much mayhem. Hercules and Theseus fight, and Persephone takes advantage of her loved one's unconsciousness to bless him with forgetfulness and return to Hades. Hercules pursues Lico to the altar, where he is besieged by armies of the dead. Using the monolithic stones of the temple against them, Hercules keeps the demons at bay until sunrise—at which point Lico bursts into flames. The curse is ended.

The next morning, Theseus remembers nothing of the adventure and Telemachus returns with Jocasta, who has agreed to be his wife. Theseus and Jocasta embrace and run away together, and Telemachus throws himself into the sea in exasperation. Hercules embraces Deianara on the threshold of a new life together.



HERCULES *(Reg Park) and Theseus (Giorgio Ardisson) sail toward Hades.*

Ercole al centro della terra has its narrative origins in the eleventh and twelfth labors of the Greek hero. According to the myths, Hercules married Megara, the daughter of the Theban king. Driven mad by Hera—the jealous, bedeviling wife of Hercules' immortal father Zeus—Hercules murdered his wife and children. When he recovered his sanity, he exiled himself from Thebes and threw himself on the mercy of his cousin Eurystheus, King of Mycenae, for twelve years. If, by the end of that period, he had satisfied all of the king's outlandish demands, he would be forgiven his sins and granted the gift of immortality.

After Hercules had already fulfilled ten impossible demands, Eurystheus was seized by a further whim to feast his eyes on Cerberus, the legendary three-headed hound that guards the gates of Hell. Hercules was ordered to borrow the monster from Pluto himself and was accompanied in his descent by Mercury, the patron of travellers, and Minerva, the Roman goddess of Wisdom—not Theseus and Telemachus, his hapless companions in Bava's film. Pluto granted Hercules permission to bring the three-headed hound out into the light of day, provided he could accomplish the feat with his own bare hands. (Some versions of the myth mention that Hercules had to beat consent out of Pluto.) He overcame Cerberus, laid the animal at the feet of Eurystheus and later returned the guardian to the gates of Hell. During the course of this adventure, Hercules took the opportunity of being in Hades to liberate Theseus, a friend who had been imprisoned there since attempting to imitate his labors by abducting Persephone, Queen of Hades.

Hercules' final task was the retrieval of the Golden Apple of the Hesperides. This rare and luminous fruit was a wedding gift given to Hera by the Earth goddess, watched over in later years by the daughters of Night and a ferocious dragon. There are two variants of the myth; in one, Hercules slays the dragon and fetches the apple himself, while in another, he appeals to Atlas, the father of the Hesperides, to obtain the apple from his daughters, taking the weight of the world onto his own shoulders during his absence.

1 The names "Deianara" and "Uretes" are corruptions of Deianira and Eurystheus, as the names are found in the original Greek Myths.

2 According to the Greek myths, Persephone was not the daughter of Pluto, but rather his wife. This mistake was originated in the English-dubbed export version of the film, as Ida Galli's character goes by the correct name of Myosotide in the original Italian version.



LICO *has more than avuncular plans for Deianara . . .*

Ercole al centro della terra plays fast and loose with its mythic bases, but it is essentially a workable compression of these final labors into a single adventure. In other ways, it distorts and parodies Greco-Roman mythology. Procrustes—an Attican robber renowned for stretching and amputating victims to make them taller and shorter—is portrayed as an absurd, kiddie matinee golem. It was one of Theseus' most famous accomplishments to rid the world of Procrustes, but his glory is pre-empted here by Hercules.

In Homer's *The Odyssey*, Telemachus is the son of Odysseus, a handsome young man of naturally regal bearing. In Bava's film, Telemachus is a scrawny, comic relief buffoon. (If only the film had reunited Park's Hercules and the diminutive Timotheus from the previous film!) While the myths tell of no adventures shared by Hercules and Telemachus, both men were mentored by Minerva, who accompanied Hercules on his descent into Hades and led Telemachus back to his home to defend his mother Penelope from encroaching suitors in his father's absence.

The closest mythic parallel for the film's villain, Lico, is Lichas,[3] a friend of Hercules. Many years after their marriage, when Deianara became aware of her husband's interest in Iole,[4] she arranged for Lichas to bring him a gift tunic, which she had dyed red in the lethal blood of a centaur. Feeling himself poisoned, Hercules managed to throw the unwitting Lichas into the sea as a dying gesture of anger and vengeance.

Cast

Barbara Steele may have achieved notoriety as "The Queen of Horror" after her star-making appearance in *La maschera del demonio*, but *Ercole al centro della terra* marked Mario Bava's first experience of directing an established horror star. Hired to appear opposite Reg Park in the imperious role of Lico was the man whose work Bava held directly responsible for making the Italian horror film (and his own directorial debut) commercially feasible: Christopher Lee.

Born May 27, 1922, Christopher Frank Carandini Lee made his screen debut in Terence Young's *Corridor of Mirrors* (1948) and played increasingly visible supporting roles in more than thirty pictures before being cast as the pathetic, man-made Creature in Terence Fisher's *The Curse of Frankenstein* (1957), the first full-color adaptation of Mary Shelley's famous novella. This fortuitous casting led directly to the role responsible for his "overnight" stardom: Count Dracula in Fisher's *Dracula/Horror of Dracula* (1958). Fluent in six languages, the 6' 5" Lee resided during 1961 in Geneva, Switzerland, and found it as easy to drive to acting assignments in Paris, Rome, Berlin, or Munich in his trusty Volkswagen as it was to drive to London for the latest Hammer production. Indeed, between 1960 and 1964, Lee made close to twenty films—only three of which were for Hammer.

"One of the reasons I made so many films in French, German, Italian, and so on," Lee explains, "was simply that I wanted people in those countries to say, 'Yes, we know this actor, because he's done films in our country, in our language'—which is important to an actor in these days of increasingly international co-production."[5] One of Lee's earliest continental features was Steno's bloodsucking spoof *Tempi duri per i vampiri/Uncle Was a Vampire* (1959), a parody inspired by the Italian success of Hammer's *Dracula il vampiro*.

Lee liked Mario Bava enormously: "He was delightful to work with, a fine technician, and a very intelligent man. His behavior during the shooting of a film was always courteous and helpful, at times even hilarious. He was full of praise for the cast and crew. He may have been more concerned with the technical aspects of a film, but it never showed." Lee thought so highly of Bava that, after returning home to London from this assignment, he encouraged his friend and neighbor Boris Karloff to accept an offer from American International to star in Bava's *I tre volti della paura/Black Sabbath*—which Karloff did.

Given the important supporting role of the incorrigibly romantic Theseus was Giorgio Ardisson, who had previously played supporting roles in Andre de Toth's *Morgan il pirata* and Giacomo Gentilomo's *L'ultimo dei vichinghi*. As Reg Park remembered, "Giorgio Ardisson [used to be] one of the Vatican guards, [but] always wanted to be a movie actor. Good-looking kid—

3 European credits identify this character as "Lichas," though the actors who speak his name onscreen are clearly saying, "Lico."

4 If we observe the chronology of the original myths, Hercules' later involvement with Iole would make *Le fatiche di Ercole* and *Ercole e la regina di Lidia*, the two Steve Reeves films, sequels to *Ercole al centro della terra*.

5 Robert W. Pohle Jr. and Douglas C. Hart, *The Films of Christopher Lee* (Metuchen NJ: The Scarecrow Press, 1986), vii.

6 Ibid.

7 US viewers may not realize this, because Giacobini's comic relief scenes were cut from *Gli invasori*, when it was re-edited and distributed by AIP under the title *Erik the Conqueror*.

blonde hair, nice body, but never trained. One of the Cardinals said to Achille Piazzi, the producer, 'Please, this guy is not cut out to be a guard. He's a guard because his mother wanted him to be a guard!'" [6]

Bright-eyed, lean, and eager to please, Ardisson provided a strong contrast to Park's ursine charisma and more than lived up to the opportunities provided him. Bava liked Ardisson's looks and athletic energy, and he would cast him in another important role in *Gli invasori/Erik the Conqueror*.

Eleonora Ruffo, billed here as "Leonora Ruffo," originated the role of Deianara in Cottafavi's *La vendetta di Ercole* and came to Bava's film after playing the female lead in Gentilomo's *Maciste contro il vampiro*. She later appeared in Pietro Francisci's *2+5: Missione Hydra/Star Pilot* (1966).

Cast as Persephone (not Myosotide, as cited in many sources) was Ida Galli, born Adriana Galli in Sestola, Italy, in 1941. She would adopt a number of different names over the course of her acting career. It was as Ida Galli that she also appeared in Federico Fellini's *La dolce vita* (1960) as "Debutante of the Year," and also in the Galatea productions *Fantasmi a Roma/The Ghosts of Rome* and *Roma contro Roma/War of the Zombies* (1964). Bava must have liked her, because they worked together again on *La frusta e il corpo/The Whip and the Body*, with Galli working as "Isli Oberon."

Appearing as Telemachus, the son of Odysseus and Penelope—described in Homer's *Odyssey* as a handsome man of naturally regal bearing—is Italian comic actor Franco Giacobini. Active in films since *Via Padova 46* (1954), Giacobini may have come to Bava's attention as he studied Christopher Lee's performance in Steno's *Tempi duri per i vampiri*. Bava and Giacobini got along well enough that he hired him for *Gli invasori* (1961), in which he played Rustichello, essentially a reprise of his cowardly, trouble-prone Telemachus. [7] Giacobini later worked with Christopher Lee a third time, in the West German production *Sherlock Holmes und das Halsband des Todes/Sherlock Holmes and the Deadly Necklace* (1962), directed by Terence Fisher. His last reported film appearance was dated 1974.

Gaia Germani, masked throughout the film in her brief appearance as the oracular Medea, was a pretty Yugoslavian actress who can be seen unmasked, opposite Christopher Lee, as the heroine of *Il castello dei morti vivi/Castle of the Living Dead* (1964), directed by Lorenzo Sabatini a.k.a. "Warren Kiefer."

Rosalba Neri, who previously appeared in *Esther and the King*, is listed in many sources as a cast member of *Ercole al centro della terra*, as indeed she was intended to be. But the credit is erroneous—in fact, something of a willful deception. Though Italian and German prints of the film credit "Rosalba Neri, c.s.c." in the cast (designating her as a graduate of the Centro Sperimentale di Cinematografica), other prints credit *Monica* Neri. In a 2002 telephone conversation with Kit J. Gavin, Neri explained that Monica Neri was "a close relative" (she declined to reveal whether she was a sister, half-sister, or cousin) who "appeared in two movies instead of me, because the resemblance was considerable . . . but I am sure you agree, darling, that I was far, far more beautiful!" Apparently Rosalba was contracted to appear in the film, but fell ill at the last minute or had something better to do, so she sent Monica to the set in her place. The still-unanswered question is, "Which role did Monica Neri play?" In one print of the film that carries her name, Monica

. . .AS *Theseus and Hercules brave the fiery pits of Hades.*



HERCULES *and Theseus must cut a path through the Hadean jungle of vines, filled with the blood of the damned.*



THESEUS *(Giorgio Ardisson) appears to be swallowed up in an ocean of molten lava.*





DON'T *believe in what you think you see: That's Monica Neri, not her lookalike relative Rosalba Neri, as a Hadean apparition.*

Neri is billed above Ely Draco (who plays Theseus' girlfriend Jocasta in the first and final scenes) and below Marisa Belli (the Queen of the Hesperides); these are both prominent, speaking roles, so Neri's role should be at least as prominent. While some European publications at the time identified her role as "Egle"—a name not heard in the English or Italian version, which is reportedly used in the German version to identify one of the Hesperides women who greet Theseus and Telemachus in the grotto of Procrustes—other, later references credit Rosalba Neri in the role of "Helena." The English version features a single line of dialogue in which Deianara addresses her first handmaiden (the one later killed by Lico) as Helena; she is called Elettra in the Italian version. The fact that the actress playing this part looks nothing like Rosalba Neri only confuses the matter further. The only actress who shares the sultry look and voluptuous figure of Rosalba Neri is the nude woman, bound to a rock by chains, encountered in Hades by Hercules and Theseus and revealed to be an illusion. I am convinced, on the basis of Rosalba's explanation, that this actress must be Monica Neri.

Production

Scripted as *Ercole nel regno dei morti* ("Hercules in the Realm of the Dead"), the film's working title was changed at some point to *Ercole contro i vampiri* ("Hercules Against the Vampires") to exploit the casting of Christopher Lee. However, Dino De Laurentiis preempted this plan when his own latest production, *La rivincita di Maciste*, changed its title to *Maciste contro il vampiro* shortly before its release.

Consequently, Bava's film was given a new identity, which traded on the title of another recent Italian boxoffice success: *Viaggio al centro della terra*—that is, *Journey to the Center of the Earth*, made in 1959 by Bava's erstwhile associate, *Le meraviglie di Aladino* director Henry Levin. The title and the coincidence suited Bava's sense of irony, and thus *Ercole al centro della terra* was born. Bava later had his revenge on De Laurentiis in France and Germany, where his film was released first and thus could play under its original title. The De Laurentiis production was renamed *Maciste contro le Fantôme* ("Maciste Against the Phantom") for its French release.

Whereas *Ercole alla conquista di Atlantide* had been a comparatively lavish co-production of SPA and Comptoir Française du Film Production of Paris, *Ercole al centro della terra* was produced solely by SPA at Cinecittà with ludicrously minimal means. "For this film, I had to make a little bet with myself," Bava later confessed, "that I could shoot the entire picture using only one segmented wall composed of doors and windows, and four moveable columns."[8]

Bava was exaggerating, but only a little. The columns were inherited, incidentally, from Riccardo Freda's 1960 film *I giganti della Tessaglia*—they are visible in its very first scene.

"This story is basically accurate, and I can vouch for it," Christopher Lee attests. "The only exceptions to the sparse scenery were the scenes shot on location." These were shot at the usual Tor Caldara beach locations near Anzio, with the opening scenes filmed once again at the picturesque falls of Cascate di Montegelato.

Virtually every interior set seen in the film is limited to the components described by Bava, with the set flats moved and reassembled in different configurations, and the white columns multiplied by mirrors and variously "painted" with colored gel lighting. Everything else—the exterior sets, the doors, the boat, even the wardrobe—were leftover pieces from earlier mythological films shot at Cinecittà.

For those viewers with an eye for such things, *Ercole al centro della terra* is a veritable rummage sale of props identifiable from other films. Medea wears a stylized mask previously worn by a nightclub entertainer in an early scene of Fellini's *La dolce vita*, and the Art Nouveau throne of the Queen of the Hesperides can also be seen in Edgar G. Ulmer's *L'Atlantide/Journey Beneath the Desert* (1961) as the ornamental throne of Antinea (Haya Harareet), Queen of Atlantis.[9] In this way, *Ercole al centro della terra* showcases Bava's uncanny ability to conjure a film "out of nothing," building a metaphysical scenario around a set of unrelated and all-too-earthly props, in much the same way he had previously juggled stock footage to create the illusion of global catastrophe in *La morte viene dallo spazio*.

Despite its thrift shop origins, *Ercole al centro della terra* obtained an aura of grandeur by being photographed in the new Totalscope Super/100 format. According to Robert E. Carr and R. M. Hayes' book *Wide Screen Movies*, Totalscope Super/100 "probably refers to a 100 mm prime lens used with the anamorphics. It doesn't refer to the film gauge. It might, though not likely, refer to the intention to project the anamorphic image onto a concave screen of 100°."[10] When projected on flat American theater screens, the image width does indeed overspill the periphery, and

even the 2.35:1 DVD presentation looks ever so slightly squeezed and cropped at the sides, so a curved screen may well be essential to the film's most accurate presentation. *Ercole al centro della terra* has the apparent distinction of being the only feature film ever photographed in Totalscope Super/100, which is probably due to the less-than-universal applications of the gauge.

Bava marked his return to color cinematography with his customary sensitivity to the end result. He ensured that prints of *Ercole al centro della terra* would be struck at Technicolor Roma according to a special three-strip process, which applied the distinct red, cyan, and yellow color dyes to the film strip one layer at a time. This allowed for an approximation of Technicolor's cumbersome, discontinued three-strip negative process, ensuring that the colors would look exceedingly ripe and seem to literally pop off the screen. Film collector Jay Fenton explains how to identify a three-strip print: "If you look at a color print and then at a black-and-white print, you'll notice the color print has a tinge of color around the soundtrack, while a black-and-white print is pure gray scale black-and-white on the soundtrack. But if you look at a three-strip print, you'll notice the soundtrack looks as though it belongs on a black-and-white print. This is because most three-strip prints had a black-and-white matrix for contrast, since three-strip was inherently grainy and soft."

Considering that Bava was not only directing this film, but also lighting it, photographing it in a new and experimental gauge, and supervising the special effects unit, it is a tribute to his character that he didn't behave on-set like a distracted, short-tempered bundle of nerves—especially when one considers that the entire film had to be shot in three weeks.



LICO *battles Hercules with an interesting skeletal dagger, barely glimpsed in the movie, in this Italian fotobusta.*

"There is no doubt that Mario was under great mental stress at times, but it never seemed to affect his work," observes Christopher Lee. "The only time I ever saw him displeased was during the Hercules film, when for some reason, Reg Park and I got a fit of the giggles and wasted a good deal of valuable time."

While blocking the scene, the absurdity of a hand-to-hand battle between the tall, thin Lee and the burly, muscular Mr. Universe became apparent to both actors, and they couldn't stop laughing, even when the time came to put the climax on film. "These things do happen and it was very naughty of us both. However, [Bava] did forgive us. He was essentially a kind and most amusing person."[11]

Reg Park also remembers the incident: "[Christopher] got me into a lot of trouble. When it was my take, they would shoot over his shoulder . . . he was a big, tall guy, by the way . . . and he would be making me laugh and I was killing all of the scenes. Instead of taking one take, we were taking five, ten, twelve takes! Bava reprimanded



THESEUS *swears that he will even kill Hercules, should he interfere with his love for Persephone (Ida Galli).*

8 Alberto Abruzzese, et al., *La città del cinema—produzione e lavoro nel cinema italiano 1930–70* (Rome, Italy: Napoleone, 1979), 83–89.

9 This sort of chicanery occurs in all *pepla*, to a greater or lesser extent. For example, *Hercules Conquers Atlantis*—which was surely made to exploit existing scenery from Ulmer's Atlantean fantasy *Journey Beneath the Desert*—contains a scene in which Hercules conceals himself in an upright sarcophagus. This prop was previously seen, without its lid, in *Hercules Unchained* . . . as the smoky vat in which Omphale's former lovers were preserved for all time!

10 Robert E. Carr and R. M. Hayes, *Wide Screen Movies* (Jefferson NC: McFarland & Co., 1988), 85.

11 Christopher Lee, letter to the author, July 6, 1986.



BAVA *bet himself that he could shoot the entire film using only second-hand props, such as these columns previously used in I GIGANTI DELLA TESSAGLIA.*

me and I said, 'Listen—it's not me, it's *this* guy!' And he's so straight-faced and serious on camera . . . I got into a lot of trouble there." Though Park remembers Bava as a "very good" director, he found him more preoccupied with the technical challenges of the production than with lending guidance to a still inexperienced actor, so his personal favorite of his Italian directors remains Vittorio Cottafavi.

Lip readers may notice a fascinating quirk about Reg Park's performances in his two Hercules films. Evidently a religious man, Park invoked the name "Jesus" rather than "Zeus" or "Jove" in the scenes where Hercules calls upon his immortal parent, and said, "Oh heavenly Father" instead of "Oh heavenly Zeus," as the line is dubbed in English by voice actor Dan Sturkie. It's an amusing anachronism when one considers that the legends of Hercules date from 500 to 1,000 years before the birth of Christ. Thank God for dubbing . . . unless you happen to be Christopher Lee.

As often happened in his European films, Lee did not dub his performance as Lico with his own stentorian baritone. "I have no idea why my own voice was not used in this film," he says. "Of course, I played the part in English and there was no need for any change. In those days, direct sound was never used in Italy because of so much extraneous noise. I can only suppose that the production company was unwilling to incur the expense of bringing me from Geneva to Rome, or to pay me for the necessary looping of the original dialogue with my own voice. I suppose they got some 'local talent.' This was not the first time it happened to me, but I think it is very tacky and indeed self-defeating."

In fact, the various Italian dubbing facilities—ELDA or, in this case, IDS (International Dubbing Studios)—did their level best to discourage actors from dubbing their own performances. It was standard policy that if an actor was paid for his/her performance in a film, he/she would not be paid again for the service of dubbing their work; it was considered as part of the performance they gave—as half of their job—but they could take it or leave it. If the actor declined this option out of inconvenience, unavailability or principle, the film's producer was forced to employ voice talent from one of the dubbing facilities, at additional cost. When you hear an English or American actor dubbing their own performance in an Italian film, it means that he/she genuinely cared enough about the quality of their performance to have a dubbing clause written into their contract, or that they were doing a favor for a producer who had run out of post-production funds. In the case of Christopher Lee, immediately after the end of filming, he flew back to England to star in *The Pirates of Blood River* for Hammer, and was not available for looping. Lee's performance, like Park's, was also dubbed by Dan Sturkie, using a silkier vocal register that he would also use to dub Lee's performance in his next Bava film, *La frusta e il corpo*.

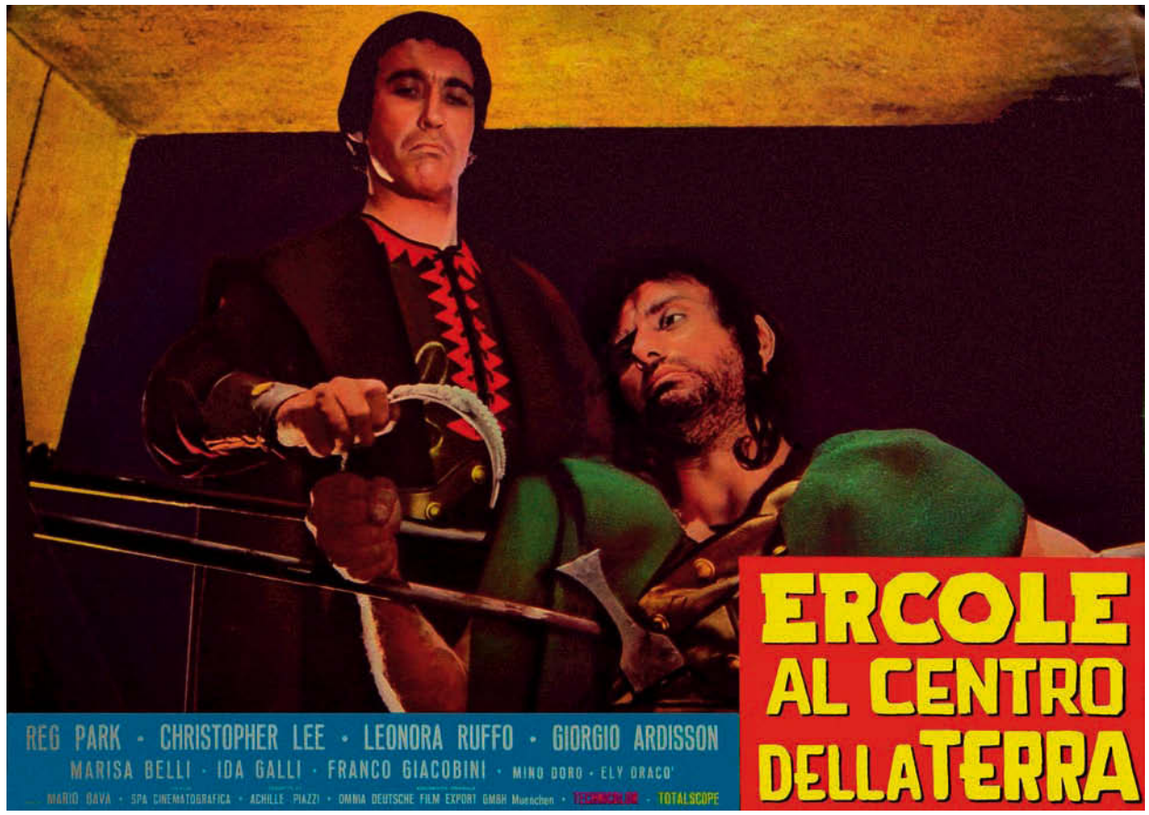


Special Effects

The Italian cinema had first depicted a hero's descent into the Underworld in Guido Brignone's *Maciste all'inferno/ Maciste in Hell* (1925), one of the country's earliest and most remarkable fantasy films. Based in part on the first book of Dante's *Divina Commedia*, Brignone's film found Pluto (Umberto Guarracino), Lord of the Underworld, in need of new Hadean subjects. He sends one of his demons (Mario Salo) to the surface world to abduct people, but this leonine lackey makes the stupid mistake of abducting the only human who might possibly get the best of the Devil himself: Maciste (Bartolomeo Pagano). By the time he made this picture, Pagano had played the character of Maciste in more than twenty films, during which the character changed from the Nubian slave of *Cabiria* to a fictionalized, modern-day variation of Pagano himself. He descended into Hell wearing a tie and a tweed suit.

The special effects of *Maciste all'inferno* were credited to Segundo de Chomón, who was assisted once again by his uncredited *Cabiria* associate Eugenio Bava in the provision of miniatures, maquettes and in-camera trick shots. Just as Mario Bava took his own children to visit his film sets in their youth, it is possible that *Maciste all'inferno* was one of the first movie sets Mario Bava visited in person, as a child. The film was also photographed by Mario's future mentor Massimo Terzano and by Ubaldo Arata, the namesake of Terzano's son. Therefore, for Mario, his camera assistant Ubaldo Terzano, and for Eugenio Bava as well—who was involved in the creation of certain effects shots for the picture—making *Ercole al centro della terra* must have been an extremely nostalgic experience.

Like Brignone's film, *Ercole al centro della terra* stages the majority of its epic visual effects within the camera. Working at Bava's side for a short time on this production was one of Eugenio's former apprentices, Aristide Massaccesi, who later adopted the professional name "Joe D'Amato" when he became a director and producer. "I worked on *Ercole al centro della terra* as a second camera operator for a couple of days," Massaccesi revealed. "I knew Mario from the time when he was only a director of photography, and I worked as an assistant camera operator. I was involved in some of the special effect shots of that film."



ITALIAN *fotobusta: Lico punishes a soldier for failing in his mission to kill Hercules.*

To offer a fuller appreciation of the trick shots in the film, the following is a time-coded breakdown of the various illusions staged for the movie, cued to their appearance on Fantoma's DVD of *Hercules in the Haunted World:*

5:14 • Establishing shot of Ecalia. This is a glass matte with photographic cut-outs providing the ancient buildings on the right side of the frame. The silhouetted Hill of the Dead on the left, distinguished by its upright stone slabs, was either painted or cut from paper, and its heavy shadows merge into the other half at the middle, probably with black paint. The background, visible through the glass is a plain cyclorama, lighted with red and blue gels, and animated with a small amount of smoke.

10:11 • Lico's throne room at the palace has an open ceiling, which was likely an optically inserted continuation of the blue cycloramic background visible in the rear of these shots. Considering Bava's statement that he had only a few columns to design his sets, it may be that this shot is also a devious double exposure that allowed the columns to be moved from one side of the set to the other—and the spear-carriers, as well.

22:32 • The film's most stunning effects shot is Hercules' ship's entrance into the land of the Hesperides. We see the magic ship sailing under a full moon, toward a blood-red horizon that is gradually suffused by inky tentacles of darkness. Then, a seam appears to open in the sea, sucking the ship along an opened gully toward the horizon. This was an in-camera split-screen trick shot involving a combination of miniature and cloud tank special effects. The inky suffusion of the sky was done in a cloud tank, like the volcano under the main titles of *Caltiki il mostro immortale;* that is, the sky is actually an aquarium filled with an initially veiny, progressively denser, red-colored liquid, with a diffused light positioned at some distance on the other side of it, providing the illusion of the lunar sphere. (The same light provided the moon for the recurring establishing shot of Ecalia, which was a matte painting by Bava.) At the proper moment, black ink—heavier than the red liquid—was dumped into the aquarium, spilling into and overwhelming the scarlet water with wonderfully crepuscular effect. The bottom half of the shot was a view of the ocean, filmed in a large pool with an overcranked, diagonally positioned camera. After filming a simple shot of the magic ship (a miniature) sailing through the ocean waves, two thick planks positioned under the water beneath it were slowly pulled apart. As the water rushed into the seam, the diagonal positioning of the camera provided the illusion of an opening zipper-like effect in the rippling waters. The miniature ship, wind fanned into its sail, was then pulled

along the length of this aisle on a string, and the lighting was dimmed to complement the blackening of the top half of the illusion.

The result is a ravishingly beautiful image that is also startling in its psychedelic qualities. It is the kind of shot that demands to be seen in 35 mm Technicolor widescreen to be fully felt and appreciated. The shots aboard the ship are illusory in their own right, as very little of the ship is actually shown.

26:54 • As Hercules scales a tree to obtain the Golden Apple of the Hesperides, his climb is supported by the illusion of a double exposure in the frame's upper right hand corner, revealing a high angle shot of the Hesperides looking up at his ascent. In the rest of the shot, Reg Park is shown climbing up into an artificial tree bough, from below.

29:10 • A mass of bracken, suggesting the main trunk of the tree, foregrounds Park's climb up a single wooden branch, filmed simultaneously through a negative lens, which gives the illusion of the actor receding far in the distance. Park is actually maneuvering around a branch-like wooden pole, with a small platform allowing him to stand and turn fully around it, pantomiming a climb. When he raises his leg at 29:19, he casts a shadow on the night-blue cycloramic backdrop that can't be much more than a few feet behind him.

29:33 • A different set-up involving another tangle of bracken, now filling even more of the screen, with Park (still viewed through a negative lens) now higher and harder to see in the profusion of branches. He is still on the same pole. Bava introduces some foregrounded smoke and lightning-like flashes into the shot to tease the eye away from examining the shot too closely.

29:36 • Another close set-up, with Park hoisting himself once again into position among a new cluster of branches, arranged level-upon-level like the bars of a jungle gym. Again, moving smoke and flashes of light support the illusion of continuity.

29:59 • Yet another close set-up, with Park continuing his ascent from one foothold to another. As he reaches for a vine, it snaps, and we cut to two separate images of Hercules falling through frame, behind two different foregrounds of tree. The falling figure is a stunt man, photographed at a very slightly overcranked speed to slow the plummet and thereby lend an illusion of greater height to the tree.



PROCRUSTES *plans to make Theseus a little longer and Telemachus (Franco Giacobini) a little shorter.*

30:12 • Park drops from a very modest height into frame for this close shot, finding a handhold on a central branch. As he climbs up, fire and ash begin to fall, adding another environmental layer to the smoke and flashes of light. A chunk of burning material actually lands on Park's back during this shot. He then gives up and begins his descent, climbing down through the various set-ups he scaled in earlier shots. We can see that he climbed up, and then down, in these shots, possibly without the camera bothering to stop.

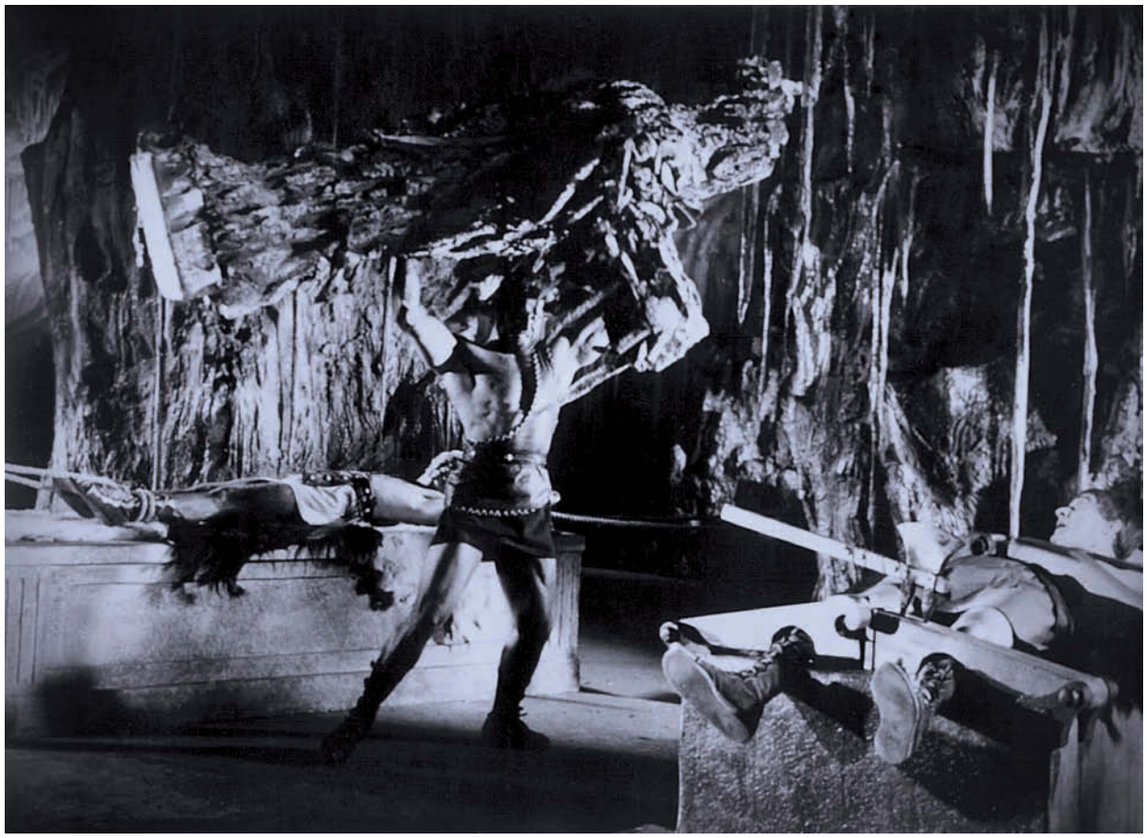
32:24 • As Hercules fells the Golden Apple from its branch, the camera set-up from 29:33 is repeated, this time with the background aperture blacked out, and another, smaller branch being maneuvered across the frame in the foreground, held from above and brought closer to, and finally past the lens, suggesting the falling cluster of vines bearing the fabled fruit. There is a superb deep focus shot as a long view of Hercules is interrupted by the foregrounded landing of the branches, with the large, round apple tumbling into perfect focus.

35:34 • Mario Bava was an optical effects artist, not a suit builder, so he cannot be held too much to blame for the ludicrous monster Procrustes, other than for allowing it to go before the cameras. What Bava did contribute to this sequence follows the shot of Hercules hurling the stone demon at a wall ("You are made of stone, and so by stone you will be destroyed!"), as we cut to a miniature shot of a small model Procrustes being thrown against a tiny wall constructed of a stone-like substance like vermiculite. The tiny stones collapse, clearing a view of a tunnel filled with green, undulating fog. The camera tracks slowly into the tunnel and fades to black, providing an elegant transition to the next shot.

37:30 • The chained woman's transformation into a cackling flame is an optical.

37:43 • The long-shot of Hercules and Theseus standing on a Hadean precipice is an optically printed shot combining animated overlays (the foregrounded flames), a glass matte (the background mountains and smoke), and live photography of Park and Ardisson filmed at a distance on a darkened set. When Hercules leaps into the flames at 38:02, it is an animated figure we see fall. The same is true of Theseus' jump at 38:21, although here—with the flames now revealed as cool water—the foregrounded optical fire is replaced with a double exposure of what appears to be a blue field of smoke along the bottom quarter of the frame.

40:13 • Bava's Hadean landscape is rich with unforgettable sights and



HERCULES *disrupts the evil god's plans by using his stonelike mass against stone, opening the hidden path to Hades.*

sounds, some of which feature ingredients that would not be out of place in the average Roman kitchen. The long-shot of the island bearing the Stone of Pluto—which, as a composition, conveys the very essence of Mario Bava—is also a miniature, photographed with a fish-eye lens to give the reused background glass matte of jagged mountains, with its backgrounded red fog, a false appearance of depth and concavity. To examine this tabletop model in depth, the foreground is an arrangement of tiny handmade trees with bare branches. The bubbling lava bed surrounding the central stone island is made of polenta (corn meal), heated on an oversized frying pan to a bubbling consistency, its natural golden color disguised by red, neon-bold lighting. [12] Beyond the central stones of the island is a rim of miniature stonework suggesting the closest areas of the jagged, glass matte mountain range that form the backdrop, its unpainted area revealing once again the red, smoky sky. The island is backlit with a halo of white light and additional smoke, which is directed by off-camera fans.

40:39 • Another angle of the same set-up, this time with Park and Ardisson photographed at a distance, allowing Bava to "insert" them on a miniature promontory.

41:56 • The thrown boulder shot is a double exposure of a tiny stone, with a thread of hemp tied around it, held taut and jiggled from off-camera, combined with another exposure of a "whip pan" to suggest the background blur of its trajectory. At 41:59, we see the thread manipulated around a tiny stone by hand.

42:50 • Another double exposure, this time marrying a background layer of Park and Ardisson moving along the rope at a distance to the foregrounded miniature set.

49:46 • A miniature ship filmed in a studio tank, of course. Bava fashioned the ship out of Buitoni pasta.

52:36 • A reprise of the glass matte previously seen at 5:14, this time with the added detail of an arc light visible in the background, shot through diffusion, to suggest the sun peering through ominous weather.

61:00 • Another glass matte, again of the arc light sun, viewed through an airbrushed foreground of clouds.

74:27 • The shots of the lunar eclipse are also a combination of foregrounded glass mattes and a diffused, backgrounded light source.

78:31 • Lico's eruption into flames is an optical dissolve effect.

In addition to these scale model, glass matte, and optical effects, *Ercole al centro della terra* contains some classic examples of Mario Bava's greatest skill: his unparalleled knack for visual suggestion. Perhaps the best example of this phenomenon is the "set" used for the appearances of Medea. The oracle's environment is spare yet exotic; it conveys the impression of a room in Shangri-La, or something out of Frank Lloyd Wright's Egyptian period . . . yet it consists of nothing more than a low balcony, a mirror laid flat on the studio floor to provide the illusion of a pool, a box for actress Gaia Germani to sit upon, and some Christmas tree "icicles" manually waved in front of the camera (by Bava himself) to suggest the shimmer of a beaded curtain.

Music

The score for *Ercole al centro della terra* was composed by Armando Trovajoli, who had performed the same duties for *Ercole alla conquista di Atlantide*. Born in Rome on September 2, 1917, Trovajoli was a young innovator on the Italian jazz scene. Inspired by the Benny Goodman Quartet, he formed his own swing band in 1944 and later studied piano at the conservatory in Rome, graduating in 1949. He made his first professional recordings in 1950, as the leader of two trios, one of which featured *La maschera del demonio* composer Roberto Nicolosi. His piano playing can also be heard on recordings by jazz legends Django Reinhardt, Stephane Grappelli, and Toots Thielemans. He entered the film business by writing some songs for the Dino De Laurentiis production *Riso amaro/Bitter Rice* (1948), a sultry drama that made a star of the producer's future wife, Silvana Mangano. Trovajoli subsequently wrote the music for movies by Luigi Comencini, Aldo Fabrizi, and Steno before Carlo Ponti grabbed him to score his lurid answer to *Riso amaro, La donna del fiume/Woman of the River* (1955), starring Ponti's own future wife, Sophia Loren. Between 1956 and 1958, Trovajoli scored less conspicuous works, including Franco Zefferelli's directorial debut *Camping* (1957), but spent most of his time as an orchestra leader for Radio Audizione Italiane (RAI). In 1959, Trovajoli entered into professional contact with two future contributors to *Ercole al centro della terra:* he scored Dino Risi's *Il vedovo* (coscripted by Sandro Continenza) and also Steno's horror comedy *Tempi duri per i vampiri/Uncle Was a Vampire,* starring Christopher Lee. Just before

12 For the shots of Thesus drowning in the mixture, the popping bubbles were created by adding calcium pellets to the polenta.

accepting Achille Piazzi's invitation to score the two Hercules films, Trovajoli's career reached its height when Carlo Ponti secured him to write the music for *La ciociara/Two Women* (1960), which won the Academy Awards for "Best Foreign Film" as well as the "Best Actress" Oscar for Sophia Loren. In his career, which is still going strong in the 21st century, Armando Trovajoli has scored nearly 200 films. He also appeared as an actor in Vittorio De Sica's *Ieri, oggi, domani/Yesterday, Today and Tomorrow* (1963).

Bava may have had little to do with choosing Trovajoli to score the film, but he was extremely well served by him. Trovajoli's approach to the picture was, like Bava's own, more atmospheric than melodic (or in Bava's case, narrative). In the scene that introduces Hercules, the music is light, fluttery, and shimmering, hearkening back to the Elysian charms of Enzo Masetti's music for the two Francisci films; the almost immediate action scenes are handled equally well, with ascending staccato horn patterns that lend energy to the cutting of the sequence. Similarly ascending patterns are used in the scene of Hercules' climb toward the Golden Apple, though interpreted by strings, giving the test of strength a greater sense of stress and sinew. The predominant instruments throughout, in terms of evoking intimations of the uncanny, are the bass clarinet and viola, which respectively suggest a woeful loneliness as might dwell in the various levels of Hell, as well as a sense of skulking shadow and otherworldly intrigue. Deianara's appearances are accompanied by an almost shapeless, ethereal music, interweaving dreamy ostinati and meandering woodwinds. Trovajoli also shows himself expert at underscoring Bava's penchant for shock cuts and zoom reveals with shuddery effusions that are surprisingly like those Carlo Rustichelli would use in his collaborations with Bava. Most memorable is the hypnotic, sighing, progressively narcotic music that accompanies the heroes' sojourn to the land of the Hesperides, which—combined with Bava's disorienting *mise-en-scène*—lends that sequence a psychedelic aspect truly before its time.

A curiosity about Trovajoli's *Ercole al centro della terra* score is that a number of its outstanding cues can also be heard in another film released contemporaneously: Umberto Scarpelli's science fiction *peplum Il gigante di Metropolis/The Giant of Metropolis*. The Scarpelli film, which was produced at approximately the same time as the Bava picture, was released to Roman theaters two weeks earlier, on October 26, 1961. In addition to sounding like a Bava film, *Il gigante di Metropolis* also looks like one: Giorgio Giovannini's extraordinary production design and the futuristic, leather-based costumes of Giovanna Natili approximate the look of Bava's next work in the science fiction genre, *Terrore nello spazio/Planet of the Vampires* (1965).



HERCULES, *Theseus, and Telemachus (silhouetted) find themselves in the garden of the Hesperides in this Italian fotobusta.*

Commentary

Mario Bava would later describe *Ercole al centro della terra* as "a parody of the *pepla*," [13] but something gets lost in this translation. The film has a lighthearted, freewheeling sense of adventure, and there are several amusing interludes, but its most memorable quality is the unexpectedly dark and tragic undertone of its harlequin-colored images. It is possible that Bava was bending the truth to make his film's extravagant bending of mythology (or its unevenness) more forgivable, and it's also possible that he was thinking of Duccio Tessari's contributions to the script—some of which survived, while others apparently did not.

Anyone familiar with Tessari's *pepla* and Spaghetti Westerns will recognize Giorgio Ardisson's Theseus as the middle ground in the evolution of a single character, which began with Donald O'Connor's impish Aladdin in *Le meraviglie di Aladino* and reached fruition with Giuliano Gemma's Crios in Tessari's own *Arrivano i titani/My Son the Hero* (1961)—a blonde, brash, athletic Romeo who bests his adversaries with brains rather than brawn. There is also something of Tessari in the film's comic, almost Irish brand of exaggeration. In the first Hercules film, Bava introduced Hercules by having Steve Reeves uproot an entire large tree from the ground and hurl it as a brake in front of Iole's runaway chariot. In the context of Bava's hyperbolic sequel, this once-jaw-dropping spectacle would be much too understated; instead, Hercules is introduced by lifting an entire wagon over his head—hayload and all—and hurling it through the air like a paper glider. In Hades, he knocks the Golden Apple out of the Sacred Tree of the Hesperides with a slingshot made of a horse's bridle, loaded with a gigantic boulder. And, as if the effect wasn't already comic enough, 2 minutes later, Hercules finds the same rock in a different corner of Hades to help him solve a different problem. (It's easy to miss this detail on home video, but when viewed on a big screen, audiences find this coincidence invariably amusing.)

Humor also creeps into the dialogue on occasion, as when, after a

close shave in the torture chamber of the dime-store golem Procrustes, Theseus exhorts to his companions, "I never thought Hades would be *anything* like this!" It's a line that never fails to tickle an audience—unlike the broad slapstick of Giacobini's Telemachus.

In this half-jovial context, the film's darker, tragic aspects sometimes assume an unexpected cast of poignancy. Early in the film, in one of its finest set pieces, Lico summons the spellbound Deianara from a stone tomb. She stands erect, much as Max Schreck arose from his coffin in F. W. Murnau's *Nosferatu* (1922), and floats toward him as he speaks her name in a recurrent command. Bava had used the same technique for Javutich's visit to Prince Vajda's room in *La maschera del demonio*, but the scene in *Ercole al centro della terra* marks the first time an actress was placed on casters for this dramatic purpose: to show an individual unable to resist bending to a stronger will. As such, this shot seems to add something valuable and new to the vocabulary of cinema.

Also effective is Bava's handling of the doomed love affair between Theseus (conceived as a comic Romeo character) and Persephone. In one striking shot, Bava implies that their unnatural love is damned, by dollying away from their kiss until they are blocked from view by a ceremonial flame that appears to engulf them. The moment of Persephone's self-sacrifice is rich with sweet regret, as she veils her face with the sheer sleeve of her gown and fades away. And who could forget the Hadean forest of vines that imprison the souls of the damned, that weep, scream, and bleed as our heroes cut a path through their jungling torment?

The characters of Deianara and Persephone—two statuesque beauties reduced to living statues—hint at the use of mannequins, suits of armor and statuary that would haunt Bava's films throughout the next decade. In a sense, the quest of Hercules is to imbue a statue of his beloved with life. Fittingly, Bava approaches Hercules by way of the legend of Galatea.

Aside from its uneasy mixture of comedy and tragedy, the narrative of *Ercole al centro della terra* frequently contradicts itself. The details suggest that the original scenario was extensively rewritten during production and post-production, with several scenes reshot, and some crucial revisions appearing solely on the soundtrack.

Most of the film's narrative confusion originates in the Garden of the Hesperides sequence, which also happens to be the dramatic highlight of the picture. One notably loose thread is the unexplained (yet very handy) presence of a horsedrawn chariot, which Hercules unbridles to fashion an oversized slingshot to aim at the Golden Apple. Doomed to dwell for eternity in their realm of Night, the Hesperides obviously have no use for such transportation. The only reason for a chariot to be present (other than to provide Hercules with the sling he needs) is that, in an earlier draft of the screenplay, Hercules rode it there. This makes sense because nowhere in mythology is it necessary to sail a magic ship through a rift in the ocean to reach the Garden of the Hesperides, which was not located in Hades, nor was it an annex to the Underworld. It would also seem that Hercules took this trip alone, as neither Theseus nor Telemachus are visible in any of the group shots at the outset of this sequence. After a few isolated medium shots with Hercules, the two characters are curiously absent from the sequence.

The dialogue proposes that the Golden Apple is a token permitting the safe passage of the living into Hades, and back. Nowhere in Greek or Roman mythology is a Golden Apple used to this end. The Golden Apples (plural) were a wedding gift to Hera, a food of the gods capable of bestowing the gift of immortality on any mortal who tasted them. My theory is that, in an earlier draft that actually went before the cameras, Hercules intended the apple as a wedding gift for Deianara, to make her a demigod like himself. Indeed, his chariot ride to the Hesperides may well have been filmed as part of the journey from which Hercules is shown returning at the beginning of the film, which is never otherwise explained. Never in the film is the apple proposed as a means of facilitating travel in or out of Hades; it is Hercules' defeat of Procrustes that (accidentally) reveals the passage into Hell.

When the heroic trio sail out of Hades with Persephone, Pluto's anger over the abduction of his daughter is demonstrated in a terrifying storm. Curiously, the storm is calmed when Theseus throws the Golden Apple overboard. This doesn't make sense, because the loss of the Golden Apple—after all, the property of the Hesperides, who gave it willingly—would seem less cause for Pluto's ire than the abduction of his daughter or the theft of the Stone of Light (also called the "Stone of Pluto" in the film).

HERCULES *uses the reins of a handy chariot to fell the fabled Golden Apple of the Hesperides from its high branch.*



13 Levin Safao, *Libération*, May 5, 1980.



BELGIAN *affiche.*

Though the thrown object is not clearly shown, frame-by-frame study reveals that it is indeed the apple prop that Theseus flings overboard to quell the tempest; I suspect this scene was shot early in production, well before the importance of the prop was contradicted by later rewrites. The camera set-ups chosen to illustrate the sequence also add to one's suspicions: nearly all of the expositional dialogue is spoken by Hercules with his back turned toward the camera, allowing critical plot details to be reconsidered and rewritten in the editing room well after the scene was shot. Also, Persephone is hidden below ship throughout the sequence, kept separate from the action, so it is entirely possible that the character was not included in the script at the time the scene was filmed. The scene would make better sense were she *not* present, because the storm could not be caused (as is implied) by Pluto's wrath over his daughter's elopement if it can be sated by returning a Golden Apple that does not even belong to him.

Also to be offered in support of this theory is the scene of Hercules' return to Ecalia. In Hades, when Hercules first sees the Stone of Light, he declares, "That is the stone that shall give new life to Deianara." Though the apple toss is followed by the two men reaffirming their friendship, Hercules returns to Ecalia with an air of defeat—and, the next time we see him, Theseus boasts that he would rather kill the demigod, whom he just followed into Hades, than forsake the love of a woman he has just met. These profiles would only make sense had Theseus thrown away not the Apple but the Stone of Light, Deianara's only chance for restored life, and if Theseus himself was under the spell of Persephone. (Of course, the Stone does appear in a later scene to awaken Deianara—but it may have been shot late in the schedule, after a further rewrite.) The film never broaches the possibility that Theseus is literally spellbound, perhaps because it would seem redundant in light of the Lico/Deianara situation, and as a result, Theseus seems a shallow, fickle, poorly written character, made likeable solely through the ebullience of Ardisson.

Speaking of Lico, he is perhaps the most ill-defined major character in the Bava canon. Even Christopher Lee appears to have been confused about the character, "who was *not* a vampire," he once declared, "in spite of the fact that some of the posters had me with long teeth." [14] Despite Lee's insistence to the contrary, Lico is a kind of proto-vampire. The Lord of Darkness promises him power and immortality if he will drink the blood of Deianara at the moment of the lunar eclipse. Had he not been defeated in his venture, the story might well depict the pre-Christian origin of vampirism. Lico is also given some vampiric qualities in the dubbing: Lico's face is shown reflected in a woman's spilled blood, Deianara has a prophetic dream about "an evil mouth red with blood," and during the climactic battle, Lico implies that he is actually undead ("You cannot slay the dead, Hercules!"). Surely, it would have been desirable on the part of the production to exploit Lee's presence in his first "vampire" role since *Dracula il vampiro,* but for whatever reason—perhaps Lee's own aversion to playing another vampire—this angle was uncertain at best during production and all but completely dropped in post-production, adding to the film's tapestry of confusion.

So who and what might Lico be? Lee has said that he played the character under the impression that he was "King of the Dead." In the film, Lico is introduced as the brother of the late King Uretes, and the film also offers some visual evidence that he is

also a High Priest at the Temple of Jove. In the only scene that tells us anything about him, he stands in the Temple of Jove beneath the palace, striking a bargain with the forces of Evil. The fact that Jove was worshipped in Ancient Rome as the sky god seems to shed light on the murky symbolism of the lunar climax, but Jove has nothing to do Lico's ceremony, which is more rooted in Balkan superstitions. Lico's sacrifice is scheduled for the moment when "the Great Dragon devours the moon"—that is, the phase of the lunar eclipse when darkness becomes dominant. According to Montague Summers, quoted in Leonard Wolf's *The Annotated Dracula*, eclipses were thought by some Balkan cultures to be evidence of a great dragon capable of devouring the sun and the moon; this creature was called a "*vârcolac*." As time passed, this mythic species evolved into the proper name *Vrkolak*, which was given to the dragon, whose appetite was traditionally discouraged by peasants during the full phase of the moon by banging pots and pans together. Thus, in the fine details of Lico's ceremony, we can see a connection between the dragon that is the symbol of the Vajda family, the wurdalak legends that would figure in Bava's later film *I tre volti della paura*/*Black Sabbath*, and Dracula himself.

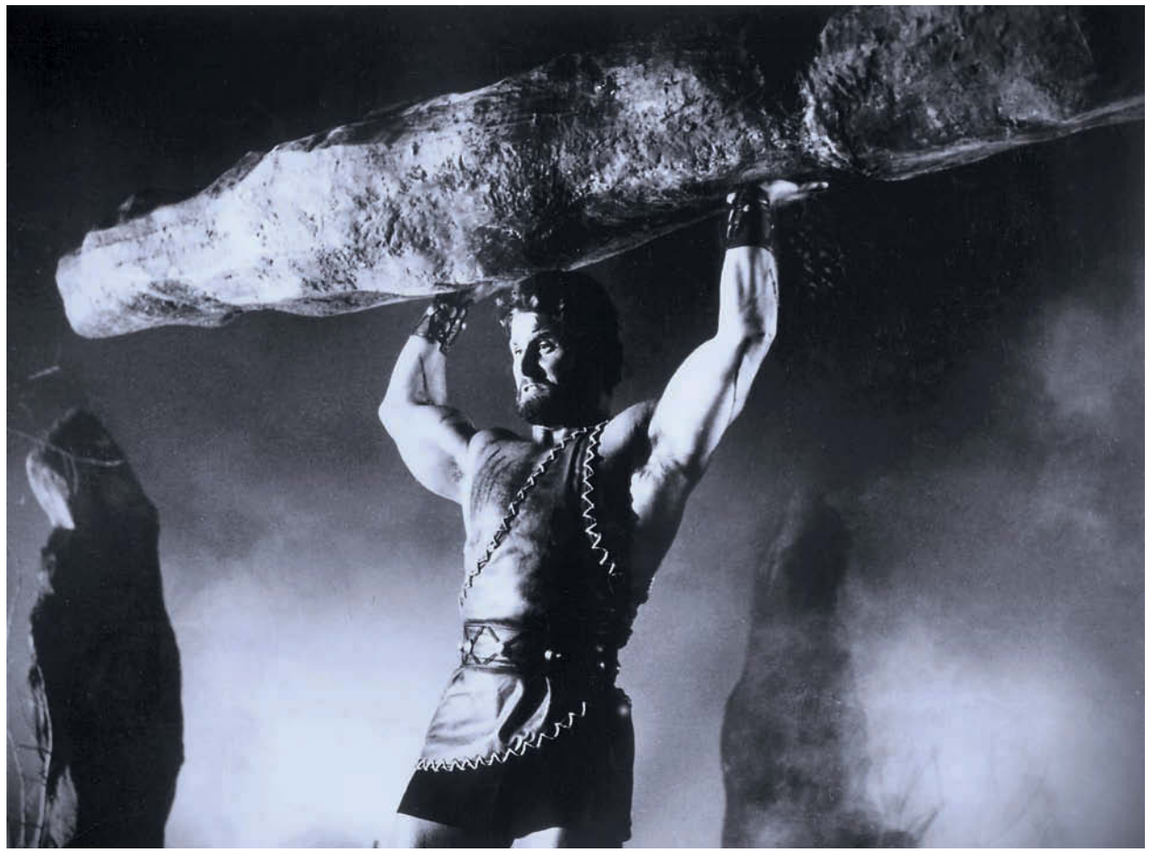
Another possible clue to Lico's identity can be found in Tessari's *Arrivano i titani*/*My Son the Hero*. In this film, a demigod observes, "In every Temple of Jove there is an entrance to Hades." Might Lico be a priest who discovered this entrance to Hades and unwittingly unleashed the evil forces that laid Ecalia low? Perhaps he struck a deal with Pluto to sacrifice his family, in exchange for eternal dominion over a new Hell on Earth? Such a scenario would also explain why Hercules is suddenly attacked by demons, in a setting identical to what we've seen of Hades, after pursuing Lico through the rooms under the palace. The idea of an unsuspected passage to Hades under the palace is also very Bavian—a potent parallel to the family hearth at Castle Vajda in *La maschera del demonio*, which connects to the family crypt, a subterranean annex, as it were, between the living and the dead.

The two curses that afflict Ecalia impose another source of bewilderment. During their first meeting, Lico explains to Hercules that Deianara's "madness" is the result of a curse placed on the descendants of King Uretes, whose father once banished the forces of Evil from the city. Halfway through the film, when Hercules returns from Hades, he is met with a traitor's welcome by the people of Ecalia. Hercules later realizes that the curse is Pluto's revenge for Theseus' abduction of the underworld god's daughter, Persephone. While the first explanation is acceptable, the second is one curse too many. One suspects that the Persephone subplot may have been added to the script late in the schedule, because the second curse could well be an invention of the dubbing. On close examination, the Ecalians' apparent displeasure during Hercules' second homecoming is suggested entirely by jeers and boos on the soundtrack; the people do not *look* at all displeased to see him. In a brief scene omitted from the American version, Hercules is even greeted by one Ecalian couple who plead with him to help save their dying crops.

As we navigate this treacherous, but ultimately rewarding path, an admonition spoken to Hercules by one of the Hesperides begins to assume a special significance: "Do not believe in what you think you see." Note that she does not say "Don't believe in what you see"; indeed, much of what we think we see in this film is actually what we have *heard*.

If we examine *Ercole al centro della terra* closely, on a purely visual level, it is possible to construct a more sensible, satisfying, and mythologically sound plot than the film actually delivers. Try it this way:

Hercules takes a chariot to the Hesperides in search of the fabled Golden Apples, which he hopes to present to Deianara as a wedding gift of immortality. During his absence, the kingdom of Ecalia is conquered by armies of the dead, who have emerged from Hades through an opening in the Temple of Jove. They were unleashed by Lico, High Priest of Jove, who usurps the throne from his slain brother and consigns its true heir, Princess Deianara, to a state of living death. When Hercules returns victorious to Ecalia, he goes to the palace and meets Lico. He is told that Deianara has not been sane since her father's demise. Hercules consults the oracle Medea, who advises him that Deianara has been placed under an evil spell by Lico, who is in league with Pluto and plans to sacrifice her to the God of the Underworld during the coming eclipse. By drinking her blood, he will be made immortal and all-powerful. The only means of awakening Deianara is the light within the Stone of Pluto, found in Hades.



HERCULES *hurls the columns of Lico's sacrificial altar at the approaching army of the dead.*

14 Pohle and Hart, 86.





THE FILM*'s picturesque climax finds Hercules under attack by all manner of flying, taloned, cobweb-covered monstrosities.*

Hercules and Theseus sail to Hades. After surviving numerous illusory obstacles, they find the Stone of Pluto. Matters are complicated when Persephone, Pluto's wife, falls in love with Theseus and uses him as a ticket out of Hades. A terrible storm rages around their ship, and Persephone explains that Pluto knows that they have stolen his Stone of Light. They will be drowned unless they throw it back. Theseus, desperate with concern for Persephone, throws the stone into the sea, and the waves are calmed as the dark sky breaks into day.

Hercules returns to Ecalia without the stone and separates from Theseus, who has stolen from his hands Deianara's only hope for cure. Dejected, Hercules turns to Medea once again for advice. She tells him that the woman with Theseus is the bride of Pluto, and that her return to Hades is essential. If Hercules can persuade Persephone to forsake Theseus and return to Hades, Pluto will spare Deianara's life in gratitude. Hercules goes to Persephone and tells her what the oracle has said. Theseus is outraged that Hercules should suggest that his love for Deianara is more important than his love for Persephone. As Lico carries Deianara to the sacrificial altar, the two friends fight until Theseus is knocked unconscious. Hercules pursues Lico to the Temple as the eclipse gets underway.

Persephone realizes that love cannot be commanded—it must be given freely—and in a final, loving gesture, she kisses Theseus goodbye and returns to Hades. Hercules fights with Lico, made strong by the consumed blood of the Princess, knocking him to the ground. As the sun fills the sky, the vampire bursts into flames—Jove condemning him to eternal hell. Deianara and Theseus awaken—without any memory of what has happened.

This revised order of events (wholly my own invention) reflects the story that *Ercole al centro della terra* might have told, had it been truer to what it shows than to what it says. I do not offer it as an improvement on Bava and Mario Serandrei's final cut—quite the contrary. While this alternative scenario makes greater sense of the characters' actions, and is somewhat truer to Greek mythology, Bava's version works better *as cinema*. Some of the revisions may have been made to compress the narrative for dramatic or budgetary reasons. (For what it's worth, Tessari's *Arrivano i titani*—which contains *two* trips to Hades—runs almost 20 minutes longer than Bava's film.) By contrasting the actual scenario with this theoretical one, I intend only to promote a better appreciation of the creative decision-making that underlies the construction of all movies, and to point out how masterfully Bava and Serandrei worked together to disguise the flaws of a film that was rushed into production with a half-baked script.

That the film was extensively revised during post-production is obvious from the dialogue, as well as from the cutting. Note that, upon his first arrival in Ecalia, Hercules mentions to Keros (who meets him) that he would have returned sooner, but "the Gods placed many obstacles in my path." The way the film is cut, with his return to Ecalia preceding his encounter with the Hesperides, the film doesn't show Hercules' homeward trek impeded in any way, and the whole point of films like this is to show the hero's victory over such obstacles. Furthermore, while Reg Park and Christopher Lee speak their lines in English, only selected lines match their lip movements, and some important dialogue is spoken with their faces averted from the camera. Even the name "Persephone" is spoken only in fragmented close-ups, indicating a tile-like replacement of footage in which the oft-reported name "Myosotide" was originally spoken.

The character of Telemachus has the feel of a late addition, and was perhaps introduced to lend a more deliberately comic or diversionary aspect to a film that Bava may have feared was becoming too ponderous or unintelligible. Telemachus is primarily shown in separate cutaways, and his general absence from the Underworld scenes (perhaps filmed before Franco Giacobini was hired) is explained by showing him aboard the ship, where he is shown guarding the Golden Apple at Hercules' request.

The most awkward portion of the revised continuity occurs near the climax, when Deianara temporarily blinds Lico by thrusting the Stone of Light at his face. We cut away to Hercules confronting Theseus and Persephone, a scene that runs for nearly 4 minutes. When we cut back to Deianara at the palace, Lico is still recoiling.

Despite the choppiness of its continuity, *Ercole al centro della terra* contains only two major dramatic flaws. First, Hercules' trip to Hades and his escape are so excitingly staged that they feel like the true climax of the film; unfortunately, at this point, we are only halfway through the picture. The second half cannot begin to approach the satisfactions of the scenes in Hades. Secondly, presented as it is without any suggestion of enchantment, Theseus' mad love for Persephone seems appallingly exaggerated, as if Theseus himself is willing

it, rather than Persephone. When he swears that he would kill his friend rather than forsake his love for this fresh acquaintance, he goes too far and loses our respect.

None of the other structural weaknesses I have discussed are very apparent on first or second viewings, because the eye is constantly held in thrall as each scene moves briskly to the next. Only after a long acquaintance with the film, and after comparing the US and British versions, does one begin to notice that the film's dialogue and visuals existed almost independently of one another.

The film's performances are generally vivid. In his second portrayal of Hercules, Reg Park exudes a convincing array of emotions: humor, dedication, humility and determination. His scenes with Giorgio Ardisson—as Hercules expresses his gratitude to Theseus for making his mission victorious, and when he tries to persuade him to surrender Persephone without resorting to violence—are especially good. The only emotion that Park doesn't successfully convey is love for Deianara, but the lovers are given only two brief scenes together in which Deianara is conscious, so his reserve can hardly be faulted. That said, his performance is not lacking in warmth.

Giorgio Ardisson makes a strong impression, too, though his performance suffers from rewriting and poorly matched dubbing in the English versions. His piercing blue eyes, sculpted features, and natural agility made him an ideal leading man for Bava's adventure films, and he would receive his definitive heroic role in Bava's next feature, *Gli invasori/Erik the Conqueror*.

Christopher Lee's performance, while believably amoral, ambitious, and rich in what the actor has called "the loneliness of evil," cannot avoid being compromised by the much-revised nature of his character. Had the role been more solidly written, Lico might have become the male counterpart to Princess Asa in *La maschera del demonio*. Like Asa, Lico is the scion of a royal family, avenging his outcast status by incestuously preying upon the blood of favored relatives, bent on claiming the immortality of his family line for himself. Both films are set in palaces surrounded by haunted landscapes, and once again, the forces of Good and Evil confront one another in a sacred ruin, where the forces of Good mysteriously assert themselves in a setting that would appear to have forsaken God. Even the Great Dragon formerly emblazoned on the chest of Javuto reappears to devour the moon.

The film's supporting performances vary in quality. One feels that Bava could have done without the grating comic relief of Franco Giacobini, but Leonora Ruffo, Ida Galli, and Gaia Germani are all suitably graceful and decorative in their hauntingly passive roles.

Mino Doro has a short but outstanding supporting role as Keros, the informant of the court. In one shot, Bava frames him lurking in the shadows behind a column—reprising a shot of Arturo Dominici that he filmed for *Le fatiche di Ercole*—and in another scene, as Keros uses paranoid body language in response to Hercules' inquiries, he moves exactly as Max Lawrence [Luciano Catenacci] moves when he dares to speak aloud about Villa Graps in Bava's *Operazione paura/Kill, Baby . . . Kill!*. Their movements are so similar, that one can easily imagine Bava acting them out for his actors' benefit.

Despite its narrative confusion and impossibly drawn-out finale, *Ercole al centro della terra* is one of the few fantasy films truly deserving of the word "dazzling." Just as *Ercole e la regina di Lidia* represented a tremendous leap of visual imagination over its predecessor, this film contains sequences that catapult from the baroque *mise en scène* of that earlier film into outright delirium. In basic narrative terms, it leaves something to be desired, but it exploits Technicolor in ways that would remain without parallel until Dario Argento's *Suspiria* (1977). It is perhaps closer to a living painting or a magic act than a traditional movie, and it delivers a greater sense of "spectacle" than almost any other film of its kind.

If *La maschera del demonio* proved that Italians could make a successful horror film, it did so while adhering to certain stylistic rules which had governed the fantastic cinema since its earliest days. The most basic of these was Bava's decision to shoot the film in black-and-white. It was a conservative move. Hammer Films had been making horror films in color since 1957, but in films like *The Curse of Frankenstein* and *Horror of Dracula*, the aims of cinematographer Jack Asher were more realistic than fantastic; every color was keyed to be blown offscreen by the bold color of blood.

The mythic context of *Ercole al centro della terra* granted Bava the opportunity to push his color scales way over the top, beyond reality, beyond Technicolor, until they burn off the screen like a form of radium. The result is a film whose colors are alive, feverish, irrational, mad as a Van Gogh painting. With this film, Bava discovered how to photograph horror subjects in color. It was a matter of intensifying color to a point that suggested madness, or the uncanny presence of the supernatural.



LICO *prepares to sacrifice Deinira at the height of the lunar eclipse.*



GERMAN *A0 poster, art by Engel.*

Variants

Ercole al centro della terra exists in two distinct English-language versions: *Hercules in the Center of the Earth* (the Italian export cut, which was released in Great Britain in February 1963) and *Hercules in the Haunted World* (the re-edited, rescored American version, which followed in April 1964).

Viewers familiar with the English-dubbed versions will find Bava's original Italian version, viewed with English subtitles (as is now possible on Fantoma's DVD), more serious in tone; in this context, even Franco Giacobini's slapstick performance is seasoned with world-weary irony, making it much more palatable. Armando Trovajoli's score is more prominently mixed in the Italian version, making the images even more scintillating; the dialogue is more graceful ("Believe in what you do, and not in what you see"), and it is much more apparent that Theseus has been possessed by Myosotide/Persephone. On the other hand, there is no explanation of the screaming, bleeding vines in Hell (such as the English versions offer in voiceover), and the dialogue points out some significant details in the early scenes that go undiscussed in the export versions.

During their first meeting, Lico explains to Hercules that, during his long absence, Ecalia was threatened in a supernatural war with the forces of Evil. Without explaining how, Lico tells Hercules that King Eurestes succeeded in defeating the devil-worshipping hordes and banished them to the neighboring Hill of the Dead. From that hill, these shadowy beings bestowed a curse on the ruler of Ecalia and all his descendants—resulting in the King's death and in the state of "walking death" which has overtaken Deianara. When Hercules pays his first visit to the Sibyl, it is to ask for a weapon effective in a battle against shadows, that he might free Deianara from her curse. The film's climactic scenes during the lunar eclipse take place on this Hill of the Dead, with Lico revealed not as Deianara's uncle, but as (to quote Lee's own understanding of the role) the King of the Dead, and the hellspawn attacking Hercules are the demons who tried to conquer Ecalia. It's one of the movie's great sleights of hand that one doesn't really question this sudden uprising of the damned in the English versions, which offer no explanation whatever. When Lico is cremated at the end of the eclipse, in the Italian version, Hercules raises his arms to the sky and offers praise to Pluto: "Oh, God of Hades, give peace to the Earth!" Indeed, Pluto has taken his own High Priest as sacrifice, satisfying the needs of Evil while also restoring order to Ecalia. The later English versions

would conveniently forget that it was a lunar eclipse and pass off the burning orb in the sky as the sun, for whose purifying rays Hercules would thank his father Zeus.

As with *Ercole alla conquista di Atlantide* and its original English version *Hercules Conquers Atlantis*, Achille Piazzi funded the preparation of an English version of *Ercole al centro della terra*, which was recorded at Renato Caldonazzo's International Dubbing Studios in Rome and given the title *Hercules in the Center of the Earth*. Like Reg Park's previous Hercules film, it too was acquired for US distribution by Bernard and Lawrence Woolner, who decided—once again—that it wasn't quite acceptable, as it was, for the American market.

Again, Hugo Grimaldi—who had reshaped *Hercules Conquers Atlantis* into *Hercules and the Captive Women* for the Woolners—was hired to make *Hercules at the Center of the Earth* more commercially attractive and playable. When the movie was belatedly released in the United States in March 1964, on a double bill with Antonio Margheriti's *Castle of Blood* [*Danza macabra*, which reunited the stars of *La maschera del demonio*, Barbara Steele and Arturo Dominici], it bore a new title: *Hercules in the Haunted World*.

Hercules in the Center of the Earth is somewhat closer in tone and design to Bava's Italian version. *Hercules in the Haunted World*, on the other hand, is a distortion. For example, Grimaldi recut Gaia Germani's two appearances as the oracle Medea into four, turning her into an ersatz narrator to keep short attention spans on track.

The two English versions of the film are immediately distinguished from Bava's cut, which begins with ordinary main titles, by a prologue sequence involving Lico. *Hercules in the Center of the Earth* opens on the "sacred" hill at Ecalia (formerly the Hill of the Dead), the camera panning down from the sacrificial stone altar, past a gnarled tree as a woman's scream pierces the night. Clearing the tree, we see a blonde woman lying supine on the ground, her face mostly averted and her throat covered in blood—though the sequence unfolds under a hot red tint that effectively erases the blood from view. The camera continues its pan to reveal Lico standing over the woman. He speaks:

> *"The time shall come when day shall turn to night and night shall rule our lives. Then will the cries of the tortured become as music, their shrieks and cries will become sounds to soothe us. The time will come when the moon, devoured by the Great Dragon, shall bring eternal darkness and I shall become the Lord of Darkness and Light. When the sun burns up the harvest, when the rivers run dry, and every mortal soul will be damned forever, then Evil shall triumph—even over the Gods—to dominate the Earth!"*



GERMAN *A1 poster, art by Engel.*

Having intoned this incomprehensible hogwash (which does not fully match Lee's lip movements), Lico turns his eyes to the full moon above, which undergoes a full eclipse. Under cover of night, the open crypts of the dead at the base of the hill close, the corpses inside them evidently biding their time.

Hercules in the Haunted World opens with much of the same footage, though without the red tinting (restoring Bava's actual color lighting scheme, and the bloody wound on the woman's throat) and intercut with recycled shots of the masked oracle Medea, who is reinvented here as a narrator of events:

SHOT of gnarled branches CUTS to establishing SHOT of Ecalia.

"This is Ecalia, a kingdom city of ancient Greece in an age of myth and legend . . ."

SHOT of Lico's altar.

"It is a time when Gods and demigods rule over the elements of Nature and control the destinies of men . . ."

The camera PANS down, past a large gnarled tree, as we hear the SCREAM of a woman. The camera clears the tree to reveal a blonde woman, supine, still moving but with blood on her throat. CUT to Medea.

"I am Medea, official oracle of the immortal Gods and sorceress of Ecalia. It is I who will tell what has happened in this kingdom; it is I who will foretell what will come to pass. Many years ago, the Gods were offended by the King of Ecalia . . ."

SHOT of lunar eclipse effect.

"A curse was cast over the land and a terrible force of Evil was brought down upon the people . . ."

SHOT of reanimated dead, standing still.

"This curse was ordained to remain until the last descendant of the King was ordered to descend into the haunted realm of the Dead . . ."

Two SHOTS of Lico follow, both outtakes from later appearances.

"And now there is one in this kingdom who has joined forces with the Gods of Evil—the fiendish Lico, a diabolical vampire.[15] He would become ruler of Ecalia at any price . . ."

CUT back to Medea.

"And there is another who can save the kingdom from this fate . . ."

CUT to Hercules, image taken from the later scene of his consultation with Medea.

"Only he has the strength and courage to challenge the Gods, because he is more than just a man . . .

CUT back to Medea, followed by SHOT of Hercules raising his arms to the heavens, thanking Zeus at the end of the picture.

"He is the son of Zeus! He is Hercules!"

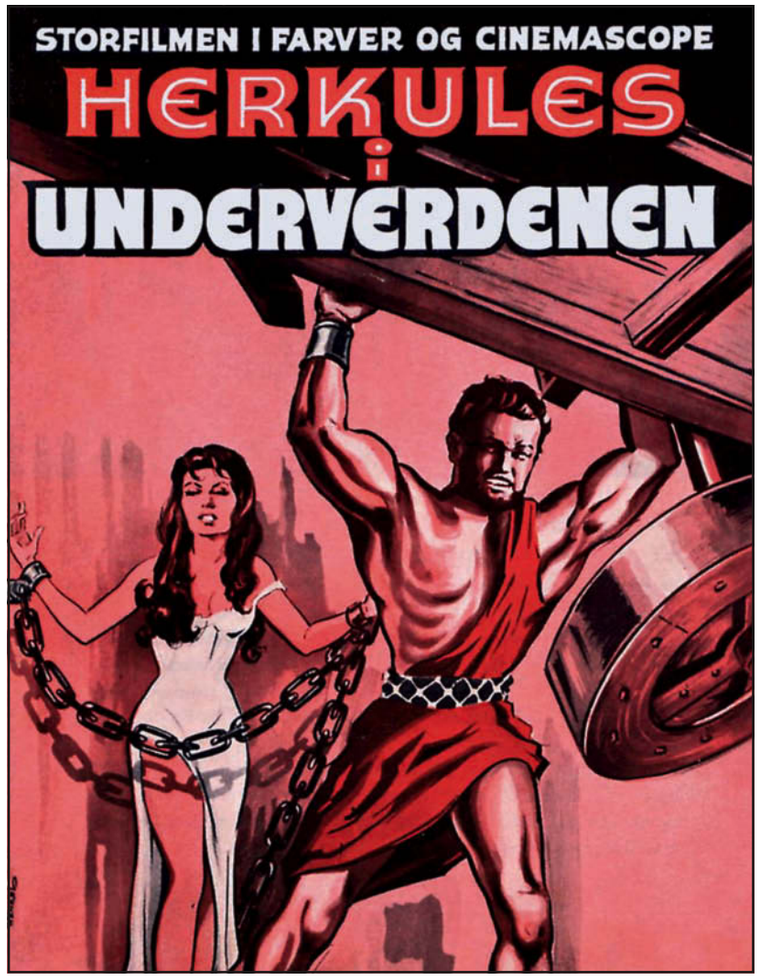
15 In *Hercules in the Center of the Earth*, the voice of Medea was dubbed by a British voice actress. In the US version, Medea's narration was dubbed by an American woman who pronounced the villain's name as "Lie-co." It is pronounced "Lee-co" elsewhere in the picture, even by Medea.

After this confounding preamble, *Hercules in the Haunted World* segues into an excellent, neo-psychedelic main titles sequence, with lots of hypnotic spirals and surging spooks, designed by the Los Angeles animation company, Filmation Associates. The credits seen in *Hercules in the Center of the Earth* are far less evocative, with plain lettering superimposed over the stone surface of a tomb. The original Italian credits are simple white text on black, but combined with Trovajoli's splendid, shimmering overture, this brief spell in the dark is an effective warm-up for the adventure to come.

While the British version of the prologue is perhaps "purer," in the sense of not being recut, the post-production tinting seriously damages its meaning and its pedigree. The footage seen in the prologues appears to be a sequence extracted from its original position amid the film's climactic events, in which Lico has kept his promise to drink the blood of Deianara. (In the film's continuity, as it now stands, we see Lico descend upon the fainted Deianara after she fails to subdue him with the Stone of Light, in a chilling subjective shot that implies, rather than illustrates, his consumption of her blood.) Since lunar eclipses are so uncommon as to be unlikely to occur twice in the same movie, the woman in the prologue (whose face is averted, for the most part) is almost certainly Deianara, played by Leonora Ruffo or her stand-in. (The clothing worn by this sacrificial victim matches that of Deianara.) In accordance with his deal with the Lord of Darkness, this vampiric act would give the mortal Lico the immortal strength necessary to challenge the demigod Hercules in a physical battle, and also explain why he subsequently bursts into flame when touched by daylight. Neither of these details are explained in the final film, which eschews the sanguinary aspects promised by most of its international release titles.

The Woolners may have altered Lico's original narration to make it less obtuse for young American matinee audiences ("When the moon is devoured by the Great Dragon?"), but surely the words imposed on Medea are even more confusing. Besides muddying the matter of whether this story is meant to be enjoyed in the past or present tense ("It is I who will tell what has happened in this kingdom; it is I who will foretell what will come to pass"), Medea's incantatory speech raises some valid questions. If the King had banished the forces of Evil from Ecalia, how is it that Lico occupies the seat of power? Is Deianara under a spell because she is her father's descendant or, as the rest of the film presumes, because Lico has placed her under his spell? The new narration also suggests that Ecalia has been cursed for generations; in truth, this curse is restricted to the royal line, but the US narration makes the film's second curse (brought on by the abduction of Persephone) redundant. The second curse is merely awkward in the original context, but here, it becomes something of a continuity error.

The second point of variation is found after Theseus hurls the Golden Apple into the sea to placate Pluto's anger. In *Hercules in the Center of the Earth*, Hercules thanks him ("Without you, I would never have succeeded in this venture.") and there is a cutaway shot to Telemachus, comically entwined in the ship's rigging. This shot dissolves to a nicely ominous scene prefacing Hercules' return to Ecalia. The scene opens with a tracking shot of cattle skulls strewn across a barren landscape. People are walking in desultory fashion along a road in the middle field, away from Ecalia. Hercules comes along on horseback and greets an Ecalian couple.



DANISH *program booklet cover.*



MEXICAN *lobby card.*

HERCULES
Greetings, my friends!

MAN
These are sad times, Hercules.

HERCULES
What has happened?

MAN
The Gods have abandoned us. The heavenly fires have burned our fields and dried our rivers. Someone has offended the great gods of Olympus.

WOMAN
Intercede for us!

MAN
Our cattle have all died.

The couple continue walking, and Hercules rides on.

The scene then dissolves to Hercules being jeered by the people of Ecalia, who blame his adventure for the curse blighting their land. It is a jarring turnabout, the reverse of the opening scene of the Ecalians extending to Hercules a hero's welcome. It is also jarring because the couple he greeted on the road did not blame him for the curse; on the contrary, they appealed to him for salvation. (As noted earlier, the Ecalians look quite pleased to see him, despite the angry recriminations dubbed into their mouths.)

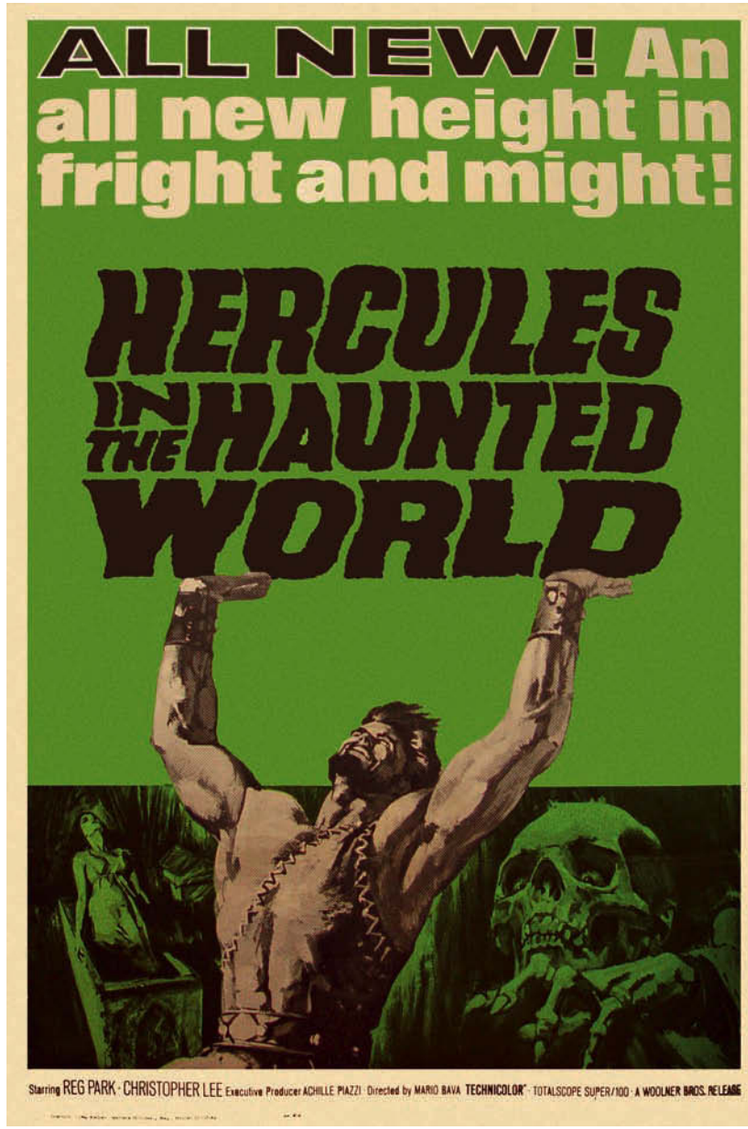
In *Hercules in the Haunted World*, there is a curt splice after "Without you, I would never have succeeded in this venture" that takes us to the nocturnal establishing shot of Ecalia that opens the film. We hear the voice of Medea:

> *"And so it came to pass that courageous Hercules [CUT to familiar recycled footage of Medea] captured the Stone of Light from the Kingdom of the Dead, and with the aid of the Golden Apple of the Hesperides, he and his friends passed safely through the gates of Hades. But new perils await Hercules on his return to Ecalia. The great Olympian god Pluto has been offend [sic] and out of revenge has thrust the forces of Evil upon the land."*

At this point, we return to the establishing night shot of Ecalia she interrupted, which is hardly onscreen before it too inexplicably cuts away—night tripping over an emulsion fault into the sun-scorched day of the demigod's homecoming.

Many liberties were taken with the film's translation into English, but easily the worst is the film's last line, spoken by Hercules to Deianara as the frisky Theseus chases after Jocasta, the shapely fiancee of Telemachus: "As long as Theseus steals other men's girls, I have nothing to worry about." It is a very generous audience that can overlook the gargantuan stupidity of that line.

Despite its gaffes and guffaws, *Hercules in the Haunted World* is commonly regarded by genre devotees as one of the very best *peplum* adventures. This, however, is a response to the film's inherent values—the triumph of Bava's vision—not an approval of the distortions imposed on it by its American distributor. Compared to the original version's continuity, it heaps sloppiness and confusion on a narrative already rendered vague by last-minute rewrites. By recycling the shots of Medea, Grimaldi dilutes the value and impact of her brief appearances and makes a tired joke of her exotic presence. The oracle becomes a pitchman.



US *one-sheet, which compensated a lack of four-color printing with spectacular graphics.*

For this reason, *Hercules in the Haunted World* should not be mistaken as the American release of a Bava film, but as an American revision of a Bava film: an unflattering distortion of his original achievement—and a harbinger of worse transgressions still to come.

Reception

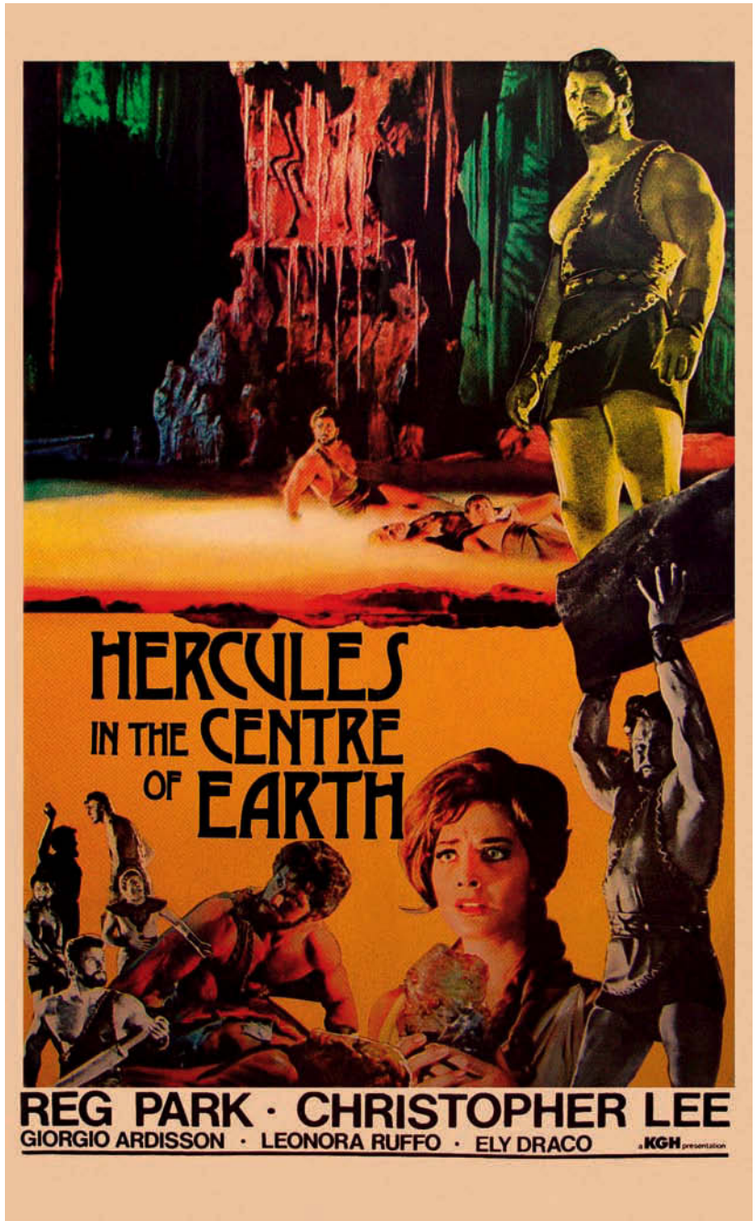
For some reason, even critics normally sympathetic to Bava's work received this epic of eye-scalding beauty with something less than enthusiasm. Following the film's release in Paris as *Hercule contre les vampires* in early May 1962, the French periodical *Midi-Minuit Fantastique* ran a review by its own editor, Michel Caen, which looked upon it with something like exasperation:

"Even after *Les Mille et Une Nuits* [*Le meraviglie di Aladino*], we still felt there was hope for Mario Bava. Alas, his latest vampires, and there are plenty of them—in the Italian cinema, vampires are always plural—are enough to discourage the true fans who have been schooled in the works of Browning, Lambert Hillyer, Terence Fisher . . . and Mario Bava! As it should be—it is one of the charms of the *peplum*—the scenario is reduced to a more or less incoherent succession of ill-defined actions. Once again, the sympathetic Hercules must descend into Hades, but this time, he is unfortunately accompanied by an anemic Flash Gordon . . . Who directed the admirable *La maschera del demonio*?"

The only response from the British press seemed to damn the picture with faint praise. An anonymous critic writing for *Monthly Film Bulletin* suggested that *Hercules in the Center of the Earth* "may well be the first mythical-horror-spectacle." Not knowing that Bava worked largely on his own to create these images, the critic proceeded to note that "the film . . . provides designers and special effects men with a field day—horrid, bubbly lava, several natty transformations, turbulent seascapes, brooding clouds and a gaggle of misshapen monsters are included in the mixture," before concluding with this jaw-dropping comment: "The trouble is that Bava's brand of spookiness is neither very frightening nor very original, and no amount of shock cutting or jazzy zoom lens shots can compensate for the absence of a real style." [16]

Regardless of which version of the film one sees, Bava's work on *Ercole al centro della terra* is invested with such striking color, imagination, and delirious imagery that it is impossible to imagine it failing to impress an audience. A triumph over budget (as well as a triumph over a vacant set), it has endured to become a film of lasting aesthetic appeal and influence. The

16 "Hercules in the Center of the Earth," *Monthly Film Bulletin* 30:349, February 1963.



AUSTRALIAN *one-sheet poster.*

"Silver Age" of the *peplum* would last in Italy for another few years, but with *Ercole al centro della terra*, Mario Bava—who, moreso than any other creative instigator, had spearheaded the genre—felt that he had made his ultimate "something out of nothing" and abandoned the playing field to his many imitators.

When Bava's film played in Austria as *Herkules gegen die Vampire*, it is said to have made a powerful impression on a certain 14-year-old boy, who left the theater idolizing Reg Park and determined to someday become a champion body-builder and actor. Young Arnold Schwarzenegger kept this promise to himself, winning his first Mr. Universe competition in 1970. Even more remarkable than his victory was the fact that he managed to triumph in this competition over his own idol—Reg Park—who was making his fourth (and final) grab for the title.

La sfida dei giganti

There is another variant of *Ercole al centro della terra* that warrants mentioning, if only parenthetically. On September 13, 1965, a fourth Hercules film starring Reg Park was released in Italy, entitled *La sfida dei giganti/Hercules the Avenger*.[17] In addition to a token amount of original footage, the film incorporated numerous entire scenes from both *Ercole al centro della terra* and Cottafavi's *Ercole alla conquista di Atlantide*, which were redubbed in the service of a new plot.

Directed by Maurizio Lucidi (the editor of *Ercole alla conquista di Atlantide*) under the pseudonym "Maurice A. Bright," this film was a co-production of two Roman companies, Plaza Film and Schermi Riuniti. The film's producer was undoubtedly Achille Piazzi, though his name appears nowhere on the final production. It was uncommon for co-productions of this period to be jointly financed by companies from the same country, so it seems likely that Piazzi once again ran out of funding and sold his interests to another producer, who worked with Lucidi to complete the film with footage borrowed from the two previous Piazzi productions. The names of Bava and Cottafavi also appear nowhere in the film's credits, although they directed about one-third of the picture between them.

The following synopsis details Enzo Gicca's screenplay, with the footage taken from *Ercole al centro della terra* printed in **bold**:

After the death of her husband, the palace of Queen Leda of Syracuse (Gia Sandri) is descended upon by a number of ambitious suitors, led by the slimy Eteocles (Franco Ressel). When the priestess at the Temple of Jove prophesies danger, Leda follows her advice to solicit the help of Hercules (Reg Park). Xanthos (Luigi Barbini), the teenage son of Hercules and Deianara ("Audrey Amber" a.k.a. Adriana Ambesi), is brutally mauled while lion-hunting with Theseus (Gianni Solaro) and succumbs to delirium. ***Hercules consults with an oracle (Gaia Germani), who warns him that he can restore Xanthos' soul only by freeing it from the chains of Hell.*** *In footage from the Cottafavi film, rewritten in the dubbing, Hercules and crew sail to the entrance of the Underworld but the others cower and try to abandon him during a brief visit to shore. He pulls the ship back to shore by its anchor chain and, leaving the crew behind, sails on to Hades alone.*

Inside a cavern, the ancient Earth Mother Gia tells her son Anteus (Giovanni Cianfriglia) that Hercules will not return from his voyage, and recommends that he seize control of Syracuse by impersonating the son of Jove. Queen Leda arrives at Hercules' home only to be told by Deianara that he is away. ***A storm destroys Hercules' ship****, but he rides the wreckage to his destination. Cutting back to Cottafavi footage, Hercules is greeted by an old man who transforms into the reptilian monster Proteus, whom he fights and slays. Meanwhile, Queen Leda's caravan encounters Anteus on the roadside, and his arrogance provokes an attack from her guards. He kills them, offers to accompany her to Syracuse, and introduces himself as Hercules.*[18] ***In Hades, Hercules encounters the Queen of the Sons of the Sun (Marisa Belli), and passes a test of worthiness by successfully felling a fabled Golden Apple from a precarious perch.*** *Anteus quickly evicts Eteocles and Leda's other suitors and*

La sfida dei giganti

"Challenge of the Giants"
Filmed at Vides Studios (Rome) and on location
Early 1965.
First released: August 13, 1965.
Technicolor, Techniscope, 2.35:1, 94 minutes

Production: Schermi Riuniti and Plaza Film. Distributor: Schermi Riuniti.

Belgium: *De Strijd Tussen Reuzen*, Cosmopolis Films
France: *Le Defi Des Geants*, Mondial Film
Mexico: *El Desafio del Gigante*
Spain: *El Desafáo de los Gigantes*
US: *Hercules the Avenger*



BELGIAN *affiche for* LA SFIDA DEI GIGANTI.

assumes the late King's throne and place in the Queen's bed. ***Hercules crosses a lake of fire and is attacked on the other side by an army of the dead, which he defeats by clobbering them with the slab-like stones of an altar. The voice of Jove advises him to place no credence in the illusions of Hell, and Hercules dives into the ocean of fire, finding only sea water.*** *He swims until he sees the place where Xanthos' soul is chained, but he succumbs to the deadly gas enveloping the region.*

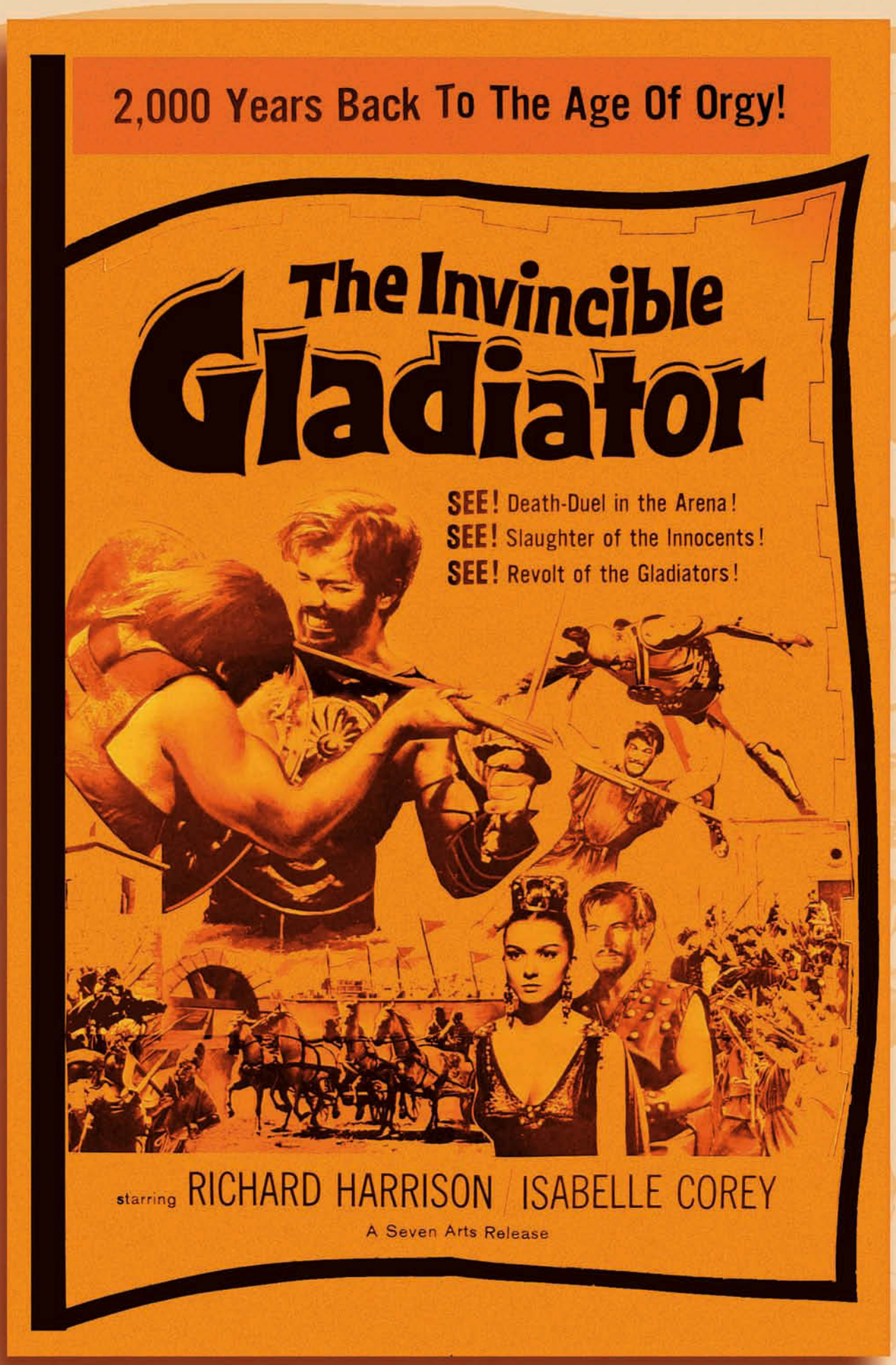
Anteus terrorizes Syracuse by torturing the daughters of his prisoners and freeing the murderers in the jails. The temple priestess prays to Jove and Jove answers: Hercules revives and embraces his son's soul, which returns to his body, causing Xanthos to awaken. Word reaches Deianara and Xanthos that Hercules has been ruling Syracuse by Leda's side, which makes his homecoming from Hades awkward. ***After another consultation with the oracle****, Hercules makes his way to Mt. Etna and triggers an eruption of the volcano by dropping large boulders into its maw. An immense stock footage eruption bathes Syracuse in lava. Anteus escapes when his father, the Earth, opens at his feet to provide a subterranean exit, but Leda dies in the crumbling Temple of Jove. Hercules pursues Anteus underground and, after a lengthy wrestling match, successfully strangles him to death while holding him up off the ground, depriving him of the contact with earth that makes him immortal.*

Despite its frankly larcenous construction, *La sfida dei giganti* is a clever and occasionally effective piece of work. It's also quite attractive (the art direction and wardrobe were handled by Giorgio Giovannini and Tina Grani, both members of the Bava squad at this time); its original Technicolor widescreen presentation, now preserved on a Retromedia Entertainment DVD, is occasionally eye-popping, even in its new footage—some of which has the look of Bava's work about it, and not solely for matching purposes. One of the film's finest components is a rich score by Ugo Filippini, and it is fascinating to see whole scenes from *Ercole al centro della terra*—such as the Hesperides sequence—scored differently by someone other than Armando Trovajoli. Gicca's script offers a thoughtful rumination on difficult father–son relationships, using those of Hercules, Xanthos, and even Anteus to view the subject from opposing angles. Park is fine in the role of Hercules, as usual, though this final outing offers him fewer opportunities to exhibit his range of humor, warmth and sensitivity.

After the passing of nearly a decade, footage from *Ercole al centro della terra* also turned up in Gilberto Martinez Solares' Mexican film *Santo y Blue Demon en el Mundo de los Muertos* ("Santo and Blue Demon in the Land of the Dead," 1970). Most of the film's environmental views of Hades—bubbling lava lakes, skeletal hands emerging from tombs, and so on, were taken without acknowledgment from the Bava film.

17 Not to be counted is Antonio Margheriti's *Ursus il terrore dei Kirghizi* (1964), a non-Hercules picture which was released directly to American television as *Hercules, Prisoner of Evil*.

18 Casting Giovanni Cianfriglia as an impersonator of Hercules is a marvelous inside joke, as he had broken into films by working as Steve Reeves' stunt man in the original Hercules films by Pietro Francisci.



US *one-sheet poster.*

Il gladiatore invincibile

The Invincible Gladiator

1961 WAS BY FAR the busiest year of Mario Bava's career—so busy that it is sometimes impossible to determine, from the release dates of the many films he directed and assisted, the precise order in which they were made. There are instances when the release dates of these pictures sometimes coincide on the same day, or within a week of one another. At some point during the year, either between the two Hercules films, or immediately following them, Bava provided some maquettes and additional special effects photography to yet another *sandaloni* costume drama called *Il gladiatore invincibile/The Invincible Gladiator*, produced by Italo Zingarelli. Of the many supporting characters in the story of Bava's career, Zingarelli is comparatively minor, at least on the surface, but he is deserving of special attention because, of the numerous members of the Italian film community who prevailed on Bava during this period for his help, he was the only colleague from Bava's prime years to attend his very private funeral in 1980.

Italo Zingarelli was born on January 15, 1930, in Lugo di Romagna, Italy. The son of two academics, a secondary school teacher and a professor, he was a husky, athletic child who did some semi-professional boxing as a young man. He broke into motion pictures as a stuntman on *Quo Vadis* (1951), then produced his first film in Britain: *Night of the Silvery Moon* (1954), a 67-minute B-picture starring Kathleen Byron and Dermot Walsh. When it failed to make his career, Zingarelli returned to Rome and determined to learn more about the film business from the inside, working first as a production secretary and then as a production manager. By 1960, he was finally in position to produce once again. The result was *Le legioni di Cleopatra/Legions of the Nile*, a critically and popularly well-received picture directed by Vittorio Cottafavi.

Although the direction of *Il gladiatore invincibile* is credited to "Anthony Momphlat" (the Spanish director Antonio Momplet), it is further described onscreen as "A Film of Alberto De Martino." Born in Rome in 1929, De Martino was a young but experienced screenwriter and assistant director who stumbled into sword-and-sandal pictures by directing some second unit material for Silvio Amadio's troubled mythological opus *Teseo contro il Minotauro/The Minotaur* (1960), which revealed his aptitude for such material. *Il gladiatore invincibile* was De Martino's veiled directorial debut. The star of the film was another comparative newcomer: a young American actor named Richard Harrison—who happened to be the son-in-law of American International Pictures president James H. Nicholson.

Born in Salt Lake City, Utah, on May 26, 1935, Richard Harrison was a member of the Muscle Beach crowd of the 1950s and early '60s. He worked as a fitness trailer at one of the local gyms and also worked as a professional model for muscle magazines. He never achieved the hyperbolic musculature of a Steve Reeves or Mark Forest or won titled competitions, so his earliest screen appearances were low-profile roles in fairly high-profile movies, including the widescreen science fiction picture *Kronos* (1957), Joshua Logan's mammoth movie version of Rodgers and Hammerstein's *South Pacific* (1958), and Logan's own *Tall Story* (1960), which introduced Jane Fonda to the screen. However, as he says, "It was always my dream, since childhood, to go to Europe." Harrison got his chance after befriending Lou Rusoff—a producer and screenwriter at American International Pictures, also the brother-in-law of Sam Arkoff, who met the handsome acting hopeful at Muscle Beach while researching the screenplay that would become *Beach Party*. Harrison's features were too mature to work in a juvenile scenario like that, but Rusoff was also preparing to produce *Goliath and the Dragon*, and felt Harrison would be perfect in the lead. The role of Goliath would have cast Harrison opposite Debra Paget and taken him to Italy, but the project fell apart, for reasons discussed earlier in this book, before he could board the plane for Rome.

AIP's Arkoff and Nicholson apologized to Harrison for this disappointment by signing him to a three-picture deal—at a reduced per-picture rate. The first and only job that came out of this contract was a supporting role as Alistair, the stripe-shirted helmsman of the militantly anti-war aircraft The Albatross, commandeered by Robur (Vincent Price) in the Jules Verne adaptation *Master of the World* (1961). The role of Alistair was so minor that the director (Republic serial king William Witney) neglected to shoot a single close-up of the future star AIP was supposedly grooming. It was on the set of *Master of the World* that he met Loretta Nicholson, the 17-year-old daughter of James H. Nicholson, whom he married six months later. It was around this time that Harrison received the offer from Italo Zingarelli to star in *Il gladiatore invincibile*. (Mark Forest had been announced as the star of the forthcoming film in trade publications, but the deal fell through.) It is important to note that the film was neither co-produced nor distributed by American International. Technically, Harrison walked out on his AIP contract by boarding the plane to Italy—and he did so as a man newly married to the daughter of one of the company's founding partners. (Richard and Loretta would later divorce, after having three children together, sometime in the 1970s.) Harrison was as happy in Europe as he hoped to be, and he would reside and work steadily in Rome for the next twenty years, starring in more than 70 of his eventual 110 features.

Harrison has said that his most important contribution to the Italian cinema was turning down Sergio Leone's offer of the lead role in *Il magnifico straniero*—which became *Per un pugno di dollari/A Fistful of Dollars* (1964)—but, like many actors, Harrison has not actually seen most of the films he has made, so he's hardly the best judge to assess his impact on his chosen profession. As an actor and as a heroic archetype, he is hardly negligible. As can immediately be seen in *Il gladiatore invincibile*, his first and arguably best *peplum*, Harrison brings a cerebral quality to his performance that distinguishes him as much as Steve Reeves was distinguished by his physical perfection, or as Gordon Scott was unique in his ability to handle challenging stunts. This is not to say that Harrison was not an equally convincing physical performer; on the contrary, his swordsmanship and horsemanship were excellent, as was his fight choreography, but his characters' most remarkable traits are their integrity, their resourcefulness, and their sensitivity. If he pales in comparison to his co-stars in *I sette gladiatori/Gladiators 7* (1962), it is a fault of the screenplay that the starring role is the blandest of the bunch, a bonding agent rather than a standout character role. As an actor, when given encouraging material, Harrison has a command of subtlety that lets the audience see him thinking, scheming, surviving. This aspect of consciousness sometimes teases the outskirts of self-consciousness, which makes Harrison's characters modern and vulnerable as well as interesting. Clint Eastwood—laconic, flinty, and squinty—was the better choice to play Leone's Man with No Name; Harrison, on the other hand, would have made a superb Ulysses.

While living in Rome, Harrison was drawn to the company of other artists working in the business, befriending fellow actors as well as the likes of artisans like Carlo Rambaldi (whose studio was near his apartment) and Mario Bava. "I liked Bava very much," Harrison says, "and my father-in-law Jim Nicholson was also a big admirer of his. When I think back to the days when I was working on my early films in Italy, I can remember that Bava was sometimes there on the sidelines, doing matte paintings on big sheets of glass. I thought he was a very, very talented man. He could make a picture look big, but as he confided to me, he hated doing big pictures."

The place is Icastus and the year is 3 A.D. The rise of Christianity is having an impact on the life-and-death sports of the arena, as well as the larger world of politics. Icastus is presently under the rule of the child king Darius (Edoardo Nevola); until he comes of age, his decisions are made by his regent, Rabirius (Leo Anchóriz). Under the instruction of his master Itus (Livio Lorenzon), Rezius (Harrison) has become the finest and possibly "the last of the gladiators." The son of a king before he was captured and enslaved, Rezius is a civilized warrior; not only can he recite the poetry of Horace from memory, but he has used it to form a philosophy of life: "Seize the day." He and his close friend Vibius (José Marco) dread the day when the arena may demand them to cross swords with one another, and that day finally comes . . . but Rezius is saved from having to take his friend's life by an attempt on the life of Rabirius, whom Rezius saves by hurling his weapon at the would-be assassin. In gratitude, Rabirius grants the gladiator his freedom and places him in charge of finding and conquering the band of brigands who camp in the mountains and plot to overthrow the regent. Rezius insists that Vibius also be freed, and Rabirius—joyous to be given a second lease on life—overlooks his arrogance and agrees.

Rezius is attracted to Sira (Brigitte Corey), the young king's older sister, but she resents him for his role in saving the corrupt and evil Rabirius. As Rezius discovers after locating the rebels' encampment, Sira is one of their number. After speaking with her and becoming more familiar with the truth of Rabirius and his abuse of the public trust, he

Il gladiatore invincibile

"The Invincible Gladiator"
Filmed at INCIR–De Paolis Studios (Rome) and Seville Studios (Madrid)
April – June 1961
First released: October 13, 1961
Technicolor, Techniscope, 2.35:1, 92 minutes

Production: Film Columbus (Rome) and Atenea Films S.L. (Madrid). Distributor: Variety Film.

Spain: *El Gladiator Invencible*, 7/2/62
Germany: *Der Unbesiegbare Gladiator*, 1/5/62, 91m
UK: *The Invincible Gladiator*, Gala Film Distributors Ltd., 1/66, 91m 12s, Certificate "U," passed with cuts
US: *The Invincible Gladiator*, Seven Arts, 9/63, 92m

determines to keep their secret and work for them against his liberator from inside his official circle. But Rabirius does not trust his new officer or the young king's liking for him. The regent arranges for King Darius to ride with Rezius in a sabotaged chariot during a race through the countryside. Turning a sharp corner, their chariot comes loose from its horses and goes plummeting with both passengers over a high seaside precipice. Fortunately, Rezius is able to save the king and takes him to the secret care of the rebel leaders inside the palace.

With Rezius and Darius presumed dead, Rabirius wastes no time in arresting Sira as a traitor and arranging his own immediate coronation. Meanwhile, Rezius carries the unconscious king for miles to the rebels' encampment, which he discovers has been located by Rabirius: dozens of rebels are crucified across the face of the mountain where they once concealed themselves, tied to stakes where they were burned alive. Rezius takes a horse and rides back to Icastus, where he presents the comatose king to the leaders of the rebellion, who are in fact Rabirius' advisors. Overjoyed by the king's survival, they plan to stage a revolt at the worst possible time for the evil pretender, announcing the king's return to Icastus on the day of coronation. Rezius and others find their way into the palace dungeons, where they find and free Vibius (arrested in the wake of Rezius' "death") and also Sira, who refuses to be freed until everyone imprisoned for her cause can be freed also. Rezius also finds imprisoned his former gladiator master Itus, no longer recognizable as the pillar of strength he once was. Before the liberation of the rebels can get properly underway, Rezius and Vibius are captured and thrown into a sealed dungeon. The presence of a mouse alerts them to a concealed point of entry, a small hole leading outside, which Vibius enlarges into a suitable crawlspace to freedom. As Rabirius prepares to wear the crown, the young king is shown to the people of Icastus outside the palace, exciting everyone into an all-out assault against the palace. Rezius and Rabirius have their expected showdown in the arena, but when Rezius corners his enemy, the final strike comes from an unexpected direction—from Itus, claiming his right to take the life of the man who destroyed him. Itus, truly the "last of the gladiators."



CAPTIVE PRINCESS *Sira (Brigitte Corey) is threatened with the blinding of Rezius (Richard Harrison).*

Rezius and Sira marry, and the son of a king becomes the brother of one and his most trusted advisor.

The work of six credited screenwriters, *Il gladiatore invincibile* is not a particularly unique story but it is told with great feeling and fortified with strong and often poignant dialogue. This, in turn, leads to some memorable performances. Harrison and Anchoríz were such memorable opponents that they would be cast opposite one another again. Marco is a staunchly likeable secondary hero, and Brigitte Corey (real name: Luisella Boni) stands in ethereal, milk-white contrast to the well-tanned he-men surrounding her. Perhaps most impressive in his few scenes is Livio Lorenzon, who would become a fixture not only of Harrison's subsequent *pepla* but of Italian gladiator films in general on the strength of his performance as Itus, until the genre petered out circa 1965. (That year, Lorenzon would work under Bava's direction in *Ringo del Nebraska/Savage Gringo*, using the pseudonym "Charles Lawrence.") Though the direction of the film is variously credited to Antonio Momplet and Alberto De Martino, there is nothing ambivalent about it; it has all the positive traits of a consistent vision. Richard Harrison explains this by revealing, "The true director of *Il gladiatore invincibile* was Italo Zingarelli, who sat over that picture like a mother hen."

Mario Bava's contributions to the film were limited to matte paintings and hanging maquettes. Two hanging maquettes are noticeable: the first is the palace exterior, and the second is seen late in the film, during the climactic scenes in the arena, as a camera angle reveals a stone village on the mountainside in the distance beyond. During the film's chariot race, Bava used glass mattes to enliven the country scenery with stone houses, sometimes lending dimension to these illusions by augmenting the glass with branches and greenery obtained from a local florist. The most memorable of the film's trick shots, however, is the panoramic shot of the murdered rebels whom Rezius finds displayed across the face of their mountain hideout. This shot appears to be a creative combination of actual props (one or two stuffed figures mounted to stakes here and there), glass matte painting (to multiply their number and add grislier examples), and possibly some hand-drawn additional paper cutouts, with smoke provided onset on both sides of the glass to integrate the various components. I've never had the privilege of seeing an excellent quality print of *Il gladiatore invincibile* in its correct aspect ratio, but this shot produces an emotional impact even in cropped presentations of fuzzy delineation. It's the ultimate illustration of Rabirius' villainy, and the reason anyone watching the film will want to see him vanquished.



ITALIAN *due-foglia. Of all Bava's films, the most exquisite promotional art attended the release of GLI INVASORI.*

GLI INVASORI

Erik the Conqueror

MARIO BAVA'S recollection of how his next film got started was a bit of a jumble: "When the first Viking film with Burt Lancaster came out, they said 'Now it's time to make a Viking film; let's get started. So we made *Gli invasori* with Giorgio Ardisson and Cameron Mitchell, on location at Lavinio, which—along with Tor Caldara—was the country of Vikings. Since I was fast and required very few horses or anything else, I made the producers a lot of money." [1]

Bava's casual comments stand in need of correction. First of all, Richard Fleischer's *The Vikings* (1958) did not star Burt Lancaster, but rather his frequent co-star, Kirk Douglas. Secondly and most importantly, *The Vikings* was not the first Viking film of this trend, though it may well have been the first to play in Italy. The trend was actually launched by Roger Corman, who directed the heroically titled *The Saga of the Viking Women and Their Voyage to the Waters of the Great Sea Serpent* in the autumn of 1957 with the express purpose of taking advantage of the Fleischer film's pre-publicity and beating it into theaters, which is succeeded in doing in November 1957—seven months before *The Vikings*' World Premiere. Furthermore, *Gli invasori* was not the first Italian Viking film; that distinction, as we have seen, belongs to Giacomo Gentilomo's *L'ultimo dei vichinghi* (1961), also starring Mitchell and Ardisson, which Bava had actually helped to complete.

It was a few pictures after this rescue mission that Bava was given the opportunity to direct a Viking picture in his own right, and its narrative does indeed owe a great deal to Fleischer's film. *The Vikings* is the story of an enmity between two adversaries—one a Viking leader named Einar, the other a Viking slave named Eric. Unbeknownst to the two enemies, they are in fact brothers, Eric being the offspring of the Queen of England, who was raped by Einar's father. Eric becomes the most hated enemy of Einar when the slave's falcon gouges out one of his eyes. After surviving the punishment doled out to him, Eric meets and falls in love with a Princess (Janet Leigh) abducted by Einar's hordes, who knows the secret of Eric's true paternity.



CAMERON MITCHELL *and Giorgio Ardisson as Iron and Erik, two Viking brothers separated by war.*

When Einar challenges Eric to the death, the Princess tries to spare them by confessing their true relationship to the Viking leader, confirmed by the family amulet they both wear. The two men duel outside the British castle occupied by the Vikings, and Einar throws away his chance to kill his brother; Eric, unaware of their fraternity, deals Einar a mortal blow. The film ends with Einar's Viking funeral, his body is set adrift on a burning ship, as Eric and the Princess look on.

Compare this, if you will, to the narrative of *Gli invasori . . .*



BELGIAN *affiche.*

Gli invasori

"The Invaders"
Filmed at Cinecittà and on location
August 22 – October 28, 1961
First released: December 7, 1961.
Eastmancolor, Dyaliscope, 2.35:1, 98 minutes

Production: Galatea (Rome), Societé Cinématographique Lyre, Criterion Film (Paris). Producer: Lionello Santi. Director: Mario Bava. Assistant directors: Francesco Prosperi, Tonino Teodoro Ricci. Story and screenplay: Oreste Biancoli, Piero Pierotti, Mario Bava. Continuity: Anita Borgiotti. Camera: Ubaldo Terzano. Assistant camera: Enrico Fontana. Second unit camera: Gianni Narzisi. Second unit assist camera: Giuseppe Berta. Art direction: Giorgio Giovannini. Set decoration: Massimo Tavazzi. Props: Massimo Tavazzi. Special effects: Tonino Cacciottolo. Wardrobe: Tina Loriedo Grani. Costume design: Mario Giorsi. Costumes: Rancati, Tigano Lo Faro, Pompei. Hairdresser: Mara Rocchetti. Choreography: Leo Coleman. Production manager: Massimo De Rita. Production secretary: Arturo Padovani. Production associates: Paolo Mercuri, Armando Govoni. Editor: Mario Serandrei. Assistant to the editor: Lina Caterini. Music: Roberto Nicolosi, conducted by Pier Luigi Urbini [Nazional Music]. Sound recorder: Rolando Mattioli. Second unit sound: Pietro Vesperini. Third unit sound: Aldo Zanni. Cashier: Dante Brivi. Distributor: Unidis, Jolly Film.

Cameron Mitchell (Iron), Giorgio Ardisson (Erik), Alice Kessler (Rama), Ellen Kessler (Daia), Andrea Checchi (Sir Rudfort), Folco Lulli (Floki), Franco Giacobini (Rustichello), Raf Baldassare (Black), Enzo Doria (Bennet), Franco Ressel (Lotar), Françoise Christophe (Queen Alice), Livia Contardi (Hadda), with Jean-Jacques Delbo, Gianni Solaro, Joe Robinson.

Argentina: *La Furia de los Vikingos*, Industria Argentina
Belgium: *De Stormloop der Vikings*, Elan Film
Denmark: *Normannemes sidste Togt*, "The Normans' Last Expedition," Schmidt-Film, 1965
France: *La Ruée des Vikings*, Francinor, 7/10/63, 80m
Germany: *Die Rache der Wikinger*, "The Revenge of the Vikings," Rolei-Nobis, 12/7/62, 90m
Spain: *La Furia de los Vikingos*, "The Fury of the Vikings," Izaro Films, Eastmancolor/CinemaScope, 85m
Turkey: *Buyuk Istila*
UK: *Fury of the Vikings*, Compton-Cameo Films Ltd., 4/21/63, 89m 49s, Certificate "U," passed with cuts
US: *Erik the Conqueror*, American International Pictures, Colorscope, 6/1/63, 88m

Synopsis

In the year 736 AD, Viking hordes attack the coast of England. They are effectively defeated by the British regent Sir Rudfort, who commands his bowmen—led by Floki—with bloodthirsty pleasure. Two young boys, the sons of Harald, King of the Vikings, are separated during the massacre, during which their father is killed by Floki's volley of arrows. After the battle, King Lotar and his Queen ride through the body-strewn battlefield and condemn Rudfort for so cruelly exceeding his orders, which were to negotiate peace by offering Harald sole sovereignty over the North Seas. Rudfort covertly signals for the King to be shot with an arrow, which fatally pierces his neck. A dead Viking is quickly blamed for the assassination. That night, Queen Alice discovers the young abandoned son of Harald on the beach and notes the mark of royalty—a serpent in the figure-eight of Infinity—on his breast. She adopts the child as her own.

Twenty years later, the Viking leader Olaf has become too old to lead his people into battle against England, and a new leader must be chosen—either the proud soldier Garion . . . or Iron, the grown son of Harald. Iron wants to be King so that he can free his beloved Daia from her fate as a vestal virgin. When a vote of thrown axes results in a tie, Garion and Iron must cross swords for the right to rule—forging the weapons they must then use against their opponent. Iron wins this contest, but refuses to kill Garion, who gratefully pledges his life to his new King.

At the same time, Queen Alice makes her adopted son Erik the Duke of Helford. Erik leads his soldiers into sea-faring battle against Iron and is defeated, Garion losing his life in the skirmish. Erik is washed ashore near a Viking camp not far from his own castle, now occupied by Iron. Cared for by Rama—the twin sister of Daia—Erik soon falls in love with her, and she notices that he wears the same crucifix around his neck as the Queen being held prisoner in the castle; thus, Erik learns that his mother has been betrayed by Rudfort, who spitefully let the Vikings into the castle when she rejected his proposal of marriage.

Iron uses his newfound power to free and wed Daia. Witnessing their wedding, Erik believes that his beloved Rama is being untrue to him—and he disrupts the marriage of her twin. He is promptly arrested and abused in the dungeon, until Rama cleverly drugs his sadistic guards by delivering a jug of wine, supposedly for the prisoner, which they drink themselves. Erik and Rama escape and Iron abandons his own wedding to pursue them, swearing to show them no mercy. However, when a bridge of vines breaks and leaves Iron dangling over a deep ravine, Erik goes back to rescue him. With Erik's help, Iron is able to hold on until his own men arrive to effect his rescue.

Banding with additional men from Scotland, Erik soon returns to his occupied castle, but finds their combined army still outnumbered two-to-one by the Vikings. Erik then challenges Iron to a duel. The two men cross swords until Iron defeats the Duke, at which point he throws away his sword, declares them even, and hurls himself into barehanded battle. During their fight, Iron discovers the serpent emblazoned on Erik's breast, the mark identifying him as a long-lost brother. Emerging from battle arm in arm, Iron declares peace—but Rudfort's men fire an arrow at Erik, which Iron heroically takes in his stead. Rudfort raises the drawbridge and holds Iron's new bride Daia hostage inside.

Dying, Iron desperately wants to see his wife one last time. While Rama poses as her sister to comfort him, Erik gains access to the castle by heroically pulling himself up a ladder of arrows fired into the outer walls by his and Iron's soldiers. He regains the castle, and Rudfort dies as King Harald did so many years before—his chest shot through with dozens of arrows. In a downbeat ending, Iron dies before he can be reunited with Daia, but she shares his final voyage, immolating his body, his ship and herself, as Rama and Erik look mournfully on from the shoreline.



CLOTHED *in white, vestal virgins attend the joint crucifixion of one of their sisters and the lover for whom she forsook her vows.*

As should be readily apparent from comparing the two synopses, *Gli invasori* borrows so much from *The Vikings* that it stands as a virtual remake, with Mitchell and Ardisson respectively cast in the Kirk Douglas and Tony Curtis roles. Einar becomes Iron, Eric becomes Erik; the untouchable Princess loved by both men becomes twin vestal virgins loved by Iron and Erik; Einar's penchant for axe-throwing is reborn as a Viking method of casting votes; the amulet of fraternity becomes a physical brand or birthmark; both films build to a climactic brawl between the two male stars, as their respective

1 Alberto Abruzzese, et al., *La città del cinema—produzione e lavoro nel cinema italiano 1930–70* (Rome, Italy: Napoleone, 1979), 83–89.



ALICE *and Ellen Kessler as Daia and Rama.*



PICTURE *sleeve for one of the Kessler Twins' popular German 45 rpm singles, "Honey-Moon."*

armies look on; and lastly, both films end with the Viking funeral of the top-billed actor.

Regardless of the similarities between *Gli invasori* and *The Vikings*, Bava's film seems to owe at least as much to Corman's *Viking Women and the Sea Serpent* (to use its condensed advertising title), which proved that epic historical adventure stories were not necessarily off-limits to meager-budgeted productions, as long as they were approached with imagination and technical know-how. Corman's film had the advantage of some excellent matte paintings by Irving Block, Louis DeWitt and Jack Rabin which gave it a dimension of scenic class uncommon in Corman's early filmography, but Corman and his crew (led by *Science Fiction Theater* cameraman Monroe Askins) didn't have the technical finesse to otherwise conceal their threadbare budgeting. Therefore, its viewers are basically left to decide whether or not they are going to suspend disbelief and follow where the movie means to take them. One imagines that, if Bava had seen *Viking Women*, he would have known instantly that the film worked on its own level, and that, working on that same level, he could do much, much better.

As with Bava's previous two directorial assignments, the title of *Gli invasori* was an ironical knock-off of a fairly recent Italian release; in this case, William Cameron Menzies' *Invaders From Mars* (1953), which did not arrive in Rome until the late 1950s, and then under the title *Gli invasori spaziali*. The script was written by Oreste Biancoli (1897–1971), a former director from Bologna whose most famous movie, *Nozze vagabonde* (1936), had been the first 3-D picture of the sound era. A screenwriter since 1932, Biancoli had co-written a number of notable *peplum* scripts, including *Maciste nella valle dei Re*/*Son of Samson* (1960), Antonio Leonviola's *Maciste nella terra dei ciclopi*/*Atlas in the Land of the Cyclops* (1961), and Riccardo Freda's *Maciste alla corte del Gran Khan* (1961). *Gli invasori* appears to have been the final project of his long career. The script is co-credited to Piero Pierotti (1912–70), a Pisa-born filmmaker who worked as an assistant director and/or co-writer on films directed by Giacomo Gentilomo (*Enrico Caruso*) and photographed by Mario Bava (*La donna più bella del mondo*), before becoming a director in his own right. He specialized in *pepla*, costume pictures, and Spaghetti Westerns, and sometimes signing his work "Peter E. Stanley."

Cast

By his own admission, Mario Bava had little affinity for actors. Consequently, while he worked faithfully with the same crew members for much of his career, it was unusual for him to work with the same performers more than once. He would re-use certain character actors time and again—like Gustavo De Nardo, Harriet White Medin, Luciano Pigozzi ("Alan Collins"), and Piero Lulli, whose faces form distinct constellations in his universe—but only one male star was invited back to carry the weight of three films: Cameron Mitchell.

It wouldn't be correct to suggest that Mitchell was to Bava what Cary Grant had been to Hitchcock, or De Niro to Scorsese: an alter ego. It is more likely that Mitchell simply knew enough about his craft to be left alone, allowing Bava to concentrate on his greater concerns of lighting and cinematography. On the level of production where Bava toiled, he was sometimes required to work with all manner of unprofessionals: alcoholic actors, temperamental starlets, producer's girlfriends, and faded stars bent on reaffirming their former celebrity at the expense of their directors and co-stars. Under these circumstances, Bava would have considered an actor like Mitchell—who was serious about his craft, always prepared and never complaining of the material he was given—a welcome relief. Bava may also have interpreted the actor's name as a sign of good luck: his favorite tool was the rock-steady 35 mm Mitchell camera he used for filling special effects, and here was an actor whose name sounded like "Camera Mitchell."

The role of Erik marked the final collaboration of Bava and actor Giorgio Ardisson, who in many ways steals this picture. In his later work, Ardisson would become a staple of the Spaghetti Westerns of the 1960s, but his most visible work includes Antonio Margheriti's *I lunghi capelli della morte/The Long Hair of Death* (1964, opposite Barbara Steele), Nick Nostro's *Operazione controspionaggio/Operation Counterspy*, (1965), Albert Band's made-for-television *Hercules and the Princess of Troy* (1965), and a supporting role (with his natural, darker hair color) in Fellini's *Giulietta degli spiriti/Juliet of the Spirits* (1965). He remained active in Italian films until his death in 1995, when he suffered a fatal heart attack during a screening of his last picture.

Ellen and Alice Kessler, the twins who respectively played Daia and Rama, were born on August 20, 1936, in Leipzig, East Germany. As children, Ellen dreamed of becoming a dancer, while her more academically inclined sister studied drafting. In 1952, at the age of 16, they fled to West Germany with their parents and jointly decided to support themselves by following Ellen's star. They first entered the public forum with a popular stage act at Les Foliés in Paris, their routine built around dances in which they mirrored each other's meticulously choreographed movements. They made their first screen appearance in 1955's *Solang' es hübsche Mädchen gibt/Beautiful Girls*, and made the jump into French films by playing the Dolly Sisters in 1957's *Les Garçonnes*. They became very popular in Italy as "*le gemelle Kessler*," making numerous singing and dancing appearances on prime time television programs, then proceeded to add the Italian cinema to their list of conquests. They appeared as featured players in *Le bellissima gambbe di Sabrina/The Beautiful Legs of Sabrina*, directed by Camillo Mastrocinque; surprisingly, Sabrina was played by Mamie Van Doren, who was hardly as celebrated for her legs as the Kesslers were. Around this same time, the Kesslers recorded a series of German pop singles with Peter Kraus (as "Alice, Ellen and Peter," for the Polydor label)—"Honey-Moon," "*Mondscheim und Liebe,*" "Hallo Blondie"—and showcased their shapely legs in a series of commercials and advertisements for OMSA stockings.



US *lobby card: After Sir Rudfort (Andrea Checchi) helps Iron and his men gain access to the Queen's castle, the tables are turned on him.*

"They were really quite nice and also very sympathetic," recalled their co-star, Cameron Mitchell. "They tried, and I thought they were very good. I also thought they were beautiful, graceful, and feminine—certainly a lot nicer than *Charlie's Angels*! But I also thought that Bava helped them. They were what I guess you'd call 'cabaret stars,' but Bava made them human and believable. They weren't just pretty showgirls."

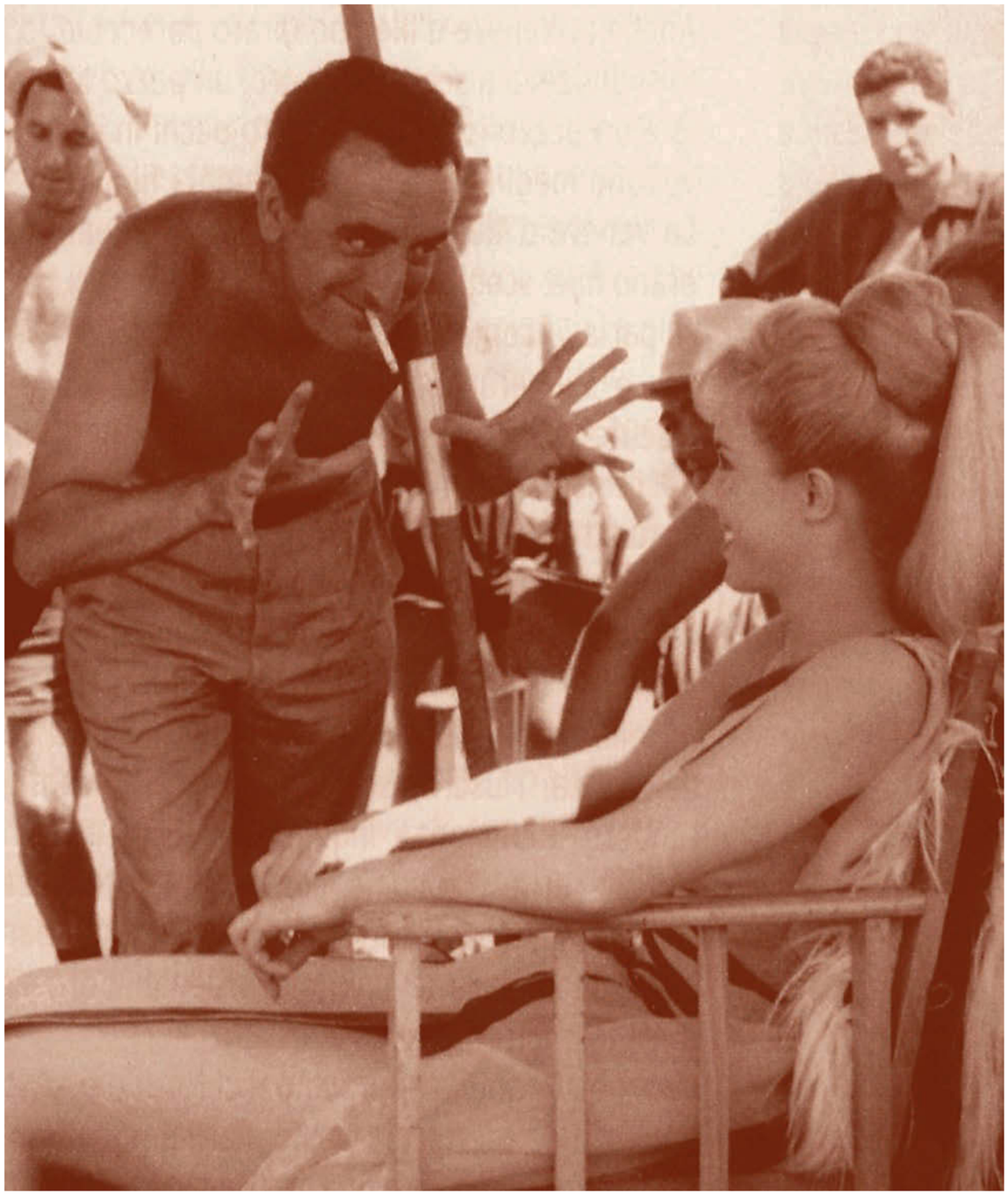
On the set, Bava was fond of teasing Alice and Ellen. He would walk past them, feign a double-take, roll his eyes at them, and insist that they were a hoax, that they really looked nothing like each other, that they were probably were not even related. After their appearance in *Gli invasori,* the Kessler Twins brought their act to America, where a performance on *The Red Skelton Show* made them an overnight sensation and catapulted them onto the 2/23/63 cover of *Life* magazine—the issue on national newsstands the week of President John F. Kennedy's assassination. Afterwards, the sister act continued to make films—most notably, Robert Aldrich's *Sodom and Gomorrah* (1962)—but they began to shy away from motion pictures after playing "the Tiddy Sisters" in *Die Tote von Beverly Hills/That Girl From Beverly Hills* (1964). After appearing as themselves in their last film, *I complessi* (1965), they worked for a time in Las Vegas and made other bids for celebrity in America, including appearances on *The Ed Sullivan Show* (they happened to share the bill on the night of The Doors' one and only *Sullivan* show), but their greatest success was always in Germany.

Given special billing as Queen Alice, Françoise Christophe came to *Gli invasori* with an impressive career in French films behind her. Two of her most interesting early credits were Jean Sacha's *Fantômas* (1947) and Jean Cocteau's *Le Testament d'Orphée/The Testament of Orpheus* (1960), in which she played the Nurse. Christophe's naturally patrician appearance landed her several royal parts, including Austria's Queen Anne in a two-part feature adaptation of *The Three Musketeers* in 1960, and a Duchess in Philippe de Broca's popular *Le Roi de coeur/King of Hearts* (1966). She was terrorized once again by "The Genius of Crime" in *Fantômas contre Scotland Yard* (1967, opposite Jean Marais), and she was featured in Antonio Margheriti's *giallo* film *La morte negli occhi del gatto/Seven Deaths in the Cat's* Eye (1973).

Christophe, whose casting in *Gli invasori* helped it to attract co-production funding from France, was still working in films as recently as 1992.

Cast against type as the villainous Sir Rudfort was Andrea Checchi, who had played Dr. Kruvajan in *La maschera del demonio*, as well as a major role in *L'ultimo dei vichinghi*. (For some reason, in all print references, the name of his character is given as "Gunnar," though he is never called by this name in either of the English versions.) *Gli invasori* was the last collaboration of personal friends Bava and Checchi, though the actor lived a dozen more years and made a good many subsequent films. He passed away on March 31, 1974, from a rare viral infection at the age of 58.

Folco Lulli, the lean-featured actor who plays Rudfort's sadistic first officer Aello ("Floki" in English-language prints), was born July 3, 1912, in Florence and made his first screen appearance in *Un pilota ritorna* (1942). Despite an important mainstream appearance in Federico Fellini's directorial debut *Luci del varietà/Variety Lights* (1950), Lulli's adeptness at horsemanship and action stuntwork made him a fixture of Italian historical dramas in the 1950s—beginning with *Ulisse* (1954) and *Nel segno di Roma* (1958) and continuing through the *peplum* cycle of the 1960s: *La regina dei Tartari/Queen of the Tartars* (1960), *Romolo e Remo/Duel of the Titans* (1961), and *Maciste, l'eroe più grande del mondo/Goliath and the Sins of Babylon* (1963), to name a few—and the Spaghetti Westerns of the 1960s. He played the role of Tobias in *Esther and the King* (1960). He died at age 57 of a heart attack on May 23, 1970—just a few years after writing and directing his first film, *Gente d'onore* ("Gentlemen of Honor," 1967). Folco's younger brother Piero Lulli also appeared frequently in Bava movies, playing important supporting roles in *L'ultimo dei vichinghi*, *Operazione paura*, *Ringo del Nebraska/Savage Gringo* (1966), and *I coltelli del vendicatore/Knives of the Avenger* (1966)—enough to qualify him as one of Bava's favorite faces and most frequent collaborators.



Production & Special Effects

For the most part, *Gli invasori* is shot without a lot of illusory spectacle, which may have been a welcome change after a film like *Ercole al centro della terra*, which was almost nothing but. Nevertheless, it does contain some trick shots worth pointing out.

Cameron Mitchell remembered: "When we were making [*Gli invasori*], there was only one place on the coast where we could shoot, near Anzio, because that coastline was pretty well populated. There was only one hill, one angle, we could use. Bava said to me, 'Camerone'—he called me 'Camerone'—and called me over to look through the camera. He had taken a photograph of an old castle and mounted it on a pane of glass before the camera, to make it look mounted on the top of that hill! He did that scene literally with pictures from *National Geographic*! It was incredible!"

BAVA *teasing Alice Kessler and (opposite) clowning around with his good friend Cameron Mitchell.*

The English castle can be seen cleverly positioned atop the hillside at Lavinio—a seaside resort near Anzio which legend holds to have been one of the original dwellings of Aeneas—serving as a dramatic backdrop to the final confrontations of the film. At one point, to really sell the illusion, Bava photographs Mitchell's and Ardisson's stunt doubles crossing their swords high on the hill, looking for all the world as though they are fighting immediately outside the barricades of the massive structure.

Bava was reluctant to employ special effects methods that he could not absolutely control, but *Gli invasori* includes a few blue screen travelling matte shots that, given his other responsibilities, may have been entrusted to other hands. They are fairly well-done, and show that advances had been made since *Le meraviglie di Aladino*, which was subject to quite a few ragged edges in this department. During the sequence featuring the castle matte, there are at least two close-ups of Cameron Mitchell that show the actor waving his sword in front of an optically printed background of the castle matte. Blue screen work was also utilized for one of the film's most exciting moments, when the bridge of vines collapses under Iron in his pursuit of Erik and Rama—allowing a view of the Mediterranean to be inserted behind the bridge suspended over the mountain chasm, which was built and photographed in the studio.



"**THIS** *can't work!" Cameron Mitchell said, but Bava managed to stage a sea battle without ships in GLI INVASORI.*

"He had an eye for scale, and he knew by looking exactly how far from the camera he needed to be to fake a ravine or a chasm," Mitchell said.



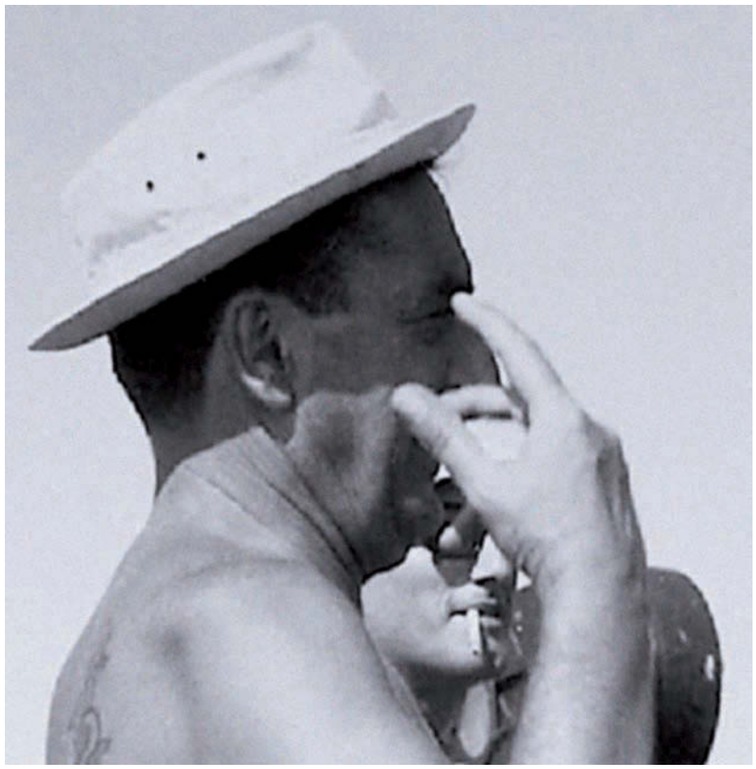
"What was physically there were the actors, whatever props we came into contact with, and the rest was trickery. We jumped from one platform to another. There was a [gap and a drop], but it wasn't that high; it wasn't that dangerous. And the sea behind us? There wasn't any, not when we were doing the shot. He could take his actors and place them on wooden planks, make that platform look like the sides of a ravine, and he could place the water where he needed the water! I don't know how the hell he did it; I can't tell you."

When Sir Rudfort fires upon Iron and closes all entrances to the castle, there is a brief shot of the castle's drawbridge closing. This is obviously a miniature, but what is interesting is that this elaborate miniature is used in only in this single shot, as we are never shown anyone entering or exiting the castle via this drawbridge.

Considering the time and expense involved in the building of such a prop, and how dispensable this shot is, it may be that the miniature was built as a setting for other shots as well—perhaps effects shots—that were ultimately not used.

The film's most exciting sequence is Erik's heroic scaling of the castle walls to rescue Daia, using arrows carefully fired by his compatriots as handholds. For this sequence, another background plate of the sea was photographed from a steep high angle, with Ardisson climbing a not-particularly-steep sea wall; this was then incorporated into a blue screen shot, whose foreground element was a slanted, albeit basically horizontal surface of planks suggesting the castle wall. As Ardisson disappeared behind the foregrounded element on the optical plate, the actor was photographed on the set, climbing atop the castle's facade. Bava used a similar procedure—and the same location—years later in *Diabolik/Danger: Diabolik* (1968), to depict the master criminal's stealthy scaling of the wall of a seaside house hosting a millionaire's dinner party.

By far the most elaborate of the film's illusions was the sea battle between the English and the Vikings, which—apart from some second unit shots—Bava filmed entirely indoors. The sequence was reserved for the end of the production schedule, and found the director outdoing himself once again with absurdly minimal means. "I shot the entire naval battle using only a couple of wooden tables carved into the shape of ships' sterns, with a dozen Viking shields along the sides, all propped up against soap crates, while some crew members rocked the camera in imitation of the sea!" he later recounted. "And then there was Cameron Mitchell, having buckets of water thrown at his face by an off-camera technician! And the ship looked far more convincing than the ones shown in *Cleopatra*!" [2] The sequence also includes some cutaway shots of miniature ships, which were shot in a water tank at Cinecittà. "Those Viking ships were constructed out of planks of Buitoni pasta, with a sort of prow leading the way," Bava pointed out. "The stagehands threw water on dry ice to produce a fog, and a bellows went up and down, puffing out big, black smoke." [3] Incredibly, Bava estimated the total cost of the battle sequence at approximately 150,000 *lire* [$94].



KING *of his set: Bava's shoulder was painted with the brand of Viking royalty during the filming.*

The sequence does work surprisingly well, being largely sold by the graceful camera dollying along the length of ships we never actually see, which gives the static set an illusion of being truly at sail.

The actor at the helm of the table was likewise impressed. "Bava used fairly close shots for that sequence, and he moved the boat by moving the camera," Cameron Mitchell explained. "The camera would slowly move back and the 'ship' seemed to be moving forward. I kept saying to myself, 'Jesus, this can't work!' but it *does* work. He *made* it work. The things he did were miracles. In all my years in Hollywood, I never saw anyone else who had what Bava had—this great knowledge and skill of cinema magic. He was a . . . 'cinemagician.' That's a pretty good word for him."

Bava seems to have had a wonderful time making the picture, whose leisurely production lasted throughout the summer. An abundance of behind-the-scenes photos show Bava in generally high spirits, posing for gag shots with Mitchell and playing the clown for the pretty girls, scowling only at the persistence of the stills photographer. When working on location under the hot Roman sun, the male crew members dispensed with their usual dress protocol and often stripped down to their undershirts or bare skin as they went about the day's work. One photograph of Bava shows him shirtless and standing in profile, a tattoo of a snake adorning his left shoulderblade. When I asked Lamberto Bava about this decoration, he rejected the very idea: "I am sure that Mario never had a tattoo!" On closer study of the adornment, I recognized the tattoo as the same serpentine figure-eight which identifies Iron and Erik as royal-born brothers in the movie. Thus, Bava's tattoo was not permanent, but rather an affectionate gift from the film's makeup artist, identifying him to one and all as the king of the set.

Assistant director Franco Prosperi remembers Bava as being quite an easy-going and benevolent King, at that: "I remember that it appealed to Mario to play *scopone scientifico* [an advanced form of *bazzica scopa*, requiring four players]. At times, he would actually hold up the shooting in order to play another hand with the machinists and electricians; it appealed to him more than his work." [4]

The Invaders & Erik the Conqueror

As usual, to encourage an American sale, Galatea produced an English-dubbed version of *Gli invasori* entitled *The Invaders*. The film was quickly acquired by Samuel Z. Arkoff and James H. Nicholson of American International Pictures, for whom it was something of a consolation prize. The moguls of AIP had been so pleased with the boxoffice performance of *Black Sunday* that they extended a personal invitation to Mario Bava to relocate to Los Angeles and sign a multi-year contract to direct motion pictures exclusively for them. Bava was vastly complimented, but declined their offer.

Arkoff felt that Bava's refusal to leave Italy prevented him from achieving all that he might have done as a film director. "I believe, had he either lived or worked in the US or the UK, Bava might have become as well-known as Hitchcock, at least as a prominent horror director," Arkoff declared. "We tried to get him, but he was basically an Italian and didn't feel comfortable in English. We even tried to interest him in moving to the UK and working there, but basically, he felt at home in Italy."

"I always refused to go to America, and that was a big mistake," Bava admitted later in his career. "I'm too much of a homebody; I would hate America. Still, it was very wrong of me to turn them down . . ." [5]

The reasons behind Bava's refusal were probably more involved than he would have acknowledged in a print interview. It is true that he was insecure about his English—"He could speak it better than he thought he could," as Arkoff well knew—but even



US *half-sheet, art by Reynold Brown.*

in his native language, Bava was more of an observer than a public speaker. He thought visually and worked instinctively; speaking aloud meant having to translate the things he understood innately into a verbal form that others could appreciate. Even Bava's Italian co-workers sometimes had difficulties understanding exactly what he wanted them to do. This was one obstacle. There was also love of country, and another factor was undoubtedly age. "Bava *was* pushing 50," Arkoff agreed. "Maybe if he had been 30 or even 35, he could have done it."

But the prevailing reason for Bava's decision to remain in Italy was unquestionably family. His children were now at the age where they were embarking on adult lives of their own, and moving would mean leaving them behind in Rome. This would have been unacceptable to Mario, and certainly unacceptable to his wife Iole, who—one imagines—would never have agreed to such a move even if her husband accepted AIP's invitation.

"In order for him to come to America, it would have meant breaking up the family," concurs Mario's friend Andrea Piazzesi. "He preferred to live a modest life; he was not an ambitious person. His wife never really wanted to go anywhere with him, never wanted to go to any sort of party, which must have been a problem for him in terms of his career because, as a director, if you can show up in certain social circles where you can meet producers, your luck comes much more easily than if you live privately, as he did, staying home with his wife. But maybe he preferred doing that."

AIP wanted to stake their claim on Bava, and as soon as Achille Piazzi was out of the way, they pounced on the next Bava film offered by their Italian liaison, Fulvio Lucisano. There was some disappointment that *The Invaders*

2 Dante Matelli, *L'espresso,* May 1979.

3 Abruzzese.

4 Manlio Gomarasca and Davide Pulici, "Il Talento di Mr. Bava," *Nocturno Dossier* 24, July 2004, 6–32.

5 Abruzzese.



AS KING *of the Vikings, Iron must preserve the integrity of vestal virgins such as Daia and Rama, but he romances Daia (Ellen Kessler) by night.*

wasn't another horror picture, but costume pictures were still hot and, they had to admit, Bava had worked wonders with the budget (officially $100,000 and almost certainly less). Nevertheless, the picture needed some work, Arkoff and Nicholson felt. In 1963—nearly two years after they bought the rights—AIP released their own English-dubbed version of the picture: *Erik the Conqueror*. The entire film was recut and redubbed at Titra Sound Corporation, with Brett Morrison providing the voice of Iron.

The original dub, *The Invaders* (first released in America on home video by Panther Entertainment in the mid-1980s), contains some awkward translation ("The filthy blight of the Vikings is at last extirpated, never more to befoul our glorious Britain!"), but for the most part, the wording of its dialogue was retained by Titra's redubbing. Compared to *The Invaders*, AIP's theatrical release *Erik the Conqueror* was further reconfigured, being extensively cut, re-edited, and re-scored. Even so, AIP's cuts were not so drastic as was supposed by their pressbook, which listed the running time as 81 minutes; the actual running time of *Erik the Conqueror* was closer to 88 minutes—10 minutes shorter than the original.

The Invaders opens with the main titles superimposed over a view of the sea at magic hour. *Erik the Conqueror* opens with abbreviated titles on a velvet blue backdrop, as magenta-colored smoke rises from below camera. After the credit for the Kessler Twins, there is a visible splice on all prints, suggesting that the remaining credits may have been intended—as with many other AIP films—to be shown at the end of the movie, with the smoke recalling the conclusive image of Iron's funeral pyre. Dirt cheap but very effective, this active background was first utilized by AIP under the end titles of *Goliath and the Vampires* and was subsequently reused on several of their direct-to-television sword-and-sandal releases of the 1960s. Nothing more than smoke and color, the backdrop manages to be redolent of mystery, alchemy, fantasy, and Bava's own unique personality.

Erik proceeds to omit *The Invaders*' awkward opening narration, which is heard as we are made to stare for a few static minutes at a crudely drawn map of the British Isles:

> *"In the year 786 of the Christian era, off the rocky shores of England in the county of Dorset, there appeared for the first time three great long vessels. Blonde giants, thirsty for blood, eager for conquest, overwhelmed the island destroying every fortification and spreading death and terror. The Vikings were invading Britain. Many of us followed that first landing and the sight of their huge prowed, square vessels came to mean disaster. A long iron lance was their fearful weapon. And from their icy land those fierce, invincible, pitiless heads established themselves solidly on those shores. And so were born small kingdoms whose strength came out of blood and slavery. The only Viking king desirous of peace and justice was Harald of the order. Thus, King Lothar of Britain had charged Sir Rudford [sic] to negotiate with him for peace."*

Without this opening dialogue, *Erik the Conqueror* forfeits the desired irony when we cut from the allusion of peaceful negotiations to a Viking settlement being raided and massacred by Sir Rudfort's troops. *Erik* also eliminates much of the raid's original brutality, omitting (for example) the truly shocking sight of a young mother fleeing her hut with an infant, and being shot with an arrow—*right through* the wailing baby in her arms. [6]

The preparations for Iron's duel with Garion were abbreviated, as was a conversation between Daia and Rama, in which Daia confessed her love for Iron and her hopes that he would become King and free her from her commitments as a vestal virgin. Rama tells Daia that if he should die in the coming war, she will be absolved of her sins. More significantly, nearly all of Franco Giacobini's supporting role was cut from AIP prints. Giacobini—returning from *Ercole al centro della terra*—plays Rustichello, a silly but inventive soldier who is teased by his shipmates for anticipating trouble at sea and preparing a makeshift belt of bladders to use as a life saver.

RUSTICHELLO
I'll be floating on top of the sea!

SOLDIER
Like a—!

RUSTICHELLO
Spare me the word!

This scene is absent from *Erik*—perhaps due to the unwholesome exchange quoted above—so when Erik is found washed ashore on Viking land and is saved from certain death by Rustichello (who quickly manufactures a story that they were both overturned at sea while fishing), the viewer is confused, because the film has neither previously introduced Rustichello nor his affiliation with the Duke.

What is most surprising about the AIP version is that, for the most part, Roberto Nicolosi's original music score—his most robust orchestral work to date—was allowed to stand. That said, at least one scene was given different music. In *The Invaders*, the sequence in which Erik is named Duke of Helford by the Queen is scored with two Christian hymnals, whereas in *Erik*, the ceremony is accompanied by, of all things, Gregorian chanting. This is an absurd revision, as Gregorian chants date from the 16th century, an historic distance of nearly a millennium from the story at hand. The gnostic quality of this music also makes the scene more ponderous, whereas the original cues fostered a more favorable, celestial atmosphere; it also obscures the film's pointed subplot about the religious motivations of the English in regard to conquering the pagan Vikings. Furthermore, Nicolosi's specific use of recognizably Christian music establishes the religious underpinnings of the relationship between mother and son, and lends resonance to the crucifixes which links the two of them in Rama's eyes, and brings about their reunion.

After Iron is mortally wounded, *Erik* deletes an extended dialogue scene between the two reunited brothers, in which Iron embraces Erik, holds him close, and tells him that they are finally together as they were always meant to be, and that he is sure their father awaits him in Valhalla. He makes clear to everyone that Erik is to succeed him as King of the Vikings, and then feeling his strength subsiding, he gasps his need to see Daia, which is where *Erik* resumes the scene.

Ultimately, *Erik the Conqueror* is—once again—a sad and pointless reduction of Bava's original work: less fluid, less coherent, less feeling, and less poetical than the director's cut. Only the elimination of the awkward opening narration effects a noticeable improvement.

AIP released dozens of sword and sandal films directly to television, but relatively few were shown in US theaters. Though *Erik the Conqueror* does not exactly qualify as one of that genre, and perhaps *because* it doesn't, the company's handling of the picture was somewhat unsure and misleading. Legendary poster artist Reynold Brown came up with an eye-grabbing advertising campaign for the picture, which curiously depicted Erik as the evil aggressor, and Rama as a formidable Viking Queen! ("In his bloodpath of conquest there stood only one temptation . . . Rama, Queen of the Vestal Virgins!")[7] The ads also camouflaged the film's Dyaliscope/Eastmancolor process as "Colorscope," an AIP-coined term that disguised a great many anamorphic (and non-anamorphic) prints over the years; it can be seen on the posters for *Goliath and the Barbarians*, *Guns of the Black Witch*, and numerous other AIP releases. The campaign was such a complete fiction that it hearkened back to the early days of the company, when Arkoff and Nicholson pre-sold concepts with poster art, and once the films were booked into theaters for the upcoming season, had the films made.

Similarly confused is the original AIP pressbook synopsis, which bears so little resemblance to the actual storyline that one cannot help but wonder if AIP's copywriter actually saw the movie:

"During the tenth century,[8] a Viking colony in Britain is attacked and overwhelmed by the English King, Lotar.[9] All are killed, including the Viking monarch, Aello, with a little Viking boy with a strange marking on his breast apparently the only survivor.[10] The English Queen, Alice, befriends the little boy, adopts him and makes him her godson. Years later, the boy has grown up as the Duke of Helfort and the Queen rules in the place of her late husband.

"The warriors from the North are now ruled by Flaki,[11] brother of the King killed in the English attack, with his armies led by the King's nephew, Iron, who dreams of avenging the massacre in which his father and young brother Erik were killed.[12] Iron is in love with Daia, young priestess of the god Odin, who has a twin sister Rama. Daia urges Iron to regain the English colony kingdom held by his father, since as



6 This shot presages the shocking moment in *Ecologia del delitto/Twitch of the Death Nerve* when a couple are impaled with a spear during the act of lovemaking.

7 In fact, it is her sister Daia who becomes Queen, when she marries Iron.

8 Actually, the eighth century.

9 King Lotar arrives after the battle is won.

10 His brother also survives, rescued by his uncle, Olaf—otherwise, there would be no movie.

11 The Viking chief is called Olaf in the film. Floki (not Flaki) is Sir Rudfort's chief bowman.

12 Iron is the son of the late Viking King, not his nephew. His wish to be King is not driven by a thirst to avenge a battle held twenty years earlier, but to free his beloved Daia from her vows as a vestal virgin.



ERIK *is temporarily defeated by Iron.*

King, he could free her from her vows as a priestess. [13]

"Meanwhile the English fleet, under the Duke of Helfort, goes out to stop the Viking fleet under the command of Iron, which has set out to avenge the earlier defeat. [14] *In the course of the battle, the Duke's ship is sunk and he disappears in the waves while the Vikings continue to another English conquest. During the land battle, the Queen's minister, Gunnar, goes to the Viking camp to betray his ruler in an effort to save his own life.* [15] *The English Queen thus becomes a captive of the Vikings and Iron becomes a King, enabling him to free Daia from her religious vows and make her his Queen.* [16]

"In the meantime, Rama comes across a young man on the seashore near her home who claims to be a shipwrecked Viking. [17] *He is the Duke of Helfort and he reveals his true identity to Rama when they fall in love, knowing she will not betray him.* [18] *Later, the Duke (the boy Erik, adopted by the English) meets Daia, thinking it is her twin sister. When she finds that he is English, she exposes him and he is imprisoned.* [19] *During the night, he is freed by Rama and taking the Queen with him, the three put to sea in a small boat and return to England.* [20] *There he regroups the English armies and they recapture the Queen's castle, killing the faithless Gunnar.* [21] *In a climactic battle, the Vikings under Iron battle the Erik-led English in an effort to recapture the castle and also bring Rama back to Viking justice.* [22] *In a duel to the death between Erik and Iron, they see that each bears the same strange markings on their chests, the mark of royal Viking brothers. As the two brothers rush into each other's arms, an arrow kills Iron, leaving Erik to assume his rightful rule and to claim his love, Rama."* [23]

The film appears to have attracted little critical attention in its travels around the world, perhaps because its historic nature prevented it from being caught in the net of *Midi-Minuit Fantastique*.

When it was distributed in the United Kingdom by Compton-Cameo in June 1963, under the title *Fury of the Vikings*, it was briefly noted by an uncredited reviewer in the pages of *Monthly Film Bulletin*: "The highly unlikely story has some of the charm of (and devices) of a minor Shakespearean play, with identical twins loved by muscular enemies who turn out, by the tattoos on their chests, to be brothers . . . Otherwise, it's all treachery, tournament, torture, duel and battle, savagely effective in its Gothic way and enhanced by Mario Bava's luridly filtered photography and fluid camera technique, and his effortlessly eclectic direction . . . Apart from a shattering soundtrack, the technical credits are above average, as is some of the acting . . ." [24]

Commentary

Undertaken immediately after the completion of *Ercole al centro della terra*, *Gli invasori* was not a carefully planned picture and its haste sometimes shows. Unlike Bava's previous directorial efforts, the film does not look seamless; just as *L'ultimo dei vichinghi* is a patchwork adventure co-directed by Giacomo Gentilomo and Mario Bava, *Gli invasori* could almost as easily be the same thing. Individual scenes have the look and feel one expects from the Bava/Terzano/Serandrei triumvirate, but others could pass for the impersonal work of hacks. The film's conflicting, piecemeal textures might be explained by lack of time and money, but considering Bava's habitual victory over such constraints, it seems a more plausible explanation that there was more than one cook in the kitchen—or if Bava's fatigue at the end of production (to be discussed in the next chapter) kept him from participating in the final editing.

The opening raid, for example, has moments worthy of Bava's visual sense—the picturesque low angles, the moments of unexpected savagery, the battlefield scattered with artfully arranged bodies, and so forth—but the bulk of the sequence is so chaotically filmed that, being placed so early in the film, it registers less as an epic attack than as a sustained blur with only occasional images of real staying power.

The subsequent scene of the assassination of King Lotar is more interesting, in that it introduces the important character of the two-faced Sir Rudfort, but this villainous character is himself almost immediately subordinated by the more evil-looking toady Floki, who fires an arrow through the King's throat at the subtle command of Rudfort's nod. Despite Andrea Checchi's best efforts, Rudfort's cold politeness is never really given the necessary showcase to seem genuinely evil; even in the last reel, as he explains

the device that will unleash a poisonous spider on Daia's beautiful skin when a sand-weighted bowl raises a partition of glass between them, he seems to take more delight in the gadget than sadistic pleasure in the torture. In the final analysis, Rudfort is eclipsed as the villain of the scenario not once, but twice: first by Floki, and then by Iron—thanks to a Cameron Mitchell performance that taps into the bloodthirst that resides even within good men who are determined soldiers.

Gli invasori doesn't really grab the viewer until it moves past its prologue scenes, when the Dyaliscope panorama suddenly fills with an array of skulls, crowned with uncanny emerald green light, introducing a ceremonial dance heralding the crucifixion of a vestal virgin and her lover. In this sequence, the *mise-en-scène* is charged with some of the same dramatic currents that informed the pre-credits sequence of *La maschera del demonio*, as two lovers are being sentenced to death by a conservative tribunal—in this instance, the couple have been tied together, back to back, by barbed vines that arrange their near-naked bodies in the shape of a human crucifix. Though the sequence is hindered by some not terribly inspired choreography, highlighting the dancing talents of the Kessler Twins, the astounding set—dominated by the trunk of an immense tree bathed in the same dazzling, emerald light—and the bold lighting sustain one's interest until Iron is introduced. Though miscast as a young man of 25, Cameron Mitchell (who was 42 at the time of filming) nevertheless tackles the role of Iron with verve and virility; his vitality is as responsible as Bava's contribution for making the film as watchable as it is.

The film shares other touchstones with *La maschera del demonio* that help us to define those threads which Bava himself was likely to have contributed to the screenplay. Once again, the heroine has a twin image; in this case, both Daia and Rama are pure and virginal, but Daia is compromised as a vestal virgin who, like the condemned woman of the scene which introduces Iron, is engaged in forbidden romance. "Iron never should have set his eyes on you," Rama reproaches her twin sister, interpreting their love in visual terms. Later, when Erik encounters Rama on the beach the second time, he does much the same thing when he says (in the uneven English dubbing), "All men carry within them the image of the perfect woman in their heart." (The names Daia and Rama have their origins in the Greek words *dia* and *horama*, which together mean "through seeing," and it should also be mentioned that the Greek prefix *di* appears in words pertaining to things either doubled or divided.) Just as the sisters are as one in terms of that image, the two brothers are alike in terms of the feminine ideal they carry in their hearts—and by the serpentine "birthmark" both of them bear on their chests. Once again, as in *La maschera del demonio* and *Ercole al centro della terra*, Bava's symbol of compromised nobility is reptilian. And when we first see Daia in the clutches of Sir Rudfort, the strap on her dress has been torn, suggesting that the villain has taken some erotic liberties with his prisoner—as Javutich did upon delivering Princess Katia to Asa's tomb.

While *Gli invasori* has certain themes in common with *La maschera del demonio*, it shares actual props in common with *Ercole al centro della terra*. The upright stone slabs adorning Lico's altar appear here adorning the marriage altar of Iron and Daia, and they appear again later, encircling the ceremony where the Baron of Scotland pledges his army to the service of Queen Alice. During the climactic battle scene, we see the large, wheeled catapult stand that Hercules raises above his head and throws so hyperbolically against his foes in the earlier picture, as it tips over in the midst of battle; it also provides the skull-adorned, wheeled platform that displays the two doomed Viking lovers.

Gli invasori is the first of Bava's films as director to open as *Mio figlio Nerone* did, with a contemplative view of the sea—and many such films would follow: *La frusta e il corpo/The Whip and the Body*, *I coltelli del vendicatore/Knives of the Avenger*, *5 bambole per la luna d'agosto/5 Dolls for an August Moon* and *Ecologia del delitto/Twitch of the Death Nerve*. All of these films deal with matters of family, predestination, and systemization to some degree, and Bava seems to find generations in the lapping waves, and a force of nature in the recurring motions of the sea from which no wave can ever break free. There is also something elemental, eternal, and implacable about the sea, as Bava's eye uniquely depicts it; an ironic counterpoint to human travails indicative of where all life began and where all life—in this case, Iron's—eventually returns. There may be no meaning in the symmetry, but there is beauty in it, which may be enough.

It is another of the film's weaknesses that Iron's death scene is



IN A HEROIC *act of fraternity, Iron leaps into the path of an arrow fired by one of his own men, meant for Erik.*

13 Daia urges no such thing.

14 After twenty years???

15 Though Sir Rudfort must have made arrangements with the Vikings, no such meeting is shown in the film. Instead, he opens the castle to the Vikings and allows the Queen to be taken captive. He does this in exchange for power, not as an act of cowardice.

16 Iron does not become King by invading the castle of Queen Alice, but rather in an earlier duel.

17 Erik makes no such claim.

18 Erik never does reveal his identity to Rama, so to speak. Instead, when she mentions that the Queen is held captive, Erik reveals himself as her son to arrange her escape.

19 Erik is not "exposed" by Daia, nor does she have him imprisoned. This is the doing of Iron, whose wedding to Daia is disrupted by Erik.

20 They are already in England!

21 True, but this synopsis places these details a bit prematurely. Sir Rudfort (i.e., "Gunnar") signals for the arrow to be fired which kills Iron.

22 There is no climactic war, only a battle between Erik and Iron.

23 This implies that Iron was preventing his younger brother from having his rightful rule, which isn't the case. As Iron's younger brother, he would have ascended to the Viking throne only after his brother's death.

24 *Monthly Film Bulletin*, 30:353; June 1963.



FRENCH *grande affiche, art by Jean Mascii.*

dragged out to lengths that begin to seem comic, the film's climactic momentum sapped by the constant cutting away from the splendidly composed, dynamic shots of the castle siege to the dying Viking's delirious mutterings. That said, the death scene does have two peculiar points of interest. As Iron lay dying, he calls for his wife Rama, who is unavailable, as she is being held prisoner in the castle; with a nod from Queen Alice, Rama's twin sister Daia steps in and provides the embodiment of the image shared in the hearts of both brothers, much like the shared birthmark they wear over their hearts. But what Bava tells us in this scene is that images needn't be sincere to offer comfort; it is the illusion, and the way we receive it, that matters. Secondly, as Iron feels death approaching, he pushes his "wife" away, boasting that he will have only one companion in death—"my sword." He dies leaning on it, his hands sliding numbly down the blade and falling away with his open palms in bloody tatters. The finale finds Daia rescued from the castle only to join her dead husband on his flaming death ship to Valhalla, while Erik and Rama look on—both now individuals, yet also a new couple.

Marriage, then, in the view of Bava's film, is a contract with death. Indeed, the marriage ceremony of Iron and Daia is predicated on death: an animal sacrifice, which Bava cannot bring himself to depict onscreen. (Indeed, elsewhere in the story Bava's respect for animal life is reflected by Rama's discovery of a tiny starfish washed ashore, which she carries back to sea, just prior to discovering Erik, who has been similarly brought aground.) Rather than show the marital sacrifice, we hear the off-camera bleating of an animal, and then a pool of red—exactly matching the color of Daia's striking wedding veil—is poured across the phallic hilt of Iron's sword to symbolically unite them. Later, as Iron dies, Bava focuses on the grip of his hand, sliding painlessly down the length of his sword's blade, blood once again staining it to the hilt.

In its final reels, *Gli invasori* makes an unusual narrative choice by having Sir Rudfort capture Daia rather than Rama, which puts Erik in the curious position of taking extraordinary measures to rescue his brother's wife, rather than the woman he loves—which would have increased the imperative of the climax. In the meantime, the dying Iron is comforted by Rama, who responds to his gasping pleas for Daia and pretends to be her in his final moments. The fact that traditional narrative demands would be ignored, in favor of showing the dying Viking being comforted by a lie is interesting, especially in that the plot depicts the essential meaninglessness and interchangeability of Church and State. The two sisters, both vestal virgins sworn to Odin, reject their religious obligations in favor of a more gratifying sexual relationship with the two brothers, one of whom is a Viking raised to spearhead the British resistance. When the two brothers recognize each other's true identities on the battlefield, the Vikings do not automatically win; instead, a truce is called, leaving only Sir Rudfort as quickly disposed villainous leverage. What is most interesting about the painstaking rescue of Daia is that she is saved from Rudfort's clutches only to be sent to her death anyway, aboard her dead husband's funeral ship.



SIR RUDFORT*'s dreams of power come to dust in a volley of arrows, Kurosawa-style.*

As always with Bava's work, *Gli invasori* is well-stocked with intoxicating images, especially on the big screen, where Bava's attentive furnishing of the entire Dyaliscope frame is most apparent and where its colors burn most brightly. (To date, no video presentation exists that does this film jssssustice.) The somber shot of the silhouetted Queen Alice and her handmaiden crossing the corpse-strewn battlefield—a juncture between billowing clouds and fallen men—toward the sounds of a crying child; the giant tree setting, where Iron and another Viking settle a tie in an axe-throwing vote by forging their own swords to fight to the death; the sinuously filmed scene of Iron's clandestine romantic meeting with Daia (the actors kissed on a circular set wreathed with twisting bracken, which the camera tracked around on a makeshift dolly, apace with the actors' carefully choreographed movements); the coronation of Erik; the marriage of Iron to Daia, (an apparition in red scarves with two white hands crossed over her breast); Iron's near-death as he falls into the chasm, gripping a cluster of vines; Erik's heroic scaling of the castle wall on arrows fired into it from below; Rudfort's violent death, as he is pierced by a half-dozen arrows from all directions, recalling Toshiro Mifune's death in Akira Kurosawa's *Kumanosu jo/Throne of Blood* (1957)—these are all first-rate. But these imagistic jewels are strung together by a derivative, weakly constructed screenplay that consists of little more than voyages back and forth across the sea, contrived meetings and revelations, and perfunctory solutions.

Perhaps because it owes too much to Fleischer's *The Vikings*, and because it offers too few opportunities for Bava to explore his greatest gifts as a filmmaker, *Gli invasori* is not one of Bava's first-rank achievements. It is well-acted, at times dynamically directed, and it contains moments of great visual splendor, painterly lighting, and so forth, but much of what it does is done better—with more exuberance and personality—elsewhere in the Bava canon. Ironically, it was one of Bava's few films that performed better in Italy—where it earned 326.3 million *lire* [$203,000], probably recouping double its cost—and other European countries than in America, where the Viking craze never really caught on.



Vacation in the Arena

Maciste all'Inferno
I Normanni
I sette gladiatori
Le sette spade del vendicatore

IN THE TWO YEARS which had now passed since *La maschera del demonio*, Mario Bava had gone about his business, following his usual, unambitious inclinations—that is to say, taking whatever work was offered to him and collecting his pay, without giving any larger thought to the arc of his career, or to his own physical limitations.

Gli invasori, with its vast number of extras and logistical demands, was a more difficult film than any Bava had directed to date. By his own admission, after filming the illusory sea battle on the final day of shooting, Bava—who had been working non-stop for more years than he could count—collapsed from what he termed "nervous exhaustion." Perversely, Bava would often boast of this breakdown in later years, in personal conversations and in interviews, describing how his inhalations of the noxious fog used to fill the stage had nearly driven him mad.

KIRK MORRIS *seeks escape from Hades through a flaming portal in Riccardo Freda's* MACISTE ALL' INFERNO.

"I finally got an infection and had to stay in bed for six months," he later claimed. "I almost ended up in a padded cell! Nello Santi rewarded me with a bonus of 5 million *lire* [$3,100]. Those were the days . . ." [1]

Bava's colorful anecdote took on a life of its own as it was repeated from one person to another, and eventually, the Italian film industry was rife with whispers about how Bava, who made such horrific films, had suffered a nervous breakdown and was hospitalized, that he had been straitjacketed and sent to a madhouse. But Mario's family deny that anything of the kind ever occurred.

"I can assure you that Mario never suffered a nervous breakdown," his granddaughter Georgia insists. "Of course, there were times when he was very upset, sad, and even depressed, as when his father died. I am not telling you this to hide anything; I really am convinced of what I am saying. If it were true, I would not mind telling you; I really don't mind talking about any kind of problem, concerning either myself or my whole family. You also must consider that, for better or worse, fortunately or unfortunately (because maybe I would have preferred at times to have been omitted from knowing all the personal problems of my family), we all know every single problem about each other in our family. The only time Mario ever went into the hospital (for a check-up—blood test/urine/blood pressure/heart, etc.), the doctors said he was perfectly well and had nothing to worry about—and then he died."

The insistence of Georgia and other members of the Bava family that Mario never suffered a nervous breakdown is supported by facts that have since come to light, which place him during the next six-month period as a contributor on various film sets, though never in the capacity of director. Reading between the lines, it seems that, in the wake of his busiest year ever—culminating in a picture so physically demanding as *Gli invasori*—Bava suffered some kind of collapse or emotional crisis that persuaded him to take a six-month leave of absence from directing. He took things easier, but he did not stop working. Because his activities were unofficial and uncredited, the rumors continued to circulate and, eventually, had an unfortunate impact on his career.

Maciste all'Inferno

With Mario Bava's *Ercole al centro della terra* awaiting its November release, screenwriter Ennio De Concini suggested to producers Luigi Carpentieri and Ermanno Donati that they continue their Maciste revival with a remake of the 1925 classic *Maciste all'Inferno*. For reasons unknown, De Concini opted to take no story credit, instead using the alias "Eddie H. Given," but a screenplay was developed by Oreste Biancoli (fresh off of *Gli invasori*) and *Marco Polo* director Piero Pierotti.

The opportunity to direct was given not to Pierotti but to Riccardo Freda. Though he would continue to reside and work in Italy through 1967, Gordon Scott chose not to continue in the role of Maciste; as his later acting choices demonstrate, he now preferred to concentrate on opportunities that might advance him as an actor rather than roles that were primarily physically demonstrative. His rejection of the script may have also had something to do with the fact that *Maciste all'inferno* would require him, at one point, to wrestle two live boa constrictors—he had nearly been strangled to death while wrestling with one such reptile during the making of *Tarzan's Fight for Life* in 1958.

Replacing Scott as Maciste was Kirk Morris, who had already portrayed the hero onscreen in three movies since 1960: Guido Malatesta's *Maciste contro I cacciatore di teste/Colossus and the Headhunters* (1960), Tanio Boccia's *Trionfo di Maciste/Triumph of the Son of Hercules* (1961), and Mario Mattoli's *Maciste contro Ercole nella valle dei guai/Hercules in the Valley of Woe* (1961). Born Adriano Bellini in 1938, Morris was a former Venetian gondolier turned bodybuilder who was given his new moniker by the man who discovered him, film producer Giorgio Marzelli. In a 1993 interview conducted by Emanuela Martini and Stefano Della Casa, Riccardo Freda reflected, "The best of the body-building actors were Steve Reeves and Gordon Scott. More problematic was Kirk Morris, who was a Venetian lifeguard [*sic*] and absolutely in no position to speak his lines without being defeated by them. I worked around the problem as best I could by making him a nearly mute hero, one who lives by action rather than words, and leaving the verbal side

Maciste all'Inferno

"Maciste in Hell"
Filmed at Cinecittà and at the Castellana grottoes in Bari, Italy
Late 1961
First released: April 11, 1962
Technicolor, CinemaScope, 2.35:1, 90 minutes

Production: Panda Cinematografica (Rome). Distributor: Regionale.

France: *Maciste en Enfer,* Comptoir Française du Film Production, 86m, 1962
Germany: *Maciste der Rächer der Verdammten,* "Maciste the Avenger of the Condemned," Constantin Film, 12/7/62
US: *The Witch's Curse,* Medallion Pictures, 12/63. Video: *Maciste in Hell*

I Normanni

"The Normans"
Filmed at Titanus Studios and on location
Early 1962
First released: August 23, 1962
Eastmancolor, Dyaliscope, 2.35:1, 91 minutes

Production: Galatea (Rome), Societé Cinématographique Lyre (Paris). Distributor: Lux Film.

Denmark: *Normännens Raseri,* "Sword of the Normans," 7/2/65, "Cinescope"
Finland: 11/29/63
France: *Les Vikings Attaquent,* Societé Cinématographique Lyre, 1963, 85m
Germany: *Die Normannen,* Karpat-Film, 10/19/62, 82m
UK: *Invasion of the Normans,* Compton Film Distributors, 2/8/63, 87m 13s, Certificate "U," passed with cuts
US: *Conquest of the Normans,* American International Pictures, 80m

I sette gladiatori

"The Seven Gladiators"
Filmed at INCIR–De Paolis Studios (Rome) and Seville Studios (Madrid)
Spring 1962
First released: October 11, 1962
Eastmancolor, Techniscope, 2.35:1, 98 minutes

Production: Film Columbus (Rome) and Atenea Films S.L. (Madrid). Distributor: *Variety Film.*

Spain: *Los Siete Espartanos,* Chamartín, 9/9/63
Germany: *Sieben Gladiatoren,* 12/20/63, 92m
UK: *Gladiators 7,* Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer, 7/64, 92m
US: *Gladiators 7,* Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer, 5/6/64, 92m

Le sette spade del vendicatore

"The Seven Swords of the Avenger"
Filmed at Castello di Borghese and on location in Rome
Spring 1962
First released: October 30, 1962
Technicolor, Screenscope, 2.35:1, 90 minutes

Production: Adelphia Compagnia Cinematografica (Rome), Comptoir Français du Film Production, Francisco Film (Paris). Distributor: Cino del Duca.

Belgium: *7 Degens voor de Koning*
France: *Sept Epées pour le Roi,* 4/8/64
Germany: *Die 7 Schwerter der Rache,* Iris Films, 1/17/64, 86m
UK: *Seventh Sword,* New Realm Pictures, 7/63, 84m 27s, Certificate "A," passed with cuts

of *Maciste all'inferno* to Andrea Bosic, who was a real actor."

If the recognition of Bava's international success in his native industry needed any proving, one need look no further than *Maciste all'inferno*, which opens with a scene that is not only loosely modeled on the pre-credits scene of *La maschera del demonio* but which was executed with the assistance of Bava himself.

In the 17th century, the villagers of Loch Laird, Scotland are incited to burn an accused witch, Martha Gaunt (Hélène Chanel), whom they tie to the trunk of a tree. Before her death, the aged crone accuses the local magistrate, Justice Parris (Andrea Bosic), of provoking this veiled act of murder to avenge himself against her, who rebuffed his romantic attentions when she was a young and beautiful girl—and she rails her curse against the villagers and their descendants. One hundred years later, a desperate young woman named Mary Bloom attempts to hang herself from a dead branch of the tree where Martha was burned alive, and it bursts into bloom and witnesses of this bizarre magic are driven made by it, proving that the witch's spirit continues to be active. This episode coincides with the arrival of Charlie Guy (Angelo Zanolli) and his new bride Martha (Vira Silenti), a descendant of the witch who is bringing her husband to her family estate of Castle Gaunt. Learning that Martha Gaunt once again inhabits the castle, the village burgomeister (John Karlsen) orders it be sieged and the innocent woman is nearly burned alive. Fortunately, Maciste (Kirk Morris)—always on the alert to oppose evil—intervenes and demands that the woman be given a fair trial. Martha is placed in a cell by the cowed locals, and Maciste decides to prove her innocence by searching for the real source of evil at its root. He uproots the tree of undead blooms and discovers beneath it a direct route to Hades.

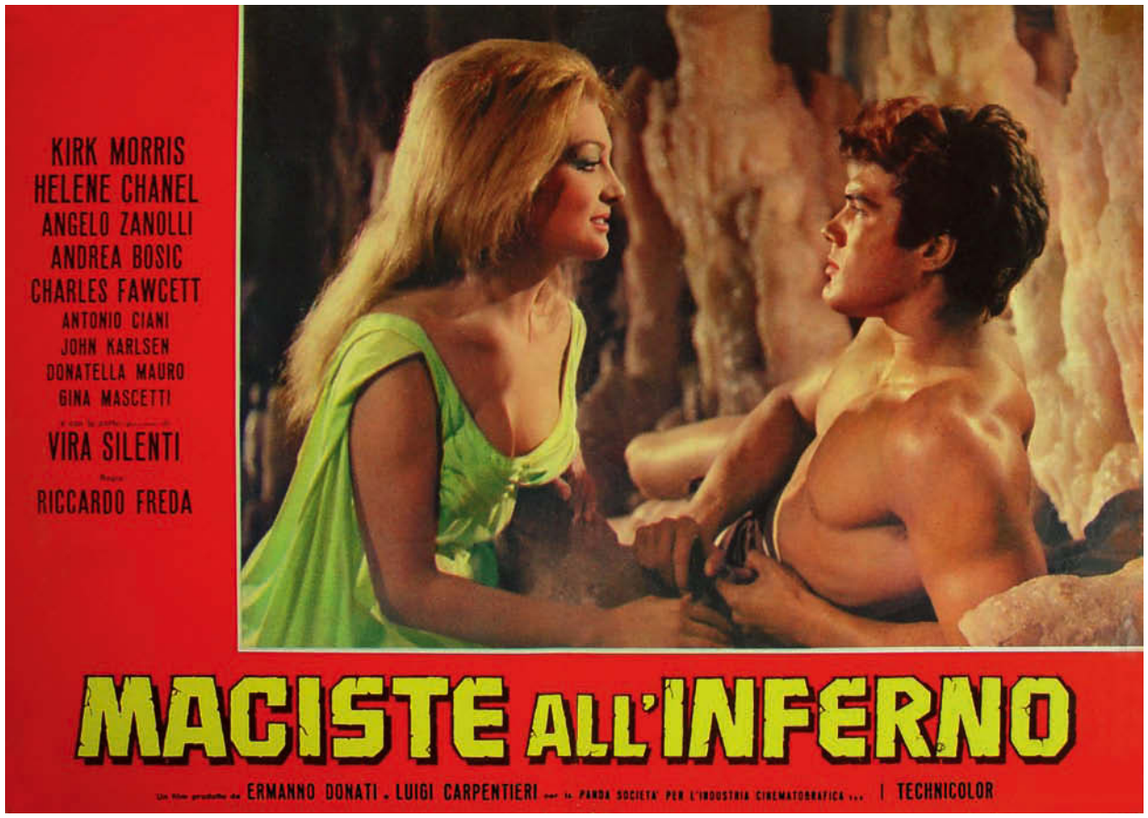
Far beneath the earth's surface, Maciste sees many appalling sights of torture and torment. He sees an old man about to be crushed under the weight of a massive boulder and accepts the burden from him, not realizing that the damned one is merely a guise of Justice Parris, mocking Maciste's goodness. Parris dwells in Hell with Martha Gaunt, who spends her eternity haunting and punishing him mercilessly. Martha resents Maciste's altruistic descent into the place of her eternal punishment and presents herself to him as a seductress, Fania. In this guise, she persuades him to partake of a delicious apple that saps his memory and all sense of the purpose of his mission. He follows Fania deeper into Hell, fighting off deadly serpents and a laughing giant, leaping over rivers of fire just to be nearer to her. Losing sight of her, Maciste comes to the aid of Prometheus, doomed to an eternity of having his liver pecked out by an eagle for his transgression against the Gods, and Prometheus helps him to recover his memory. When Maciste succeeds in staving off a herd of bulls intent on pushing him over a precipice into a pit of flames, Martha can no longer deny his worthiness and falls in love with the essential goodness of the hero. She confesses to Maciste, who distrusts her intentions, that one kiss from her lips is all that is needed to discharge her curse. He kisses her, and she vanishes into thin air.

Meanwhile, the people of Loch Laird have grown tired of waiting and are preparing to burn Martha at the tree where her ancestor met her fate. (It has magically risen to reseal the pathway to the Underworld.) As the witch's curse is lifted, the flames engulfing Martha and Charlie are extinguished by providential rains. Maciste emerges from an opening in the ground and frees the couple. The rains also seem to wash away the madness engulfing Loch Laird, and with peace restored to the community, Maciste mounts his horse and gallops away toward his next adventure.



ACCUSED WITCH *Martha Gaunt (Hélène Chanel) prepares to be burned alive in the Bava-inspired prologue of MACISTE ALL'INFERNO.*

1 Alberto Abruzzese, et al., *La città del cinema—produzione e lavoro nel cinema italiano 1930–70* (Rome, Italy: Napoleone, 1979), 83–89.



MACISTE *(Kirk Morris) meets a rejuvenated Martha Gaunt in Hades, in this Italian fotobusta.*

For this ambitious production, Freda once again turned to Bava with a request that he oversee the film's special effects photography. Recovering from overwork, Bava agreed but within set limitations; consequently, the picture is not nearly so steeped in special effects as one might imagine or hope. *Maciste all'inferno* carries a special effects credit for Serse Urbisaglia, who specialized in fire, fireworks, and other explosive effects, rather than opticals and trick shots. The majority of the film's magic consists of precisely of such pyrotechnic effects—the Bible bursting into flames, the shower of sparks, the pockets of open flame seen here and there amid the craggy walls of Castellana grottoes where the Hell sequences were filmed. Relevantly, Urbisaglia's earliest recorded screen credit was for *Totò all'inferno*, a spoof of the Maciste silent starring Totò (of course), made in 1954. At some point in the production, it would appear that Freda himself gave up trying, because chunks of narrative seem to be missing and the restoration of Maciste's memory, after he partakes of Fania's magic apple, is conveyed with a risible parade of clips from other movies. As if to embarrass Kirk Morris, none of the clips are from the backlog of Maciste adventures in which he starred; instead, flashbacks to the derring-do of Gordon Scott, Gordon Mitchell and Mark Forest (all produced by Carpentieri and Donati) are dredged up, with their own familiar faces clearly visible on occasion, though Morris was required to participate in foolish and unconvincing "insert" shots to suggest these clips as fragments of his own earlier adventures.

Among the shots which Bava supervised for the film: the 45° angled glass shots used to superimpose live flame over the shots of the actors being burned alive; an elaborate glass matte seen during a shot of the newlyweds' coach approaching Castle Gaunt, that masks a clear view of the familiar Castello di Balsorano with a more haunted-looking woods; another view of the castle, as supposedly seen from a local tavern, which shows a large illuminated window where the actual castle has none; the optical shots of the gigantic flaming iron door and the charging steers; and Maciste's rather laughable leap across the river of flames (it's the leap that's funny, not the effect). Aside from the wooded view of the castle, none of these contributions are particularly notable and, when one compares this film's river of fire to the one in *Ercole al centro della terra*, one can measure exactly how much more Bava was able to achieve in a controlled studio environment, versus an actual location. Indeed, Freda's decision to film so much of the picture in the sameness of the Castellana grottoes is one of many elements that detract from what should have been a much better picture.

One curiosity about *Maciste all'inferno* is that it somehow got around the "curse of Maciste" when it was released in America and other English-speaking territories as *The Witch's Curse*. Acquired for US release by a small outfit called Medallion Pictures Corporation, the film was allowed to keep its original export dub, so Maciste was called "Maciste" in one of the character's recent spate of adventures for the first time. The English version of the film was one of the first directed by newly expatriate American actor Mel Welles, best known for his tongue-in-cheek performance as florist Gravis Mushnik in Roger Corman's shot-in-two-days extravaganza, *The Little Shop of Horrors* (1959). Born Ira Meltcher in New York City in 1924, Welles had been active in film and television since 1953, appearing mostly in uncredited character parts until becoming an outstanding member of Corman's repertory. The record shows that he made only three other pictures for the notoriously thrifty producer-director—*Attack of the Crab Monsters* (1957), *The Undead* (1957), and *Rock All Night* (1958)—before deciding that these sorts of pictures weren't doing his career any favors. Welles' real ambition was to direct.

"I graduated from college as a doctor of psychology, got bored with it and became a writer, and then someone asked me to act," Welles told me in 2001. "I was good at it but didn't find it terribly fulfilling, so I decided to direct." After many years of trying, Welles succeeded in writing and directing a low-budget crime picture called *Code of Silence* (1957), starring Terry Becker, Ed Nelson, and himself, but it was never properly distributed. "In order to direct [again], I had to become a producer—to hire myself as director! I left America for Europe because, at that time, television had cut into the movie business by about 40 per cent, and I got tired of working at places like Screen Gems. In Europe, they were still making feature films. I bought a short story from *Playboy* magazine called 'The Skindiver and the Lady,' and I made a deal with some German producers to produce it for me while I directed it. In return, I would direct one of their pictures.

Neither picture got made, but that's how I got to Europe. When I first got to Rome, I was asked to dub a picture called *The Best of Enemies* [*I due nemenici*, 1961], as an actor. I dubbed every actor in the picture except for Alberto Sordi and two Africans. A bit later, they did a picture called *Barabbas* [1962]; the director, Richard Fleischer, was going to take the film out of Italy to England or America to dub [it], but to satisfy Dino De Laurentiis, he agreed to audition a few of us [dubbing actors]. I ended up doing twenty-something voices for the picture!" [2]

Welles would eventually succeed in his ambition to make more films as a director—*La isla de la muerte/Island of the Doomed* (1966) and *Lady Frankenstein* (1971) remain popular with collectors of choice horror arcana—but it was his work as a dubbing director and actor that would always be his real bread and butter. He remembered that his first work as a dubbing director was done for Riccardo Freda, and *The Witch's Curse*—in which his voice is heard many times, notably as the doctor who befriends Charlie, played by Charles Fawcett—was possibly his first such assignment. Welles would subsequently become acquainted with Mario Bava and dub the English versions of a number of his films.

I Normanni

Bava was lured back to work after the holidays to contribute to another Galatea/Lyre co-production: *I Normanni*, an historical drama starring—once again—Cameron Mitchell. He may have been entreated to return to work as a personal favor to producer Nello Santi, or to Mitchell. Whatever may have motivated him, *I Normanni* was an extremely minor assignment, little more than a means of further easing Bava back to active duty.

I Normanni is set at the beginning of the ninth century, when—an opening scroll tells us—the once-piratical Normans gave up their plundering ways and began to settle on English soil. It chronicles an attempt by Wilfrid, the Baron of Saxony (Mitchell), to unseat King Dagoberto (Raf Baldassare) and wed the Queen (Franca Bettoja) while diverting the blame for his intrigue onto Olivier, the Count d'Anglon (Ettore Manni), who has kindly allowed the Norman tribe of Olaf (Philippe Hersent) to build homes on his feudal lands. Two of Wilfrid's men kidnap the King and plant evidence from the abduction on Olivier's property, for which the Queen promptly orders him to be hanged. With the help of two Norman friends, Olivier's sadistic jailer is hanged in his place and the Count conspires with Olaf and his people to clear his name, while confessing his love to Olaf's beautiful daughter Svetania (Geneviève Grad). Learning of their betrothal, Olaf admits to a lifelong secret: Svetania is not his daughter, but the daughter of King Dagoberto, whom he discovered being smuggled to safety aboard a ship he pirated many years earlier. Armed with proof of her heritage, Svetania goes to the Queen and persuades her of Wilfrid's covetous plans, so that the castle is won from within—as it is being won from without by attacking Normans.



DANISH *poster for I NORMANNI.*

The director of *I Normanni* was Giuseppe Vari, who began in the movie business as a film editor in the late 1940s, cutting such films as Camillo Mastrocinque's *Il vento mi ha cantato una canzone/The Wind Sang Me a Song* (1947) and Federico Fellini's *Il bidone* (1955). He made his directorial debut in 1951 with the historical costume drama *Messalina*, and resumed his work in *pepla* nearly a decade later with *La vendetta dei barbari/Revenge of the Barbarians* (1960), an Oriental Film production starring Daniela Rocca, Anthony Steel, Robert Alda, and Arturo Dominici. In later years, Vari sometimes worked under the pseudonyms Joseph Warren and Al Pisani.

Bava's primary contribution to *I Normanni* was preparing a glass matte for the exterior shots of the Saxon castle. The castle is virtually identical to the castle seen during the climax of *Gli invasori*, but while the same photographic reference was used, it is not exactly the same matte. Here, the castle is larger and occupies more of the hillside; a flag can be seen flapping from one of its towers—a live prop planted at the top of the hillside, at a great distance behind the matte. The matte appears several times during the course of the picture, unchanged, but during the Normans' climactic attack on the castle at dusk—a sequence that incidentally recycles other footage from *Gli invasori*—Bava amends the basic matte with dusk-blue tinting and a background of ominously dark, airbrushed clouds. (Vari's handling of the dusky sequence is so careless that every other shot appears to take place in strong daylight.)

Bava's singular approach to lighting also stands out in two shots set inside the rowing cabin of a ship, during the sea battle which opens the picture. Here, the rowers occupying the right half of the Dyaliscope screen are saturated in emerald green light, while screen left shows a man bathed in the same incendiary red gel lighting seen in *Ercole al centro della terra* and *L'ultimo dei vichinghi*, pounding a drum to keep the rowers' movements synchronized.

Bava may also have had something to do with filming the sequence of the Saxons' raid on the Norman village, which resembles the opening sequence of *Gli invasori* in its camera set-ups and attention to brutality; indeed, shot on the same seaside location with what might well be the same

2 Tim Lucas, "Father of Lady Frankenstein," *Video Watchdog* 78, December 2001, 35-36.

costumes, it might easily consist of outtakes from that earlier sequence. The rest of the film, however, is visually lacking in character or interest. The cameraman was Marco Scarpelli (1918–95), who photographed many Steno comedies of the 1950s, including *Tempi duri per i vampiri/Uncle Was a Vampire* (1959); his camera assistant on *I Normanni* was a young man receiving his first credit on a feature film—21-year-old Vittorio Storaro, who go on to direct the photography of such films as *L'uccello dalle piume di cristallo/The Bird With the Crystal Plumage* (1970), *Il conformista/The Conformist* (1970), *Ultimo tango a Parigi/Last Tango in Paris* (1973), *Novecento/1900* (1976), and *Apocalypse Now* (1979), becoming the most revered Italian cinematographer of his generation.

RECONSTRUCTION *of Mario Bava's panoramic glass matte of Sparta and environs for I SETTE GLADIATORI.*

I sette gladiatori

I sette gladiatori was another side project for Bava, reuniting him with producer Italo Zingarelli and actor Richard Harrison. The film's direction is credited on all prints to Spanish director Pedro Lazaga, best known among devotees of the fantastic for his stylish *La Mansión de la Niebla/Murder Mansion* (1972), but Harrison insists that the picture was entirely directed by Alberto De Martino.

Made exactly one year after their previous collaboration *Il gladiatore invincibile*, *I sette gladiatori* is not as satisfying, yet it was notably the first Italian film to establish the precedent of remaking a genre film in a different generic setting. In 1960, director John Sturges and screenwriter William Roberts had unofficially remade Akira Kurosawa's medieval samurai epic *Shichininin no samurai/The Seven Samurai* (1954) as a Western entitled *The Magnificent Seven*. *I setti gladiatori*, based on Zingarelli's idea, takes the same essential story shared by these earlier pictures and applies it to a band of gladiators in 1st century A.D. Sparta. Though the film would be serious (yet high-spirited) in tenor, it was scripted by De Martino with a group of other seasoned screenwriters mostly experienced in the craft of writing comedy: Giovanni Grimaldi (*Buonanotte . . . avvocato!*), Bruno Corbucci (Sergio Corbucci's brother, who, with Grimaldi, had written numerous Totò comedies), and Sandro Continenza (*Le avventure di Giacomo Casanova*, *Mio figlio Nerone*, not to mention *Ercole al centro della terra*).

Darius (Harrison), son of the first emperor of Sparta, suffers the rule of his father's successors in servitude as a Roman gladiator. After helping five of his Spartan comrades to escape, he is punished by being thrown into the arena in a life-or-death contest with numerous adversaries. He defeats them all within an inch of his life, and the Roman emperor is pressured by the spectators into granting his freedom.

Darius rides back to Sparta, determined to reclaim the life and love that is rightfully his. There, the beautiful Aglaia (Loredana Nusciak), daughter of Milon (Eduardo Toliolo), looks forward to the day of his return. Darius finds his father's once-regal house fallen into ruin, and his former nurse Ismene (Emilia Wolkowicz) informs him of his father's murder and the rise to power of the new Spartan emperor, the corrupt Hiarba (Gérard Tichy). Ismene presents Darius with his father's only bequest, the Emperor's sword, which she preserved for him. Hiarba, who covets Aglaia's love as much as he coveted the throne, learns of Darius' freedom and sends a group of soldiers to kill him—following to ensure that the job is done properly. During the attack, the overwhelmed Darius is joined by Ismene's son Livius (Enrique Avila); the attackers are slain, and the intervening Hiarba suffers a cut arm before making his stealthy escape—with the sword of Darius. Attempted murder

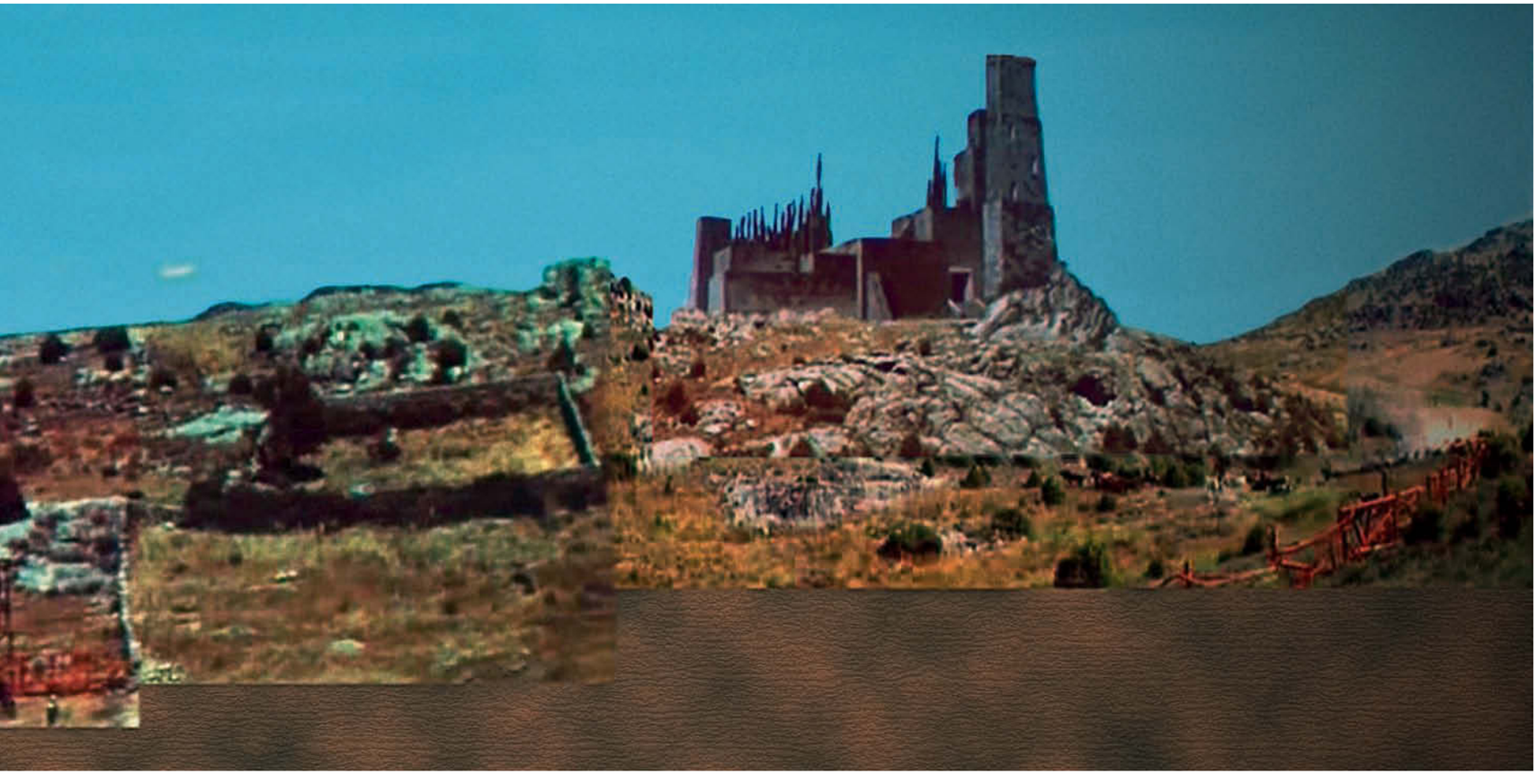




having failed, Hiarba uses the sword to murder Milon and then frames Darius for the killing, turning Aglaia against him in the bargain.

Darius flees Sparta and rounds up the five men whom he helped to escape from slavery, outstanding gladiators all: Panurgus (Livio Lorenzon), the eldest; Flaccus (Bernabe Barta Beri), who loves to drink; Xeno (José Marco), who has the strength of three men; Mados (Antonio Rubío), an expert archer who leaves his comfortable private life of wealth and privilege to help Darius, and Vargas (Nazzareno Zamperla), the youngest, whom the others free from the arena during a contest with a bull. Joined by Licia (Franca Badeschi), the lovely daughter of Panurgus, they camp in the mountains and make their plans to help Darius recover his rightful command of Sparta. Macrobius (Antonio Molino Rojo), the ambitious right-hand

RICHARD HARRISON *stars as rebel leader Darius in I SETTE GLADIATORI.*





AGLAIA *(Loredana Nusciak) romances Darius.*

of Hiarba, discovers the location of Darius' encampment and goes to the Emperor with the information. Aglaia, still consumed with hate for her father's murderer, promises to wed Hiarba—and he promises her the head of Darius as a wedding present. Macrobius later dares to remind the Emperor of how important he has been to him, and Hiarba slays him for his insolence. Aglaia, having overheard their harsh words, witnesses the killing and realizes that Hiarba was in fact her father's murderer.

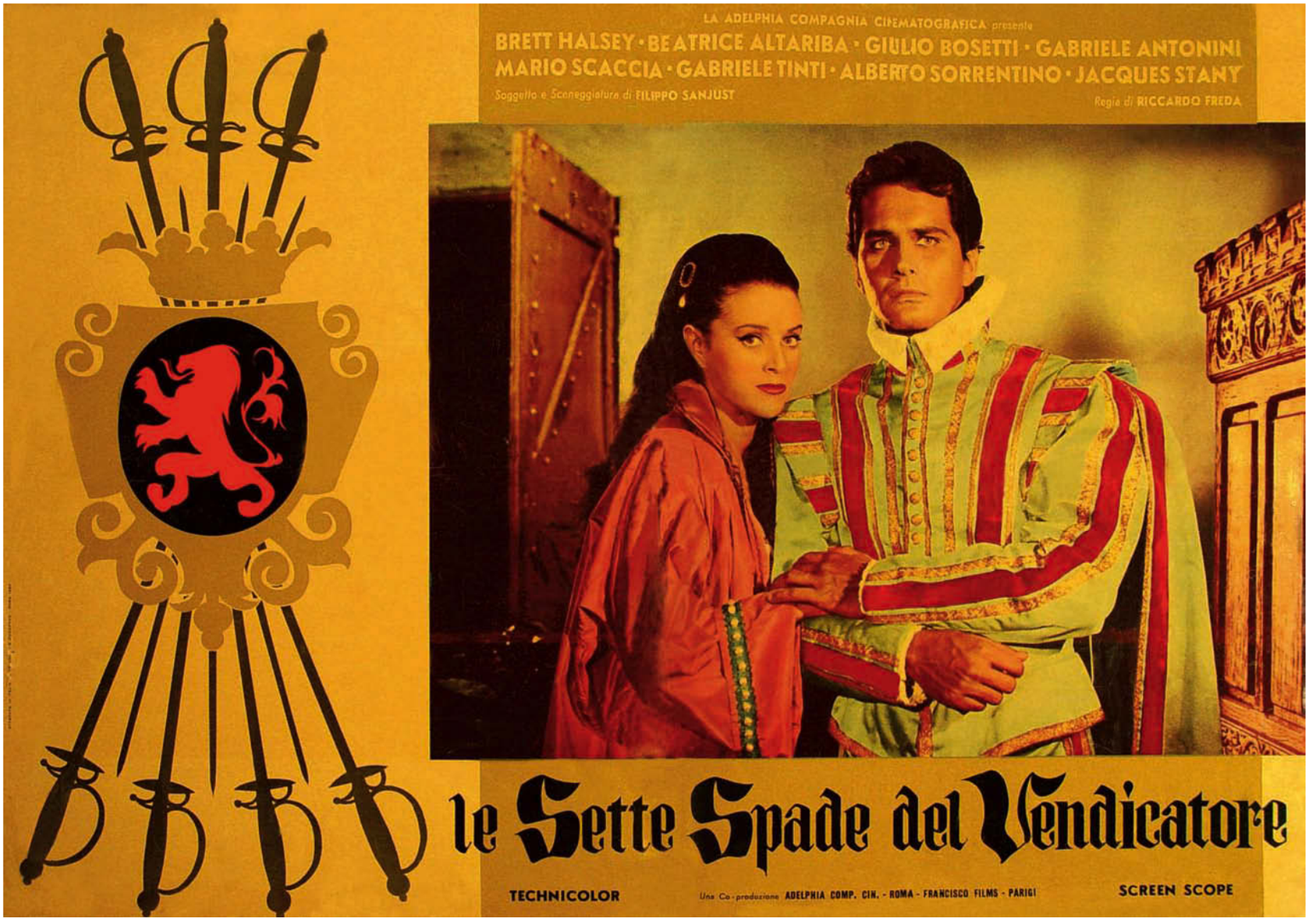
She rides to the encampment of Darius, where the attack has been successfully repelled, and finds only Licia there—the gladiators are en route to the palace. Licia, who also loves Darius, begs Aglaia to leave him alone and refuses to pass along any message of reconciliation; as Aglaia leaves in tears, Licia calls after her the truth—that Darius still loves her. Meanwhile, Darius and the gladiators reach the towering palace and set about scaling its sheer stone walls to its very peak. The ensuing battle climaxes with the death of Hiarba and the restoration of Sparta's proper and honest rule, with Darius and Aglaia once again in each other's arms.

I sette gladiatori is an entertaining if shallow *peplum* that makes up for its thin plot with lots of amusing little set pieces and a cast of lustily laughing characters whom it's impossible not to like. By the very nature of its story, Richard Harrison's Darius—after a promising introduction in the arena that ends with him exhausted but compelled to crawl across the ground to collect the key to his freedom—is eclipsed by the more flamboyant, distinguishing talents and personalities of his fellows. Though it is Darius who stands to win all from the gladiators' efforts, his presence is hardly felt as one of the seven, which is less a fault of Harrison's earnest performance than of the writing and cinematography, neither of which emphasize his stake in the story sufficiently. Once again, Livio Lorenzon proves himself a valuable addition to the cast, observing his daughter's devotion to Darius as one who knows her heart will be broken, but knowing better than to advise her in such matters. Aglaia, unfaithful to our hero for most of the film, is a difficult heroine to champion but there is something of the appeal of the late Sylvia Lopez in Loredana Nusciak, whose subsequent film career continued to be haunted by the number 7: *Sette a Tebe/Seven From Thebes* (1964), *Sette dollari sul rosso/Seven Dollars to Kill* (1966), and *Rembrandt 7 antworted nicht . . ./Z7 Operation Rembrandt* (1966).

Mario Bava's uncredited contribution to *I sette gladiatori* finds him working on a more ambitious scale than was apparent in *Il gladiatore invincibile*, actually extending the possibilities available to the craft of glass matte painting. The film is credited to two cinematographers, Adalberto "Bitto" Albertini and Eloy Mella, but Bava replaced them both for a series of trick shot exteriors. The first is Darius' first look at Sparta as he rides into view of his homeland—the ancient city is elaborately painted into the hollow of a lush, green valley. A second glass matte adds a row of ancient rooftops behind the tall barricades that surrounds the city, and as Darius is shown galloping toward his home, he passes a hanging maquette of a rather imposing central building, which is shown a few more times in the wake of the attack on Darius. It is immediately before the sequence of the rescue of Vargas from the arena that we get our first glimpse of the film's most memorable matte painting: a view of the Emperor's palace from Hiarba's throne overlooking the arena. It's an impressive piece of architecture—an almost pyramidial structure made up of immense stone slabs, thorn-like spires, and cantilevered exterior staircases, standing staunchly atop a pile of boulders. Another painted view of Sparta is glimpsed as Vargas and the other gladiators make their escape, and as Darius and his men prepare to stage their final assault on the palace, there is a magnificent complementary painting of the palace's backside that is followed by a camera pan to the assembled faces of the men about to brave it. But the most startling of the film's trick shots is a view of Sparta (from approximately the same angle it was first viewed by Darius) that unexpectedly pans right, up the mountainside, to include the towering majesty of the palace. Filmed on location, this approximately 160° matte shot would have required the careful arrangement of three or four layered glass arrangements, placed before the camera in such a way as to omit any clue of their separation and to refuse any glimmer of light that might cause an unwelcome reflection. Bava had previously toyed with the placement of foregrounded objects to make his mattes more believable as compositions in depth, but now he was pushing his matte technique toward a new spatial frontier—one that could extend his illusions well beyond the already maximized widescreen ratio of 2.35:1. One is reminded by this shot of Bava's use of 360° camera turns to involve, rather than erase the "fourth wall" and render the atmospheric artifices of a film set more credible. In this moment, *I sette gladiatori* succeeds in vaulting into the arena of a truly epic vision.

Le sette spade del vendicatore

Riccardo Freda's next film assignment was *Solo contro Roma/Alone Against Rome* (1962), a remake of *Fabiola* whose direction was shared by Freda, who



ITALIAN *fotobusta depicting Beatrice Altariba as Isabella and Brett Halsey as Don Carlos di Bazan.*

supervised the arena sequences, and Luciano Ricci, directing under the Anglocentric alias of "Herbert Wise." Starring an earnest but shallow-chested Lang Jeffries (billed as "Jeffries Lang") as Brenno, and the conversely voluptuous Rosanna Podestà as Fabiola, the film was produced by Podestà's husband, Marco Vicario, and photographed in Eastmancolor and Total-Scope by Luciano Trasatti. The look of the film is highly naturalistic and, with the exception of some moments in the arena when the number of extras appears to have been multiplied with multiple exposures, it would have offered Bava no reason to offer his services. Though well-acted—particularly by Philippe Leroy as the conqueror Lucio Silla and Gabriele Tinti (in one of his more prominent roles) as the imprisoned brother of Fabiola—*Solo contro Roma* is a somewhat leaden picture outside the arena, yet it possesses the gravitas necessary to set it somewhat above the usual *pepla*. Freda's arena sequences are appropriately rousing, and one can see him aspiring to trump some of the cards he had played in *Maciste alla corte del Gran Khan*—once again, a defenseless hero is pitted against a blade-accessorized chariot, but in this case, there are two such death devices.

Freda's next fully-fledged film as a director, *L'orribile segreto del Dr. Hichcock/The Horrible Dr. Hichcock*, was another of his "bet" films with Luigi Carpentieri and Ermanno Donati. Freda had failed to complete a feature in ten days with *I vampiri* in 1957, but with this production he succeeded in completing a picture in twelve days—to the horror of screenwriter Ernesto Gastaldi—by simply throwing away several important script pages of exposition when he fell behind schedule! Filmed in and around a villa in Parioli, it tells the Gothic horror story of a 19th century surgeon (Robert Flemyng) whose necrophilia fetish compels him to drug his wife Margareta ("Teresa Fitzgerald" a.k.a. Maria Teresa Vianello) with an experimental anaesthetic he has developed. After accidentally overdosing her to his horror, he flees his castle and returns twelve years later with a new bride (Barbara Steele, returning to Italy after starring in Roger Corman's *Pit and the Pendulum*), who soon becomes aware of an unknown presence in the castle and her husband's increasing distractions. The final reel reveals that Margareta didn't die after all but was driven mad by being buried alive, and Hichcock—driven completely mad by guilt—promises to restore her youth and beauty with the blood of his younger and more beautiful wife. Mario Bava is not known to have assisted Freda in any capacity on this important Italian horror film—neither Bava nor Barbara Steele acknowledged working together a second time—but the film, shot in

ravishing Technicolor by Raffaele Masciocchi, contains a couple of hallucinatory scenes lit with potent color gels, including a nightmare sequence in which Flemyng's face swells into the likeness of a demon. This effect is a comparatively early instance of a latex mask being distorted with air bladders inflated by secreted tubing and bellows, a technique introduced in Russia (*Ilya Muromets/The Sword and the Dragon*, 1956) but which did not become standard until Dick Smith revived and modernized it for use in *Scanners* (1981). Considering his ongoing collaborations with Freda during this period, it is possible that Bava was involved in the creation of the scene, at least as a technical advisor, but we cannot be sure.

However, Bava is confirmed to have been present on the set throughout the filming of Freda's next film, a remake of his directorial debut *Don Cesare di Bazan* (1942) in Technicolor and widescreen. Titled *Le sette spade del vendicatore*, it was lensed—again by Masciocchi—in the spring of 1962. "I remember meeting Bava during *Seven Swords For the King*," confirms its star, American actor Brett Halsey, who would star in two of Bava's later films at the end of the decade. "That was my first Italian film and I didn't speak Italian at that time, so I didn't know exactly what his function was, but I remember him [there] as a friend/consultant of Freda's."



TRADEMARK *Bava lighting and a familiar composition herald the moment of Don Carlos' arrest.*

In 1580, King Phillip II of Spain (Gabriele Antonini) signs a truce that brings an end to his country's fifteen-year war with the Turks. Don Carlos di Bazan (Brett Halsey), a man of privileged birth who has spent many years fighting in foreign lands, returns to the castle owned by his family. There, he learns from his cousin Don Luís (Giulio Bosetti), the Duke of Saavedra, that his father passed away during his absence and his properties have been claimed by the throne. Insisting on his rights, Don Carlos retires to the master bedroom (in the King's absence) and falls asleep, only to be awakened during the night by the sounds of agonized moaning coming from elsewhere in the castle—sounds which alert him in time to resist an attack by a knife-wielding intruder. Don Carlos pursues the would-be assassin through the castle until the stranger is intercepted and killed by Don Luís, who reasons that it was a case of mistaken identity and an attempt on the life of the king.

The next day, the king is due to return to his acquired home in the company of his guest, the Cardinal of the Inquisition (Mario Scaccia). Prior to his arrival, Don Carlos and his manservant Sancho (Alberto Sorrentino) are riding in the woods when they come to the rescue of Isabella (Beatrice Altariba), whose coach has been accosted by enemies of the throne. Imagining her savior to be a servant of the castle, Isabella—announcing herself as a guest of the king—rewards Don Carlos with a meager sack of coins, which he returns to her coachman with orders that they follow him. He leads them to the castle, where the haughty Isabella continues to treat him like a commoner. That night, Don Carlos is made to sleep in servants' quarters, in half of a bed divided down the center by a wall of cloth. While preparing to sleep, he feels a presence on the other half of his mattress and, suspecting another attempt on his life, he unsheathes his blade and cuts through the cloth barrier dividing the bed in two—revealing the surprised face of Isabella, who is not as noble as she pretended to be! They both laugh and spend the night as lovers.

Another attack on his life leaves Don Carlos in possession of a document specifying a time, place, and password for a meeting of those conspiring to kill the king. Don Carlos takes the mask of his assailant and crashes the assembly, but he is identified by the ringleader of the conspiracy—his cousin, Don Luís—and arrested by the Duke and his right-hand man, Corvo (Gabriele Tinti), who accuse him of masterminding the plans for assassination. The King, believing the charges made by his trusted advisor, condemns Don Carlos to death. Knowing of their love, Don Luís breaks the spirit of his cousin by telling him that Isabella is a harlot brought to the castle with the intention of seducing the king. He suggests that they marry, prior to the execution, so that Isabella can have a more pleasant future—and become a more appealing mate for the king. She later comes to Don Carlos' cell and weds him, a ceremony that hurls Don Carlos into deep despair. King Phillip II is enchanted by Isabella and the Duke's evil plan to gain control of the throne appears to be playing out . . . but Don Carlos is freed by a group of patriots, made aware of the Duke's two-faced campaign by Sancho. Don Carlos, thought to be dead, reveals himself to Isabella and initially scorns her, but he is soon persuaded that she truly loves him when, discovered by Corvo, she aims a pistol at Don Carlos—but fires at the Duke's cohort instead.

Don Carlos and Isabella are apprehended nevertheless and taken by Don Luís to a torture chamber, where Don Carlos is nipped by a hand-held piranha and threatened with worse—a fate graphically demonstrated by the Duke, who orders one of his own men to be caged and lowered into a pool teeming with the carnivorous fish. During a



BRETT HALSEY *and Giulio Bosetti cross swords in the film's ravishing climax, lit with lollipop colors by an uncredited Mario Bava.*

theatrical performance staged for the King's pleasure, Don Carlos makes his escape and arranges to expose the Duke. The resulting mêlée leads our hero back to the torture chamber as the two cousins cross swords amid many other dangers, including suspended vats of flaming oil. Emerging victorious, the King declares his eternal indebtedness to Don Carlos and returns his bride and his properties.

As a disoriented newcomer to the world of Italian film production, Brett Halsey was unable to specify Mario Bava's role on the set of *Le sette spade del vendicatore*, but a viewing of the film is sufficient to explain everything. In addition to a couple of quickly-executed glass mattes showing the exterior tower of the castle silhouetted against the night sky, with soft golden light illuminating a single cut-out window, and a trick model shot of a horse-drawn carriage exploded by its own cargo of gunpowder, the film is fairly rampant with Bava's lollipop lighting techniques. At no time does the film feel like it was photographed by Bava, but it has the consistent and unmistakable feel of a film *painted* by Bava. He was, in essence, the film's lighting director—as, in fact, he was and would be on the films he directed, with Ubaldo Terzano or Antonio Rinaldi credited as the directors of photography.

Nowhere else is Bava's command over the film's lighting and atmosphere more apparent than in the climactic torture chamber swordfight between Brett Halsey and Giulio Bosetti, which is introduced with a close shot of an enormous turning wheel of spikes glowing in hellish red, the camera panning away to reveal surrounding cavernous walls hued with unnatural splashes of amber and green, and suspended vats of flaming oil, which Don Luís strategically spills in wondrous yet lethal torrents to nudge his cousin toward greater dangers.

"I remember very well the swordfight scene in the torture chamber," offers Halsey. "There was a trick set up where pots of flaming oil were suspended from overhead cables. [Bosetti], the heavy, was supposed to trap me in certain positions where the oil could be dumped on me during the fight. Anyway, during a 'dry' rehearsal, I realized that I was positioned in a place where I would have really been trapped when they dumped the oil. Freda was offended when I insisted on a 'live' rehearsal, but changed his mind when he saw I was right and would have been doused by the burning oil. They didn't like losing half-a-day to reset the trick, but as you can imagine, I didn't give a damn."

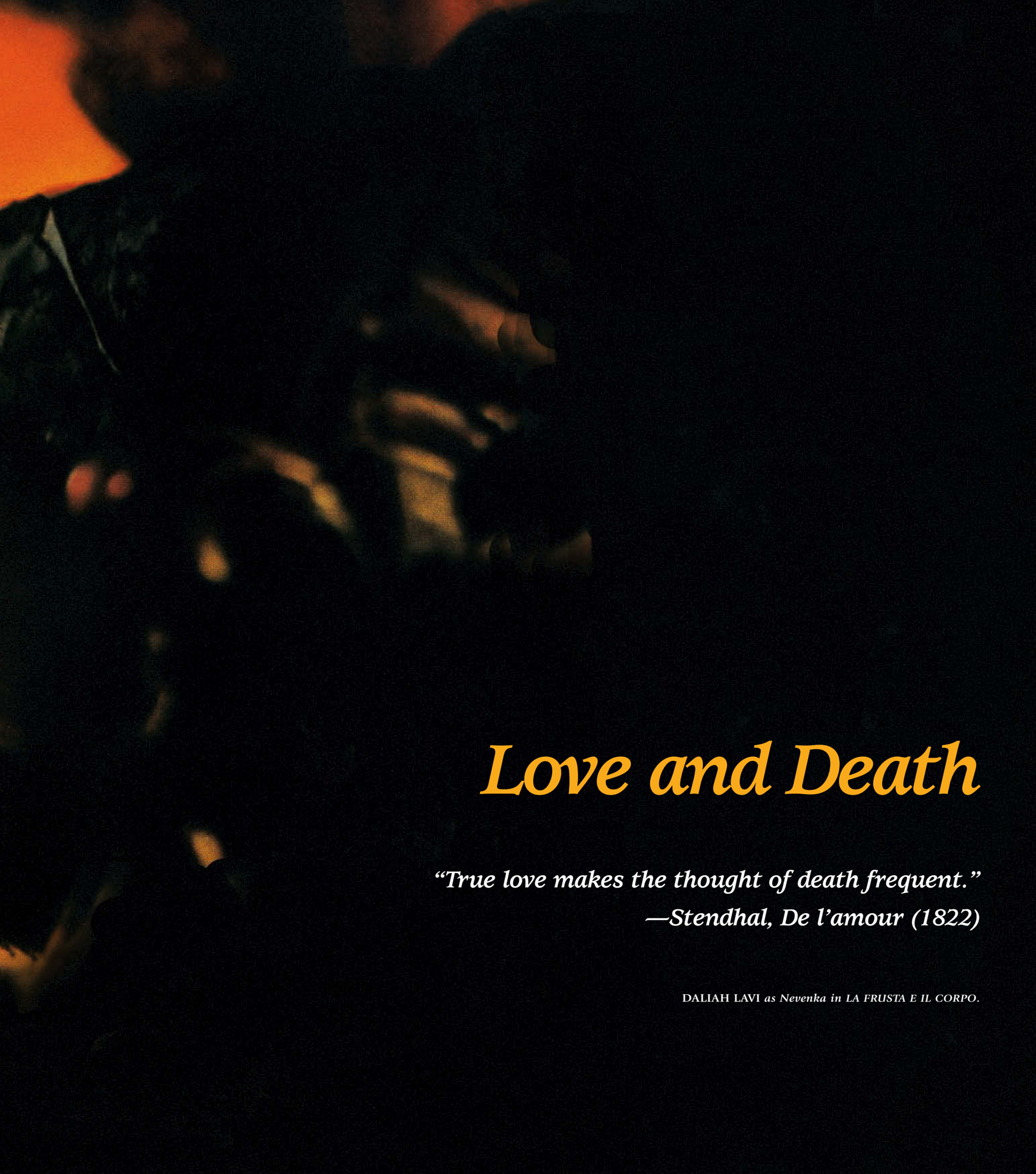
Seen in a proper 35 mm Technicolor print, this sequence ranks with Mario Bava's most breathtaking work. (When New Realm Pictures released *Le sette spade* in Great Britain as *Seventh Sword*, the advertising boasted with good reason that it was "in Glorious Technicolor!") Many other scenes are also impressive from a lighting angle, and not always for chromatic impact—for example, Don Carlos' swashbuckling rescue of Isabella's coach, where the exciting sword choreography plays against a backdrop of diffuse sunlight showering down through the treetops, an effect reprised from the earlier Freda/Bava collaboration *Agi Murad il diavolo bianco*.

It would be unfair to discuss *Le sette spade del vendicatore* at any length without commending its extraordinary, intimate yet stirring score by Franco Mannino, with featured soloists Mario Gagni (flamenco guitar), Franco Cataina (staccato trumpet), and Franco Giordano (percussion). Perfectly evoking a period texture and somehow all the more electrifying for it, the music must have been one of Freda's personal favorites as he would reuse the most striking cues in his next picture, *Oro per i Cesari/Gold for the Caesars* (1963, co-directed with Andre de Toth and Sabatino Ciuffini), though its story took place in a different country, more than fifteen centuries earlier.

After the completion of *Le sette spade del vendicatore*, Bava was still hesitant about returning to work as a director, because he knew there was only one course of action available to him. He understood that to surrender the director's chair and return to the work as a full-time director of photography and special effects technician would mean a loss of money and prestige and be generally perceived as a sign of professional failure. He might have procrastinated longer, but American International turned up the pressure. Determined to have more Bava movies, AIP's Sam Arkoff and Jim Nicholson followed the example of what their former Boston office manager, Joseph E. Levine, had done with Steve Reeves. No longer content to merely import and exploit foreign pictures, AIP proposed to become the principal investor in a consortium of independent production companies joining forces to actively co-produce Bava's next feature.

Though his films had yet to generate any commercial heat in his homeland, Mario Bava was the first Italian director—before Vittorio De Sica, before Federico Fellini, before Michelangelo Antonioni—to attract this level of commitment from an American film company.





Love and Death

"True love makes the thought of death frequent."
—Stendhal, De l'amour (1822)

DALIAH LAVI *as Nevenka in* LA FRUSTA E IL CORPO.





JOHN SAXON *gallantly protects Leticia Roman from an alphabet murderer in* LA RAGAZZA CHE SAPEVA TROPPO.

LA RAGAZZA CHE SAPEVA TROPPO

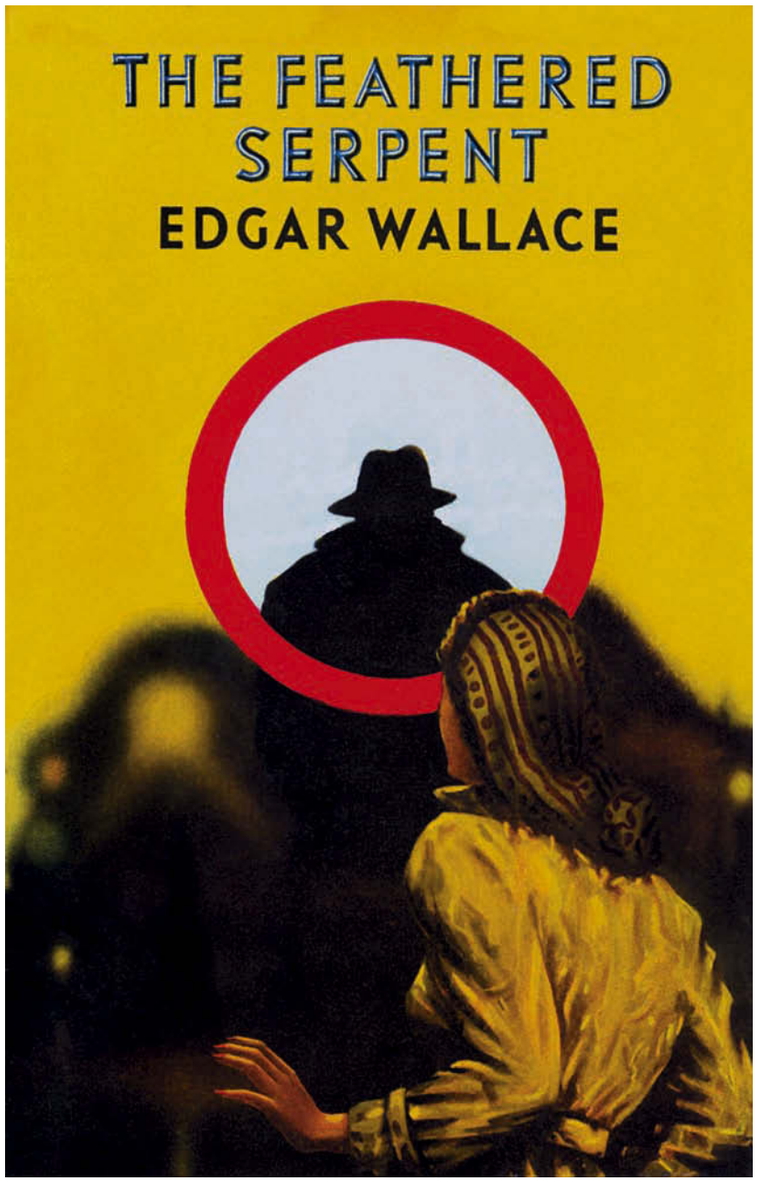
Evil Eye

IT IS A TESTAMENT to the worldwide impact of *La maschera del demonio* that Mario Bava became—for many devotees of the horror genre—synonymous with black-and-white cinematography. And yet, of the twenty-plus films he directed, only two were filmed in monochrome. The second was *La ragazza che sapeva troppo*, an important film in his canon—though perhaps more for historical reasons than for its intrinsic value. Despite two or three sequences that rank with Bava's finest suspense set pieces, it's an uneven picture, due in part to the fact that it exists in two very different versions, and perhaps also due to the director's state of mind during production.

Bava claimed that he was approached to direct the film when he was recovering from a nervous collapse. Certainly no other filmmaker on the continent, perhaps nowhere else in the world, was more entitled to one. In the three years since 1959, Bava had done triple-duty on more than a half-dozen films: directing them, photographing them, and executing their special effects—and you could add to that number another dozen pictures to which he lent a lesser or greater covert hand. 1961 had been his busiest year to date, with three features bearing his name and at least another seven that were forbidden to boast his involvement—certainly enough work to precipitate a nervous breakdown. From November 1961 (when the editing of *Gli invasori* was completed) through the spring of 1962, Bava vowed to take it easier and refused all invitations to direct. Just as *La maschera del demonio* became a huge international hit and his services as a director became more desirable in his home country, he withdrew from the limelight and took a little holiday. When producers called, he told them that he was sick in bed . . . but when friends called, he was only too ready to help them solve technical problems, or to work on the occasional maquette or trick shot. This kind of work he found relaxing. But most of this six-month holiday was spent at home, with Mario alleviating his anxieties by losing himself in books.

All of his life, Bava had been a devoted bibliophile. His preferred reading was the great Russian classics, but in the wake of *La maschera del demonio*'s international success, he felt a responsibility to learn more about his chosen field and began to delve more deeply into the mystery, horror, and science fiction stories which were collected by Edizione Mondadori in various digest magazines each month. Mario's wife Iole may have tolerated his devotion to the classics, but whenever she caught him reading "trash," he was mocked. Consequently, as he told Ornella Volta, "When I have to read vampire stories, I cover the outside of the book so nobody notices." [1] Bava's literary vacation would become a source of inspiration for his next picture.

Another significant thing occurred during Bava's hiatus. Since he had



A SAMPLE *of Hodder & Stoughton's "Yellow Jacket" mystery covers—the inspiration for Mondadori's "gialli."*

La ragazza che sapeva troppo

"The Girl Who Knew Too Much"
Working title: *L'incubo.*
Filmed at Titanus Farnesina Studios and on location
May 3 – July 1962; reshoots December 1962.
First released: February 10, 1963
B&W, 1.66:1, 88 minutes

Production: Galatea, Coronet (Rome). Producer: Massimo De Rita. Associate producer: Salvatore Billitteri. Director: Mario Bava. Assistant director: Franco Prosperi. Assistant to the director: Enrico Checchi. Story and screenplay: Ennio de Concini, Enzo [Sergio] Corbucci, Eliana de Sabata, with the collaboration of Mino Guerrini, Franco Prosperi, Mario Bava. Continuity: Neda Matteucci. Director of photography: Mario Bava. Camera operator: Ubaldo Terzano. Art direction: Giorgio Giovannini. Set decoration: Luigi D'Andrea. Props: Fratelli Cimino. Costume Design: Tina Loriedo Grani. Dresses: Emilio Schubert. Makeup: Euclide Santoli. Hairdresser: Mara Rocchetti. Production manager: Paolo Mercuri. Production inspector: Armando Govoni. Production secretary: Neda Matteucci. Line producer: Massimo De Rita. Editor: Mario Serandrei. Assistant to the editor: Lina Caterini. Music: Roberto Nicolosi. Song: "Furore" (Adricel/Vivarelli), sung by Adriano Celentano [Edizione Nazionalmusic], released by Jolly Records. Distributor: Warner Bros.

Additional US credits: Music: Les Baxter. Mixing: Eve Newman, Al Bird, Kay Rose, Ernest Reichert. Dubbing: Titra Sound Corporation, New York NY.

Leticia Roman (Nora Davis/Drowson), John Saxon (Dr. Marcello Bassi), Valentina Cortese [US: Valentina Cortesa] (Laura Craven Torrani), Dante Di Paolo (Andrea Landini), Gustavo De Nardo (Dr. Facchetti), Robert Buchanan [Walter Williams] (Dr. Alessi), Gianni Di Benedetto (Prof. Torrani), Jim Dolen (priest), Luigi Bonos (hotel clerk), Virginia Doro (housekeeper), Shana/Chana Coubert (Ethel), Peggy Nathan, Marta Melecco, Lucia Modugno (nurse), Franco Morigi a.k.a. Franco Ressel (narcotics officer), Adriana Facchetti (dishwasher), John Stacey (Pacini), Milo Quesada, Tiberio Murgia, Titti Tomaino, Pini Lido, Dafydd Havard and Mario Bava (Uncle Augusto, US version only).

Belgium: *Het Meisje dat te Veel Wist*, Cosmopolis Films. Reissue: *Duivelse Obsessie,* "Diabolic Obsession"
France: *La Fille qui en Savait Trop,* Les Films Marbeuf, 1/29/64
Mexico: *Noche del Demonio,* "Devil Night," Distribuídora Sotomayor S.A., 1964
UK: *The Evil Eye*, Anglo Amalgamated via Warner Pathé Ltd., 7/64, 92m 31s, Certificate "X," passed with no cuts
US: *Evil Eye*, American International Pictures, 5/20/64, 92m. DVD: *The Girl Who Knew Too Much*

turned down American International's earlier invitation to relocate to Hollywood and make pictures for them, the proverbial mountain now decided to come to Mohammed. AIP joined forces with Galatea to become active co-producers of Bava's next film.

Sam Arkoff communicated with Galatea's Nello Santi about possible projects, and it was decided—considering the current vogue for movies made in the style of Alfred Hitchcock's *Psycho* (1960)—that a "Hitchcockian" thriller would be highly exploitable. During this period, a large number of films in the *Psycho* mold were released: *Homicidal, Anatomy of a Psycho, Scream of Fear, Maniac, Paranoiac, The Couch,* as well as a contemporary reinvention of the original film about madness, *The Cabinet of Caligari.* Given the popularity of *Black Sunday*, as long as Mario Bava was at the helm, AIP could be counted in—so the picture became a joint venture between Galatea, AIP, and Coronet Produzioni of Milan.

"I was recovering from a nervous breakdown; I didn't feel like directing it, but I needed the money, so I did it," Bava told Luigi Cozzi. "It was supposed to be a romantic thriller, but the very idea seemed absurd to me. Such a thing might have worked with Kim Novak and James Stewart, but I had . . . *never mind, I don't remember who they were!* Anyway, I decided to film it seriously, as though it were a truly macabre story, and somehow it worked out. It was actually somewhat successful."

When Bava returned to work, he did so gingerly, bringing with him some of the comforts of home. Upon arriving on-set, he now changed from his regular shoes into a more comfortable pair of slippers. He was also frequently accompanied by the great passion of his home life—a pet basset hound, named Centi—short for Centingar Clelium, a bewildering moniker which no one in Bava's family understood or is able to explain. Supposedly a puppy from the first litter of this dolorous breed to be imported into Italy, Centi (the Italian word for "100") was as freakishly long of body as he was in name. Centi went everywhere with his doting master, whose great pleasure was to pamper him like a baby, ordering special dishes for him in restaurants and making a comic show of feeding him, while amusing onlookers by comparing the animal's sad visage to his own.

Gialli

Like *La maschera del demonio*, which is sometimes described as the "missing link" between Universal and Hammer horror fare, *La ragazza che sapeva troppo* represents an important step in the evolution of Italian movie thrillers. Today, it is widely regarded as the first example of the subgenre known as the *giallo*—a particularly lurid brand of murder mystery named after the yellow (*giallo*)-jacketed crime pulps published by Edizione Mondadori since 1929. This is accurate enough in broad terms, but as in most things, the truth is more complicated. In Italy, *La ragazza che sapeva troppo* is regarded as neither the first Italian thriller nor the first *giallo*.

Part of the confusion is caused by the fact that, over the years, the words *"giallo"* and *"thriller"* have become synonymous in popular Italian usage. In his excellent book *I Colori del Buio: Il cinema thrilling italiano dal 1930 al 1979*, Luca Rea chronicles the entire history of Italian thrillers, which he traces as far back as 1916's *Carmela, la sartina di Montesanto*, directed by Elvira Montari; indeed, given Elena Bava's description of its opening scene of abduction, Eugenio Bava's own *L'amante della luna* (1919) would probably qualify, as well. These were thrillers made in the spirit of the great French innovator of the fantastic action serial, Louis Feuillade. Rea's text proceeds through a series of films produced between 1930 and 1959, which the author classifies as *telefoni neri* ("black telephone" movies), comparable to American gangster pictures and police procedurals.

The *giallo* cinema produced in Italy during this period reflected the kinds of stories and novels that were appearing inside the yellow covers of the Mondadori *gialli.* It is important to mention that the concept of these pulps originated in Great Britain; the format of Mondadori's covers—a lurid illustration framed by a red circle on a wraparound yellow binding—was adapted from the British "yellow-jacket ninepenny" paperbacks published by Hodder & Stoughton, the red circle establishing a kinship with Edgar Wallace's highly successful 1922 novel *The Crimson Circle.* Wallace was among the first thriller-men to be published in translation by Mondadori, along with Agatha Christie, Raymond Chandler, and James M. Cain. These British and American writers are thus the very essence of *gialli* to the Italian people, which is why they regard *giallo* cinema as a tradition that existed long before Mario Bava entered the picture. They can hardly be counted wrong,



ITALIAN *locandina, Style A, art by Sandro Simeoni.*

1 Ornella Volta, "Conversation avec Mario Bava," *Positif* 138, May 1972, 44–48.



NORA *is shocked to discover her Aunt Ethel (Shana Coubert) dead.*

when the record shows that an Italian thriller called *Giallo*, co-directed by Mario Camerini and Mario Soldati, was produced in 1933 (based on Edgar Wallace's Hodder & Stoughton-published *The Man Who Changed His Name*).

In America and other English-speaking countries, however, the term *giallo* is more closely bound to what the Mondadori *gialli* became. This transformation took place during the years of Mussolini's nationalistic ban on international imports, when the *gialli* began to be written exclusively by Italians. These books were not so successful, and to excite the interest of the public, Mondadori began to publish novels—and also short stories, which were collected in weekly digests—distinguished by increasingly lurid and sensational content, encompassing vice, sado-masochism, and erotic violence. After the ban on imported literature was lifted, the luridness remained and many of the Italian contributors to these magazines adopted English names to survive in the business. As the term *giallo* has come to be understood outside of Italy, it denotes a particularly lurid brand of thriller that dotes more on the details of cruel and outrageous murder than on the art of detection.

The more decadent forms of *gialli* did not begin to influence Italian cinema until 1954, when Ernesto Gastaldi—a student at the Centro Sperimentale di Cinematografica—shocked his instructors by proposing to write and direct a film inspired by the Mondadori pulps as his graduate project. Expressive of his love for the films of Alfred Hitchcock, and visually patterned after the lurid cover art and ironic stories of the *gialli*, Gastaldi's student film *La strada che porta lontano* ("The Road to a Distant Door") became the first authentic Italian *giallo* movie. However, it was only a student film; a single print was struck, and because it was shot without sound, the dialogue and sound effects had to be performed live, behind the screen, at every performance. Gastaldi had great belief in the possibilities of cinematic *gialli* and wrote a feature script, *A . . . come Assassino* ("A . . . for Assassin"). Unable to launch it as a film, he produced it as a stage play in 1959, whereupon it became a great success. It was not filmed until Angelo Dorigo directed a version in 1966. Gastaldi would later work with Bava, scripting *La frusta e il corpo* (1963), and go on to become one of Italy's leading specialists in *gialli* in the 1970s.

Luca Rea's book points out some other titles that slightly preceded or were contemporary to Bava's film—including Bernardo Bertolucci's *La commare secca/The Grim Reaper* (1962)—but these are either traditional mysteries, dark existential dramas, or police procedurals. Even *La ragazza che sapeva troppo* is not quite a *giallo* in the sense this term is used today; it doesn't possess all the necessary generic criteria, most conspicuously in its lack of color and graphic violence. However, it was the earliest theatrical release to acknowledge the *gialli*, not only as an influence on its storytelling and *mise-en-scène*, but as part of the story it tells.

As its title makes plain, *La ragazza che sapeva troppo* was undertaken in emulation of the films of Alfred Hitchcock, not the yellow-bound *gialli*—but because it is the story of a young woman addicted to lurid paperback mysteries, Bava's handling of this material could not help but be informed by the world of *giallo* fiction, as he was an avid reader and collector of the Mondadori series himself. The movie not only looks at the world through the dilated paranoid sensibilities of someone who consumes such books like popcorn, but—as the narration of an observing male voice establishes with the very first shot of this young woman reading her book—it may also represent for us the very story she is reading.

Synopsis

Nora Davis—a young American secretary, 20 years of age—is flying to Rome to spend her summer vacation with an old friend of her family, the elderly and ailing Ethel Vignal Bartocci. On the plane, she reads a mystery paperback—the title of this novel appears to be ***The Knife****, but closer inspection reveals that her book is a "two-fer" of* ***After He Got the Knife*** *and* ***Didi's a Doll****—which unnerves her to the point of wanting a cigarette. Finding herself fresh out, she warily accepts a Kent cigarette from the gentleman seated beside her. He insists on giving her the entire pack. Upon arriving at the Fiumicino Airport, Nora witnesses this same gentleman as he is apprehended by the Roman police—who identify him as Pacini, a drug trafficker. Before her eyes, his luggage is opened and rifled, revealing a suitcase full of Kent cigarettes laced with marijuana and talcum powder cannisters loaded with cocaine. When Nora tries to get rid of the contraband he passed to her, a helpful guard retrieves the pack of Kents that she dropped, and she nervously puts them back in her purse.*

Nora makes her way to Ethel's apartment, where she is greeted by a handsome young doctor, Marcello Bassi. Before taking his leave, Marcello tells Nora



NORA *is charmed by the Old World courtesies of Dr. Marcello Bassi.*

that he is always available at a nearby hospital at night should he be needed. That night, during a thunderstorm, Ethel screams Nora's name and is found dead. Nora throws her coat over her nightgown and races into the night for help, but while running past the deserted Trinità dei Monti atop the Piazza di Spagna, she is attacked by a mugger who snatches her purse and knocks her unconscious. During the night, Nora awakens at the sound of a scream . . . She sees a woman stagger out of the shadows with a knife in her back, falling face forward into a puddle of blood. Nora conceals herself as a man steps forward to remove the knife. Nora faints and remains unconscious till dawn. An anonymous man happens by, pours whiskey into her mouth, and rushes away as a policeman arrives. Smelling her breath, the patrolman commits her to the hospital as a case of advanced alcoholism. There, she is eventually discovered by Marcello, who vouches for her and arranges for her release.

No one believes Nora's account—some believe she was drunk, others blame her appetite for murder mysteries and overactive imagination, while others, like Marcello, find nothing to believe because there is no evidence of a killing. Revisiting Trinità dei Monti with Marcello (where they are spied upon by a derelict man wearing a jacket with patched elbows), Nora sees a woman coming out of an apartment adjacent to the Piazza di Spagna, whom she initially mistakes for the murder victim. She later makes this woman's acquaintance at Ethel's funeral; she is Laura Craven Torrani, a woman of early middle age who lives in an apartment on the right side of Trinità dei Monti with her husband, Prof. Torrani, who is often away in Switzerland on business. Laura wishes to join him and, since Nora now has no place to stay in Rome, she offers her the use of the Torrani apartment during her absence. She requests that she not try to enter the one room in the apartment that her husband keeps locked—"so one less room you have to worry about!"

After moving into the apartment, Nora accidentally discovers a secret compartment in an armoire, which contains a metal storage box containing a set of alphabet blocks and old newspaper clippings about a series of "Alphabet Murders" that occurred ten years before. All of these articles were written by the same journalist: Andrea Lampini. Emily Craven (Laura's sister) was the third victim, following Gina Albert and Maria Baccati—and she was killed in the exact same spot where Nora witnessed the murder! Could she have somehow had a vision of what occurred on that spot a decade earlier? As she fingers a block bearing the letter D, the telephone rings. The caller asks her name, and she answers "Nora Davis."

"Did you say Davis?" the caller inquires. "Is that D . . . as in death?" (In Italian, the line is "D . . . come Delitto?"—"delitto" being the word for "murder.")

Becoming fearful of possible intruders, Nora borrows an idea from a mystery she once read: she rigs a protective trap around her bed, shaking talcum powder onto the floor and tying up a webwork of string to trip anyone who might enter the apartment unbidden. As she settles down to sleep, she hears the front gate creak . . . sees a cloaked shadow trying to peer inside, and checking the doors for an unlocked entrance. The figure finds the front door open, and Nora screams—but it's a policeman keeping an eye on the place. He is suddenly attacked from behind by Marcello, who has also been keeping Nora under surveillance! The two men scuffle in confusion until Marcello stumbles into Nora's powdered web trap, breaking his finger.

Nora and Marcello—his finger bandaged—continue to date. And Nora is continually stalked at a distance by the man with the patched elbows. One night, after seeing Nora home, Marcello lingers to light a cigarette and is surprised to see her leave again almost right away. He follows her to a seemingly abandoned building where she has been summoned. On an upstairs floor inhabited only by swinging lights, swaying shadows, and a disembodied voice, Nora is suddenly seized . . . by Marcello, who is rewarded for his concern with a black eye. They find the place empty, inhabited only by a tape recorder—but the contents of the tape, the "disembodied voice," confirm Nora's story for the first time. They learn that the empty apartment was rented to a man named Landini—the author of the Alphabet Murders articles. They follow his lead to a printer's shop, but Landini no longer works there. Nora and Marcello return to the Torranis' apartment, where they are startled to discover a man waiting for them inside—a man with patched elbows: Andrea Landini, the very man they are seeking!

Landini explains that he was the man who poured whiskey into Nora that morning on the Trinità dei Monti, in hopes of reviving her. He explains that his articles were widely read and put pressure on the authorities to arrest someone for the Alphabet Murders before more were committed. After the murder of Emily Craven, Landini was befriended by Laura's husband, Prof. Torrani, a psychiatrist. Torrani convinced him that the killer had to be a pervert, a psychopath, and pointed out a likely suspect:

a homeless man called Straccianeve.[2] *Landini persuaded the police to arrest Straccianeve, who was subsequently tried and sentenced to life in prison, where he screamed his innocence. Ever since, Landini has suffered from uncertainty: what if Straccianeve was telling the truth? What if he was innocent? When he overheard Nora talking to Marcello about the murder she witnessed, Landini became convinced that she had a true psychic vision of the event and would be able to identify the killer. Against Marcello's counsel, Nora decides to show Landini the box of clippings and blocks she found—but they are now missing from the cupboard!*

United by a common purpose, Nora and Landini go to the prison to speak with Straccianeve; unfortunately, they are informed that he died of coronary thrombosis in 1959. His only survivor is a daughter, Maria, who works as a cleaner at the Foro Italico. But Maria is no longer there; a co-worker explains to them that Maria disappeared from work one day, evidently having finally earned enough as a prostitute to leave town in a Fiat. Afterwards, Landini mentions having another appointment and directs Nora to the bus stop; on her way out, she notices Landini talking once again to the cleaning lady. Nora goes back, but Landini is gone and the working woman is no longer helpful. This baffles her. When Landini calls her later, she puts him on the spot, demanding to know what happened. He says that he knows the truth now, and asks Nora to meet him in one hour at his apartment, where he will explain everything.

At Landini's apartment, Nora is met by three shocks: a typewriter loaded with paper reading "To save myself, I would have had to kill again . . ."; a series of file folders on each of the three Alphabet murders, including one labelled "Fourth Murder" which contains a photograph of herself; and in the adjoining room, Landini's dead body, a bullet fired through his temple—evidently self-inflicted.

Nora decides to leave Rome, and Laura Craven Torrani returns from Switzerland in time to see her off. Marcello brings Nora some newspapers, and her eye is caught by an article illustrated with a photo of the woman she saw being murdered! She visits the morgue, where she identifies a corpse as the victim of the murder she witnessed.



MARIO BAVA *looks annoyed to be photographed while conferring with jovial assistant director Franco Prosperi.*

When she is shown a small box containing the dead woman's belongings, Nora's attention is caught by a single button—a button that did not match the clothing the woman was wearing when she was found. She is allowed to take the button with her, in hopes that it will help her to recover the memory of where she saw it before.

She returns to find the Torranis' apartment uninhabited, and senses that the locked room may harbor the answer to this mystery. She finds a key and goes inside . . . and sees the man from the murder scene—staggering towards her! He falls forward, a knife implanted in his back! This is Prof. Torrani. As she turns to flee, Nora notices a discarded sweater adorned with buttons like the one she obtained from the morgue. As she reaches out for it, her arm is clutched—by Laura!

A raving lunatic, Laura explains that she was in fact the murderess, that her husband was merely a cowardly accomplice. She had to kill her first victim because her name started with the letter A ("You can see that, can't you?") . . . she killed her sister Emily because she disapproved of her actions, looking at her judgmentally "with her evil eyes" . . . she killed Landini because he had discovered her secret, and she killed her final victim—Straccianeve's daughter—because she too knew the truth and was blackmailing her. Prof. Torrani was not the killer, but the disposer of the body—and now even this accomplice had outlived his usefulness. As Laura prepares to shoot Nora, she is shot twice in the back by her dying husband.

Atop the Pincio, looking across the breadth of Rome to St. Peter's Basilica, Nora and Marcello reflect on their past adventures and future wedding plans. Marcello runs out of cigarettes and accepts a Kent from Nora . . . who snatches it out of his mouth abruptly when she remembers that they are drugged. She remembers that she smoked one on the night of the murder—perhaps it was all a dream, an hallucination? She resolves to quit smoking from that moment on and throws the packet away. It lands on the street below, where it is picked up by a passing seminarian like manna from Heaven.

Production

The screenplay for *La ragazza che sapeva troppo* is signed by six writers: Ennio De Concini, the principal screenwriter of *La maschera del demonio* and the Steve Reeves Hercules films; his girlfriend Eliana de Sabata (they never married); Sergio Corbucci, who subsequently wrote the metaphysical *Danza Macabra/Castle of Blood* (1964) for Antonio Margheriti, and went on to become Italy's second great master of the Spaghetti Western (after Sergio Leone), directing *Minnesota Clay* (1964) and *Django* (1966); Mino Guerrini, who subsequently directed the astonishing Italian horror film *Il terzo occhio* ("The Third Eye," 1966); Franco Prosperi, Bava's assistant director at the time, who later became a director in his own right with the spy spoof *Dick Smart 2.007* (1967); and Bava himself. According to Prosperi, Mino Guerrini "was never seen and never felt" in the scripting process, which originated with a four-page treatment by Corbucci.

It is tempting to connect each of these contributors to different threads in the finished work, based on their other achievements. De Concini, as we have

heard, was principally an idea man and may have been the first to suggest that the time was right, in the wake of *Psycho*, for an Italian imitation or send-up of Hitchcock. Corbucci was likely responsible for the concept of witnessing a murder revealed to have taken place a decade earlier, as his script for *Danza Macabra* is about a man who accepts a bet to spend the night inside an empty house on the anniversary of a grisly event, and witnesses the events as they are replayed before his eyes. Given the diabolical imagination displayed in *Il terzo occhio*, as well as its interest in morbid psychology, Guerrini would be the likeliest instigator of the details of the film's murders, and the motivations of the killer. As for Bava and Prosperi, they were surely responsible for developing the character of Nora, given Bava's interest in *gialli* fiction and Prosperi's later interest in spy spoofs; thus, many of their specific contributions may survive only in the American version known as *Evil Eye* (to be discussed later). Given Bava's track record of rewriting and improvising new directions on the set, there was very likely a certain amount of revision and reshaping also going on throughout the production.

The film began shooting under the working title of *L'incubo* ("The Nightmare"), which was changed to avoid a conflict with another black-and-white thriller announced by Hammer Films. Even with the financial input of an additional American company, it was a fairly low-budget undertaking, with a good deal of the filming taking place at Trinità dei Monti, the famous public square in the Lazio district of Rome. Here, the twin church towers of Trinità dei Monti look down on the Piazza di Spagna—an oblong oval area on the street below, to which they are joined by a pair of complementary, curving stairwells, famously known as "the Spanish steps." The stairs also lead up to a French academy for artists, a magnificently restored villa and garden that forms the entrance to the Villa Borghese park (the location of the eponymous feature that Bava photographed in 1953), and today, Rome's biggest McDonald's. Trinità dei Monti, like much of Rome, is a conglomeration of buildings from many different centuries; it was once the centerpiece of an artists colony, due to its proximity to the academy, but at the time Bava made this film, it was becoming a tremendous tourist attraction, in the wake of films like *La dolce vita*, which romanticized the Roman scene. (Fellini himself lived only a short distance from the Spanish Steps, in Via Margutta.)



THIS EARLY *publicity portrait of Leticia Roman finds the actress striking an Ann-Margret-type pose.*

Today, Trinità dei Monti remains one of the most popular attractions and meeting places in Rome, though it is now impossible to live there unless you are a millionaire. It continues to play an important decorative role in contemporary motion pictures, including Bernardo Bertolucci's *Besieged* (1998) and Anthony Minghella's excellent thriller *The Talented Mr. Ripley* (1999, which is set during the period in which Bava's film was made). Thanks to its prominent placement in *La ragazza che sapeva troppo*, Trinità dei Monti has also become a monument of sorts to the golden age of Italian horror, and is the first stop many Bava fans make when they first sojourn to Rome.

Except for a few other landmarks seen during a light-hearted montage, the film's only other major location is the Foro Italico, a Fascist stadium built in 1932 at the base of Monte Mario, encircled with statuary depicting athletes of all kinds in the manner of ancient Roman gods. All of the interiors were shot at the original Titanus Studios in Farnesina.

In retrospect, it may seem strange that *La ragazza che sapeva troppo* was not shot in color. However, in 1962 when the film was in production, black-and-white was standard issue for the myriad psychological thrillers that poured forth in the wake of *Psycho*. (AIP's 1964 pressbook for *Evil Eye* makes an overt pitch to sell the picture along these lines, describing it as a "terror mystery in the tradition of *Psycho* and other entertainment masterpieces," while Bava himself—then at age 48—is misleadingly sketched as "Italy's young master of shock and terror who has been acclaimed as the equal of Hitchcock.") During this time frame, black-and-white was considered the proper key for psychological suspense and kitchen sink violence; indeed, there had never before been an Italian thriller lensed in color. *La dolce vita*, also a black-and-white film, was another point of reference.

The monochromatic look of the film is very much in the classic *film noir* mode of the 1940s, luxurious and distinctive, and some of its scenes (Nora's visit to Landini's office, for example) would not have worked so well in color. That said, *La ragazza che sapeva troppo* is actually less imitative of *Psycho* than of Hitchcock's color thrillers of the 1950s; it owes more to *Dial M for Murder, Rear Window, To Catch a Thief*, and of course, *The Man Who Knew Too Much*. Color would have brought more sparkle to its travelogue aspects, and made its horror sequences more lurid. Given the adjustment to color he would make with his next *giallo* ("The Telephone" in *I tre volti della paura/Black Sabbath*), one imagines that Bava also recognized this basic error in judgment.

Cast

La ragazza che sapeva troppo assembles what was probably Mario Bava's most thoroughly talented cast up to this time. The principal players are attractive, likeable and capable, the supporting characters are colorful and interesting, and peppered throughout the movie are cameo appearances by actors whom Bava used on other occasions.

Cast as Nora Davis was 22-year-old Leticia Roman, who was born Letizia Novarese in Rome on August 12, 1941. She was the daughter of former stage actress Giuliana Gianni and screenwriter–costume designer Nino Vittorio Novarese (*Cleopatra*, *The Greatest Story Ever Told*), who had dressed some of the films Mario Bava

2 In Italian, the name Straccianeve has connotations of a tramp who wears rags.

photographed in the '40s and '50s, including *La donna più bella del mondo* and *Nel segno di Roma*. Roman started her screen career with a small part in the Elvis Presley movie *G.I. Blues* (1960, in which she romanced co-star James Douglas, not Presley) and had just completed supporting roles in *The Charge of the Black Lancers* (1963) and *Un tentativo sentimentale* (1963), opposite *La maschera del demonio* stars Arturo Dominici and Barbara Steele, respectively. In her first starring role, Roman sparkles as Bava's naïve, impish, hyper-imaginative heroine—especially in *Evil Eye*, the more light-hearted US version of the film.

After finishing *La ragazza che sapeva troppo,* Roman relocated to West Germany, where she made several films—including Russ Meyer's infamous one-shot collaboration with producer Albert Zugsmith, *The Memoirs of Fanny Hill* (1964) and the Karl May Western *Old Surehand* (1965), before marrying and retiring from the screen in 1966. According to her friend and co-star John Saxon, Roman is now divorced and working in the real estate business in the Los Angeles area. While studying at UCLA in the early 1990s, Mario Bava's grandson Fabrizio "Roy" Bava was approached one night in a Los Angeles restaurant by a stranger who turned out to be Roman, who remarked on his amazing resemblance to someone she used to know—Mario Bava! That she would remember Bava's appearance so well after thirty years indicates that Roman must regard the film as one of her most memorable acting jobs.

As co-producers of the film, AIP insisted on complementing Roman's untried lead casting with a "known quantity" co-star in the role of the handsome young doctor, Marcello Bassi. Roman herself suggested her friend John Saxon. Saxon was himself an Italian-American, born Carmine "Ricky" d'Orrico in Brooklyn, New York, on August 5, 1936. After playing a couple of unbilled bit parts in George Cukor's *It Should Happen to You* and Vincente Minnelli's *A Star Is Born* (both 1954), Saxon's brooding good looks brought him teen stardom in *Running Wild* (1955), *Rock Pretty Baby* and *The Unguarded Moment* (both 1956). In 1961, Saxon made his first Italian film, Mauro Bolognini's *Agostino*, based on a story by Alberto Moravia, the celebrated author of *Two Women* and *The Conformist*.

"Letícia was a friend, part of the Italian community out here in Hollywood," Saxon explains. "She called me up one day, and said in her Italian accent, 'John! How would you like to star with me in a 'ar' film?' Well . . . I had never done an art film before, but I was game. Only later did I find out that, with her thick accent, she was actually saying 'horror film'!"

"When I went," Saxon told *Fangoria* magazine, "I was not aware of [Bava] as someone regarded as a master. I found him interesting, but I don't think I was interested enough in him at the time to explore what he did as a director. Sometimes it seemed like he lived in his own personal world of superstition. He was filled with almost occult beliefs about anything: [one] didn't do [certain things] because it was bad luck."[3]

According to Saxon, Bava was in an uncharacteristic bad humor during the production. "One day we were filming on the beach," he recalls, "and while we were standing around waiting for the next take, I decided to warm up with a few karate exercises. Bava made some kind of crack, loud enough for everyone to hear, like, 'Oh, look at the big shot karate expert!' That was kind of sharp and uncalled-for, I felt. I later wondered if might have been under the impression that Letícia had got me the part because I was her boyfriend, which I wasn't. Or maybe he had his eye on her?"

My own interpretation of Bava's behavior toward Saxon is that it was rooted in a mutual misunderstanding. First of all, Bava felt contempt for anyone who did anything to draw attention to themselves. Athletic competition seemed to Bava the height of narcissistic conceit, and we can see this feeling expressed elsewhere in the AIP version of the film, during the scene at Foro Italico. The only thing worse than an offense to Bava's sense of humility was an offense to his sense of craftsmanship. Bava therefore had little patience with actors and actresses whom he believed—rightly or wrongly—got their roles by sleeping with producers and other influential people. Oblivious to recent trends and stars in the American cinema, Bava knew nothing of Saxon or his career, just as Saxon knew nothing of Bava's list of accomplishments or, indeed, his personal character. Knowing that Roman had arranged for Saxon to be cast, and hearing that they were friends, Bava may well have been under the false impression that Saxon had been cast for reasons that were other than professional. And to see Saxon demonstrating his karate prowess on the set where he and others were trying to work, especially if he



MARIO BAVA *directing Leticia Roman.*

was recovering from overwork, Bava might well have cut loose a remark. As for Saxon's interpretation . . . While it is possible—perhaps even necessary—for a director to be somewhat infatuated with his leading actress, it is extremely unlikely that their relationship went beyond that, especially since Roman was the daughter of an old colleague. Thus, Bava and Saxon embarked on their collaboration having the wrong idea of each other, and they never had or took the time to sort out their misunderstandings. Saxon's real-life situation on-set—always aiming to please and getting snubbed for his efforts—works well in the service of his portrayal, as Marcello's devotion to Nora results in a series of ironic injuries and embarrassments.

Saxon, of course, has enjoyed a highly diverse and visible career that has endured to this day, including such features as Curtis Harrington's *Queen of Blood* (1966), *Enter the Dragon* (1973) with Bruce Lee, Umberto Lenzi's *Napoli violenta/Violent Protection* (1976) and *Apocalisse domani/Cannibals in the Streets* (1980), Dario Argento's *Tenebrae/Unsane* (1982), Wes Craven's *A Nightmare on Elm Street* (1984, as well as its second and fifth sequels), and Robert Rodriguez' *From Dusk Till Dawn* (1996). When Saxon appeared at "The Haunted World of Mario Bava" retrospective at Los Angeles' American Cinematheque in October 1993, he admitted after the screening of a clip from *La ragazza che sapeva troppo* that he had never seen the film, and applauded the style and suspense of the footage shown.

Also stealing a number of scenes are Valentina Cortese and Dante Di Paolo. Cortese, born in Milan on the first day of 1925, was the most experienced member of the cast, having already appeared in close to fifty films, though she was not yet 40. Like Bava, Cortese had devoted her youth to painting, but began to participate in open air plays at Milanese village feasts when she was 15. Her work in one of these programs was seen by some important critics, who recommended that she audition for the



MARIO BAVA *conferring with Valentina Cortese during the filming of the cemetery scene.*



Academy of Dramatic Art in Rome. When she applied, her interview was conducted by a film director who promptly gave her a screen test and signed her to a longterm contract. She was too busy giving stellar performances—such as her Oscar-nominated work as Severine in François Truffaut's *La Nuit Americaine/Day for Night* (1973)—to ever study acting. It's possible that Cortese was courted for her role in *La ragazza che sapeva troppo* by screenwriter Sergio Corbucci, who had previously directed her in the all-star Italian war parody *The Shortest Day* (1962), though she was also one of at least five actors in the film who were also featured in Richard Fleischer's *Barabbas* that same year, which may be even more indicative of an agent's "package deal." (The others were Gustavo De Nardo, Gianni Di Benedetto, Jim Dolen, and John Stacey.) Cortese's performance as Laura Craven Torrani is splendid, alternately tender, morbid, and exuberant; even in her greatest displays of madness she conveys a special luminosity, a kind of open-hearted madness that invites the viewer to participate. Cortese later played the Queen of the Moon, to Robin Williams' King, in Terry Gilliam's *The Adventures of Baron Munchausen* (1989)—which, like *La ragazza che sapeva troppo*, featured art direction by Giorgio Giovannini.

The film's second male lead was Dante Di Paolo, who had just completed a three film contract for producers Ermanno Donati and Luigi Carpentieri, which had included Irving Rapper's *Giuseppe venduto dai fratelli/Joseph and His Brethren* (1960), Antonio Leonvila's *Maciste nella terra dei ciclopi/Atlas in the Land of the Cyclops* (1961), and Riccardo Freda's *Maciste alla corte del Gran Khan*. Born in Frederick, Colorado on February 18, 1926, Di Paolo's background was as a dancer. He had worked as an unbilled hoofer in *Abbott & Costello Meet Dr. Jekyll & Mr. Hyde* (1953) before stepping up to the classic MGM musicals *Meet Me at the Fair* (1953) and *Seven Brides for Seven Brothers* (1954). After dating singer/actress Rosemary Clooney for several years, the couple were separated by work opportunities and married other people; Clooney began raising a family

3 William Rabkin, "A Cop on Elm Street," *Fangoria* 44, 1985, 11.

with husband, actor José Ferrer, while Di Paolo left Hollywood to dance professionally in Las Vegas, where he fell in love with Tropicana showgirl Nadine Ducassé. She adopted the first of many professional names, Nadine Duca—later Nadine Ducas, then Nadine Sanders and, finally, Nadia Sanders—and was recommended to Italian producer Virgilio De Blasi by a common friend. De Blasi admired her Nordic good looks and invited her to Rome in 1961. There she tested and won the role of Queen Gaia in Riccardo Freda's *I giganti della Tessaglia*.

"She went over there to do that," Di Paolo explains, "and I wanted to go to Italy too, because I wanted to see my father's home, which I'd never seen. You see, I'd never been to Italy and I had a home there, a three story home in the Abruzzi mountains! My dad had told me all these stories about it and I decided, 'I'm gonna go.' The house was like my gold ticket. So we went and had dinner with the producer and his girlfriend Maria Barto, and he said to me, politely, 'What do *you* do?' I happened to mention *Seven Brides for Seven Brothers*, and that happened to be one of their favorite films of all time! They just loved it, and that helped me a lot at the beginning."

Di Paolo was overjoyed to work in Rome because no one there questioned his ability to act, just because he had been a dancer. He also found his footing as a dramatic actor thanks to some peculiar advice from a director: "When I was making *Joseph and His Brethren*, Irving Rapper told me, 'Look, I've got plenty of actors in this thing, so I want you to just be yourself. I don't want you to act.' I based almost everything I did after that on that advice. That became, more or less, my formula as an actor—for the screen, anyway."

Hearing that Mario Bava was preparing an English-language film, Di Paolo's agent called the production office to tell Bava about his American client and arrange for a screen test. "We were told to meet him at his office and we found him outside, coming across the street from somewhere," Di Paolo recalls. "He called out to my agent Livio, '*Troppo giovane, troppo giovane!*' which means 'Too young, too young!' He thought I was too young for the part. Livio suggested, 'Well, let's see what can be done to get him into the part, with makeup or whatever, and see what happens.' So he managed to talk Bava into giving me a test. On the day of the test, I went there and thought I was going to be the only actor there, but there was one other guy making a test also; he was on before me. I didn't see his test, but it seems that everyone thought that this other guy had the part because he was a known theatrical actor and he played the part for these people almost as if he were onstage, giving them a performance, you know? That was very impressive, but he wasn't doing it for the camera, and when they screened our tests—Leticia told me this later—there was no question that I had it, because I had underplayed the hell out of it."



ANDREA LANDINI *(Dante Di Paolo) is accompanied by Nora and Marcello to a prison, where the warden informs them of Straccianeve's death.*

Bava immediately voiced his approval. Di Paolo: "After he picked me out, he said 'You did more with that [character] than I was going to give you. I like it, keep doing what you're doing. Whatever you have in your mind about this character, it's right." So I felt really good about that. All the way through the film, he'd give me my marks so I would know where to stand, where to walk from here or there or whatever, and the rest he'd leave to me. That was it. There were no fussy little directions with lines about this and that—nothing, never. I liked working with him so much; he gave me so much freedom, you know?"

Di Paolo is perfectly cast as the mysterious reporter Andrea Landini, a shabbily dressed witness to the crimes of this great city, not unlike the narrator of the famous American radio show (and subsequent Columbia B-*noir* film series of the '40s), *The Whistler*. It should be admitted that some of Landini's early appearances in the movie, which viewed him only from behind, were played by a stand-in crew member (with visibly black hair). Di Paolo's dialogue scenes, however, are superb and he perfectly embodies a haunted writer of extinguished promise, his life destroyed by professional guilt and self-doubt.

Asked what he drew upon to create this performance, Di Paolo replies, "I was thinking of the kind of guy Landini was, and about being 'on the spot.' When you're preparing to play a character, you analyze different things about him in your mind, and sometimes you'll put yourself right in that spot, and that's when you know how to react. You



GIANNI DI BENEDETTO *makes a surprise reappearance as Prof. Torrani.*

really become that character, and that's what decides what you do. I don't know exactly what I thought about him, really, but I knew that, on the screen—especially that kind of a part—you had to show some thinking. It couldn't just be theatrical acting. I don't know how to go about describing that; it's just an inner thing that you feel about the character, and you just suddenly become that character and go through whatever it is they're going through."

Di Paolo remembers that becoming Landini could be a little tough on his lungs. "In one scene, I had to smoke a cigarette in that house… God, it went on forever; it was a long scene, where I'm describing what happened in the past and all this… and I had to smoke all the way through it! And the cigarette had to match each time [for the sake of continuity]. Instead of dousing each cigarette out between takes and lighting up another one of that size, I used to smoke the whole cigarette down! So when I finished shooting that day, I didn't smoke again for awhile."

Bava was sufficiently impressed by Di Paolo's work to cast him again in his next *giallo* feature, *Sei donne per l'assassino/Blood and Black Lace*, in which he played the cocaine-frazzled antiques dealer, Frank. Forty years later, Di Paolo's performance as Landini was used to lend a grace note to his supporting role in the HBO series *Unscripted* (2005), produced by Steven Soderbergh and Di Paolo's nephew, George Clooney. Cast as the grandfather of series regular Jennifer Hall (playing herself), Di Paolo gave a touching performance—his first in many years—as an ex-hoofer suffering from Alzheimer's Disease. In the first season's final episode, Di Paolo's character dies, willing his few possessions to Hall, who finds among them a couple of reels of 16 mm film. That night, Hall threads them up and watches this evidence of her grandfather's glory days—his performance in *La ragazza che sapeva troppo*. More than just a convenient use of some film footage, the scene was obviously intended by Clooney as an affectionate tribute to his uncle.

Gianni Di Benedetto, cast in the purely photogenic role of Prof. Torrani, had previously appeared in *La Romana/The Woman of Rome* (1954), *L'arte di arrangiarsi* (1955), and played a police officer in Roger Vadim's *Et mourir et plaisir/Blood and Roses* (1960). His casting in *La ragazza che sapeva troppo* was evidently fortuitous, because in subsequent years, he appeared in numerous *gialli,* including the first three features of Dario Argento: *L'uccello dalle piume di cristallo/The Bird With the Crystal Plumage* (1970), *Il gatto a nove coda/The Cat o' Nine Tails* (1970), and *Quattro mosche di velluto grigio/Four Flies on Grey Velvet* (1971).

The film also contains a number of familiar (if briefly seen) faces from Bava's earlier and subsequent work. Walter Williams, working once again under his screen name of Robert Buchanan, plays hospital chief Dr. Alessi; he had previously appeared as the Eunuch in *Esther and the King* and would be subsequently featured in *Diabolik/Danger: Diabolik* (1968). Franco Ressel—billed here as "Franco Morigi"—is glimpsed leading the narcotics squad that apprehends the drug-dealing Pacini at the airport; he had previously played King Lothar in *Gli invasori* and would play the Marquis Riccardo Morelli in *Sei donne per l'assassino*.

La ragazza che sapeva troppo also marks Bava's earliest collaboration with Gustavo De Nardo, who plays Dr. Facchetti. De Nardo would eventually appear in more Bava films than any other supporting actor—playing the detective in the "*La goccia d'acqua*" ("The Drop of Water") episode of *I tre volti della paura/Black Sabbath*, the bed-ridden patriarch of



CLAD IN *leopard skin, Valentina Cortese has a memorable climactic scene as the mad Laura Torrani.*



ITALIAN *fotobusta.*

the Menliff house in *La frusta e il corpo/The Whip and the Body*, the ill-fated doctor at whose office Baron von Kleist seeks treatment in *Baron Blood*, and a gas station owner in *Cani arrabbiati/Rabid Dogs/Kidnapped*. Active in small Italian films since the mid-1950s, De Nardo's previous film work had included Christian-Jacque's *La Legge è legge/The Law Is Law*, Henry Koster's *The Naked Raja* (1959), Nunnally Johnson's *The Angel Wore Red* (1960), and Andrew Marton's *It Happened in Athens* (1961). It is difficult to chart De Nardo's career with much accuracy because a number of his film appearances, including *Baron Blood*, were uncredited.

Cast as the priest presiding over Ethel's funeral was Jim Dolen, a white-haired actor who was quite active in Italian films from 1958–1964. His appearances include *Totò nella luna* ("Totò on the Moon," 1958), Antonio Margheriti's *Il pianeta degli uomini spenti/Battle of the Worlds* (1961), *Il crolla di Roma* ("The Fall of Rome," 1962), and the Gothic *giallo, La vergine di Norimberga/Horror Castle* (1963), as well as an unbilled role in 1964's *Gidget Goes to Rome.*

Also appearing briefly, for the first of two times in Bava's filmography, is Lucia Modugno, who has a charming memory of the production: "In the film I played a nurse and had a couple of lines. After that, I listened to the dialogue between two other characters and did the expressions that I thought were right. At a certain point, after he called "cut," Bava said to the bystanders: "Who is this clever young girl? Who found her? She did some incredible bits of business!" and made a gesture like kissing his hand. I was just starting out; nobody had told me what to do or anything, so he was surprised by my timing and my expressions. It was Bava who later called me back for *Diabolik*: my role was that of a prostitute, who had witnessed something and went to do an Identikit. I remember Bava as a very paternal man; even his appearance was a bit paternal—homely, how else can I say it? He wasn't slick nor a philanderer—I've met quite a few of those! He was serious, very serious . . ."[4]

Commentary

Mario Bava's last feature film to be shot in black-and-white, *La ragazza che sapeva troppo* is a gem of stylistic execution that falls short of complete success due, once again, to inconsistencies of narrative. It's easy to believe that each of its half-dozen screenwriters contributed something to its sometimes wildly conflicting makeup. The greatest problem with having so many cooks in the kitchen is that the solution to the mystery—though logical—does not complement the evidence as satisfyingly as other, more fantastical, less plausible explanations also pondered in the course of the storyline.

As the movie unreels, the viewer is never certain whether Nora witnessed a murder or experienced a psychic vision. Did she witness the killing of Emily Craven, as it happened ten years earlier—and if so, how? Was it a product of her overexcited, mystery-fuelled imagination? A bump on her head? A drug-induced hallucination? Or merely a nightmare, as suggested by the original shooting title? Or might it have been provoked in her suggestible nature by her overstimulated immersion in the waking amalgam of past and present that is Rome? One imagines that each of these explanations was treated as valid in the storylines proposed by the six different contributors.

The film offers too many possibilities, all equally enticing—and consequently, while the final solution (that she witnessed the murder of Maria Straccianeve, who just happened to resemble the woman who was murdered by the woman she is now suddenly blackmailing all these years later) may seem more logical, it is also less dramatically satisfying. Over the years, countless mysteries on the page and screen have managed to juggle multiple false leads and red herrings, but the mysteries that endure tend to be those which offer the most unexpected explanations. If *La ragazza che sapeva troppo* falls short, it is not due to any failure of technique, but because its discarded explanations are more attractive than the one finally proposed, precisely because the solution is merely logical, while everything that comes before has an aspect of magic.

So deep was Bava's own personal dislike of travel—which worsened in the wake of his *Le meraviglie di Aladino* misadventure—that virtually all of his horror films can be reduced to the baleful consequences of arrivals and departures. *La maschera del demonio* is the story of a trip to a medical convention gone awry; *Ercole al centro della terra* is the story of a hazardous journey, and *Gli invasori* deals with a series of voyages bent on conquest. Of his later works, *'I wurdalak'* from *I tre volti della paura* finds a family wracked with fear about the impending return of their patriarch from a dangerous trip; *La frusta e il corpo* begins with the return of a prodigal, much dreaded son from a long voyage; *Baron Blood* and *Lisa and the Devil* are both about American tourists who travel abroad, only to reactivate evil forces from the past; *Cani arrabbiati* is about what could happen to anyone reckless enough to leave



ITALIAN *fotobusta depicting Nora's visit to the morgue, attended by Dr. Facchetti (Gustavo De Nardo).*

their house . . . the theme is rigorously consistent, right up to his final feature *Schock*, in which the film's heroine succumbs to a mental breakdown following her return to her old house after many years spent away, in an asylum.

Like these characters, Nora Davis finds danger and destiny, rather than escape, abroad. Her presence in Rome provokes an hallucination that reactivates an old, unsolved murder case, and her fated place in this story is emphasized by how well her own surname fits into the alphabetical itinerary of the killer, and the fact that she finds herself occupying the home of the last victim. Here and elsewhere in Bava's films, the fear of travel is not simply a matter of knowing where one belongs and feeling that we are all put where we are born for a reason; it is also usually connected to a superstitious fear of stumbling into a larger, karmic reality and discovering the other destinies that may await one elsewhere. This persistent—indeed, *in*sistent—theme carries with it a dread of recognizing, and being unable to resist, the path not taken.

From the very beginning, the narration of *La ragazza che sapeva troppo* discusses Rome in terms of being "a dream destination" and Nora is heard to enthuse, "It must be a dream to live here." Thus, she is bound on a journey not unlike that of Lisa Reiner in Bava's later *Lisa and the Devil*, made ten years later. Both heroines are young, blonde, and beautiful tourists who come to Europe anticipating a dream and, after spending time amid its antiquities, become lost in time and veer into the parallel dimension of nightmare. While Lisa's nightmare takes her to a previous lifetime, Nora's is not quite so severe; it only takes her back ten years (or so we spend most of the film believing). Nora and Lisa (at least in the revised version of her story, *The House of Exorcism*, 1975) also share a common stimulus, in that both embark on their respective adventures after bumping their heads on the ground of a public plaza.

Given the way the story is constructed, Nora's theoretical dislocation is treated as authentic for most of the running time, only to be abandoned in the final reel in favor of a more pragmatic explanation that comes out of left field. (Bava may have appreciated the irony of naming the murder victim Maria, as he could then tell people that he was making a movie about a girl who has "a vision of Maria" in front of a church!) Even after it is explained that Nora witnessed a murder in the present tense, while dazed by a mild concussion, the movie continues to embellish its explanation with needless, compensatory details. For example: in her final scene, Nora recalls smoking a marijuana-laced cigarette prior to witnessing the murder in Trinità dei Monti—but while this scene is present in the American cut, it is not present in the Italian version, making the addendum particularly pointless. In the Italian version, she smokes only one supposedly drugged cigarette—while on the plane—and experiences no apparent after-effects whatsoever. Furthermore, marijuana is not an hallucinogen, which makes the idea seem all the more ill-conceived.

Another of Bava's chief contributions to the scenario was to explore the schism he perceived between the sunniness of Rome and the dark, sinister imaginings of people who come there from cooler climes—an elaboration on his aforementioned quote that Calabrese workmen go to the cinema to laugh or cry, because they have the sun and care nothing for movies that take place in the dark. As Marcello shows Nora around the city in the wake of her presumed hallucination, he says, "Just look around you—does this look like the kind of place where women get stabbed? Come, this is the real Rome, where the sun shines bright and the air is clear! A dream, perhaps—a nightmare, never!"

Despite Marcello's claims, *La ragazza che sapeva troppo* is deceptive in its appearance. It is set in then-contemporary Rome, yet it cannot be said that it is set in the real world, as Bava's later *Cani arrabbiati* clearly is. Marcello Bassi, whose name evokes not only Marcello Mastroianni but also Rosanno Brazzi (at the time, the two leading matinee idols of Italian cinema), looks at the world with surprising naïveté for a doctor who works the late shift in a hospital near the center of Rome, who should be as familiar as anyone with what really occurs there under cover of night. Instead, the film explores the fantasy that was Rome in 1963, in the wake of *La dolce vita*, when it captured the international imagination as "Swinging London" would a couple of years later.

Given its emphases on the beauty of Rome, on Rome as a "dream," *La ragazza che sapeva troppo* would have been a more satisfying and germane picture had Nora's vision of the murder on Trinità dei Monti been provoked by her being overwhelmed by her visit to the Eternal City, where

4 Manlio Gomarasca and Davide Pulici, "Il Talento di Mr. Bava," *Nocturno Dossier* 24, July 2004, 6–32.

Vespa motorbikes co-exist with the Colisseum. This metaphysical possibility, which is briefly considered in a scene that appears only in the American version, is clearly what happens to Lisa in *Lisa and the Devil*, and seems related to the phenomenon which would later become the *deux ex machina* of Dario Argento's 1996 film *La sindrome di Stendhal/ The Stendhal Syndrome*. First described by Stendhal (Marie Henri Beyle, 1783–1842), the author of *Le Rouge et le Noir* and *Le Chartreuse de Parme*, this syndrome refers to people who are so susceptible to beauty that, in the presence of great works of art or architecture, they can become faint, disoriented, or delusional. In Florence, Italy—the home of the Uffizi Gallery—the nearest hospital is said to keep three beds available for tourists who fall victim to the intensity of Vermeer and Botticellli, when seen live, up-close, and in person. Of course, one of the film's early drafts—my guess would be Corbucci's—may have told such a story, in which the hallucinations of a young and impressionable tourist help to solve a crime that occurred in Rome ten years earlier. (Nora's surname in the US version—"Drowson"—carries associations of "drowse on," an encouragement to keep dreaming.) Instead, Bava's final cut settles for a more mundane—and ironically, less believable—account, as the ten-year gap between the original Alphabet Murders and the attempted blackmail by Maria Straccianeve seems more than a little far-fetched. Worse yet, the murder of Maria breaks the pattern of the killer's psychosis ("I had to kill her, don't you see? Her name began with the letter A!"), turning Laura Torrani's hot-blooded madness cold-bloodedly sane and practical.

La ragazza che sapeva troppo may have its roots in the works of Alfred Hitchcock, but it is far more representative and revealing in regard to the work of Mario Bava. Hitchcock had previously noted the irony of shy, high-strung people who read murder stories for relaxation; Hume Cronyn plays such a person in *Shadow of a Doubt* (1943, scripted by Thornton Wilder) and Bava was such a person himself. In the hands of another director, Nora Davis might have become a silly caricature, but Bava recognized elements of her in himself: addicted to mysteries, anonymous (Nora = *n'aura,* "no face"), with a deep-seated unease regarding travel and unfamiliar cultures. Consequently, *La ragazza che sapeva troppo* is one of Bava's most personal films and Nora—especially as she is more richly depicted in the English-language version, *Evil Eye*—emerges as one of his most accessible and appealing of his heroines; a neurotic Nancy Drew (with the same initials!), always on edge but never incapacitated by her fears. Bava must have felt a deep affinity for her, because he later helped to create another, similar young heroine for his screenplay *Cry Nightmare* in 1967—a character who managed to survive the rewrites and was eventually played by Sally Smith in Antonio Margheriti's eventual filming of the project as *Nude . . . si muore/ The Young, the Evil and the Savage* (1968).

The Italian version of the film presents Nora as a more sober-minded heroine than does the quite different, and ultimately more satisfying, American recut. The most obvious difference between the two presentations of the character is that the Italian version is narrated by a third person male voice, placing the story in the tense of the novel Nora might be reading on the plane, while the American version is narrated—in giddy, girlish, "Dear Diary" exuberance—by Nora herself. Consequently, the Italian version conveys only her surface reality, resulting in a cooler, more sophisticated heroine. In Nora's first scenes, she wears an eye-popping snakeskin coat by Emilio Schubert, which seems an uncharacteristically showy and sophisticated thing for such a naïve young girl to wear. Perhaps by covering his heroine in the dermis of a cold-blooded serpent, Bava was venturing comment on her status as a foreigner to sunny Italy, or as a reader of stories that chill the blood, or her announced resolve to stop reading these books that excite her imagination, to shed them like a skin.

THE STRIKING *snakeskin coat worn by Nora on her arrival in Rome.*



After surviving air travel and her encounter with a drug smuggler, Nora's next stop is the apartment of Ethel—wonderfully furnished by Giorgio Giovannini with objects of superstition (a horseshoe hangs on the back of her front door) and antique portraits of long-dead, solemnly gazing children. Likewise, our first view of Ethel prefigures her coming death: she's covered in a ghost-like sheet, inhaling vapors, which curl all around her like a fog when she emerges from this makeshift tent to greet her guest in jolly fashion.

The film's first highlight comes early, about seven minutes into the picture, with Ethel's death and the murder that Nora witnesses (or imagines) outside Trinità dei Monti. The death scene is a *tour de force*, fascinating not only for its compositional adroitness and wildly escalating tension, but for the many trappings it shares with the scene of Miss Chester's visit to the medium's deathbed in the *"La goccia d'acqua"* episode of *I tre volti della paura*: the stormy night, the squeaky bed, the cat, the staring face of the old dead woman, the strobing lights, the bedside glass of water which both Nora and Miss Chester drop to the floor in fright. As Nora shakes Ethel's dead body in

disbelief, a portrait of a morbid-looking male child is thoughtfully included in the shot, so that it appears to be peering over her shoulder.[5] This eerie grace note foreshadows the dolls littering the floor of the medium's domicile, as well as the Victorian-era ghost child of *Operazione paura/Kill, Baby . . . Kill!*.

Nora has changed into a nightgown prior to this scene, so before running outside toward the hospital to fetch Dr. Bassi, she covers herself in a shiny black raincoat (which, in the monochrome cinematography, complements the black cobblestone streets that gleam under rainfall). The purse snatcher awaiting her wears a striped shirt that echoes the earlier striped lighting on Nora's face, as the lamps in Ethel's bedroom flickered on and off in the moments after her death. When Nora is knocked to the ground, the camera lingers on her generous show of bare leg—a shot reminiscent of the (highly fetishistic) death of the title character's governess in Luis Buñuel's *Ensayo de un Crimen/The Criminal Life of Archibaldo de la Cruz* (1955)—and then dissolves to a point later in time (or space).

A scream awakens Nora, whose distorted perception of the murder she witnesses is conveyed by manipulations of Bava's *cristallo d'acqua*, or "water glass." The use of the water glass is particularly interesting in this context, because the murder is framed by intermittent rain, and it sets up beautifully the closing shot of the sequence, which pans away from Nora's collapsed form to a rain puddle in which Trinità dei Monti is reflected—its stately, inverted facade then distorted by a cloudburst. Fifteen years later, Dario Argento (or perhaps his director of photography, Luciano Tovoli) echoed this shot prior to the first murder in *Suspiria* (1977), as a woman splashes through the reflected image of the building in which she is about to be killed.



ITALIAN *manifesto incorporating the image of Landini trying to revive Nora with whiskey.*

The film's alphabet murders are indebted to Agatha Christie's 1936 Hercule Poirot mystery *The ABC Murders* (filmed in 1966 by Frank Tashlin), perhaps by way of Ernesto Gastaldi's 1959 stage play *A . . . come Assassino* ("A . . . as in Assassin"). Even today, the alphabet continues to occupy a central place in the mythos of murder mysteries, thanks to Sue Grafton's best-selling series of novels, launched with *A Is for Alibi* in 1982. The particular magic of alphabetical murders stems from their implication of a cold-blooded, systematic approach to crime, as well as the implicit promise of a potentially large number of killings. Bava takes the idea further by having the killer collect newspaper clippings of her "triumphs" in a box filled with an old, incomplete set of alphabet blocks, giving her *modus operandi* a Freudian dimension of childhood trauma that is never explicitly addressed (nor does it need to be). A major component of the *giallo* as it later developed, especially in the hands of Dario Argento—the killer's private shrine of childhood talismans and other souvenirs of a primal, mind-shattering trauma—can be traced back to the use of these specific props.

As a stranger in Rome, Nora Davis discovers her sense of belonging in the killer's own annihilistic template: not only is she the "D" that is required for the campaign of murder to continue, but she discovers the tools of the killer's trade while residing in the home of the previous victim, in whose footsteps she seems fated to follow. Further cementing her fated relationship to the killer is their similarity of names, Laura being the face (*l'aura*) that Nora (*n'aura*) is unable to identify as the one threatening her. It is then appropriate that Laura's face—*the* face—is one of the few openly examined among the film's gallery of supporting players, which consists to a great extent of people viewed in silhouette, out of focus, or with their faces somewhat averted from the camera lens. Laura's face is also significant because it is her resemblance to the murder victim that first attracts Nora to her as she steps outside her apartment on Trinità dei Monti—a detail that makes no sense if Nora did not actually witness the death of her sister Emily. If she had witnessed the murder of Maria Straccianeve, as the film ultimately decides, then there is no point to the resemblance and the coincidence that Laura's sister was an earlier victim in the series of murders becomes too far-fetched.

Nora's adventure reaches its zenith of disorientation with the introduction of Landini—a magician-like name for a character who exists half the time in empty rooms on pre-recorded tapes. For a while, Landini's own enigma threatens to overwhelm the murder plot, especially in the striking sequence in which Nora responds to his invitation for a meeting at his apartment. Her harrowing visit to his empty digs—a series of rooms, all unfurnished and of a menacing whiteness, with a main corridor adorned with bare, swinging bulbs that tip the shadows left and right so that the walls appear to wobble and sway—is shot from abstract angles, incorporating only fractions of Nora's frightened expression. Nora follows Landini's disembodied voice through this expressionistic labyrinth, only to discover a tape recording which immediately dispels a believable encroachment of the supernatural, a moment anticipating Leandro's surprise revelation of the tape recorder inside the musical carousel in *Lisa and the Devil*.[6]

5 The same painting can be seen hanging in the home of Marcello Mastroianni's character in Pietro Germi's occasionally thriller-ish *Divorzio all'italiana/Divorce, Italian Style* (1961).

6 In the Bava canon, tape recorders tend to appear as demystifying contraptions and objects of betrayal (see *5 bambole per la luna d'agosto* and *Lisa and the Devil*), which probably says a good deal about the man's aversion to interviews.

This sequence is daring not only for its *avant-garde* framing, but for its perversity in generating chills from a setting that is the polar opposite of the traditional frightening atmosphere. It is bright rather than dark, clean rather than a chaos of cobwebs, clearly uninhabited, and it conjures its atmosphere of horror through distinctly contemporary trappings—lightbulbs, a typewriter, and a tape recorder. (In another of his films, 1982's *Tenebrae*, also starring John Saxon, Dario Argento would play at this game as well, staging all of its murders in broad daylight.) It's *La ragazza*'s most remarkable sequence, and one that ultimately exonerates Bava's decision to film in black-and-white; like the red and green makeup effects in *I vampiri* and *La maschera del demonio*, this sequence could not work so effectively in color. In color, Nora's own natural coloring would take the edge off the menace of this setting; in black-and-white, Nora is also colorless, and the more intensely colorless environment threatens to overwhelm her gray scales with opposite energies of black-and-white that seem powerful enough to absorb her very substance. Bava ends this sequence on a jolt of ironic comedy, by having Nora and Marcello activate the tape recorder they find, only to hear the comically accelerated playback of Adriano Celentano's sultry theme song, "*Furore*." One imagines that Bava may have conceived this wicked *dénouement* as a way of exacting revenge against a pop song that he was obliged to use.

The search for Landini continues at the printer's shop, and the subsequent scenes at the morgue and prison demonstrate Bava's gifts for cinematographic sleight-of-hand and economical *mise-en-scène* in the manner of the clinic scene in *I vampiri*. The bustling print shop consists of only two conjoined walls with opaque panels, through which the shadows cast by two crew members are visible, one of them operating an unseen piece of machinery (suggested by cardboard cut-out) while another walks in and out of view, carrying different things. Onscreen are the hero and heroine, a young woman who works there, and another figure bent over in the background of the shot; the illusion is completed with sound effects of an actual printing press. Likewise, later in the film, a courtroom is suggested by a single desk, a jail is evoked by a single framed set of bars, and a morgue is provided by a completely black set furnished with only four white-drawered cabinet fronts. These examples show how Bava and Giorgio Giovannini were able to conjure environments with a stark minimum of set decoration. At the same time, this reliance on scenic reduction—which recalls the expressionistic "bare essentials" *mise-en-scène* of William Cameron Menzies' *Invaders From Mars* (1953, revealed in the final moments to be a dream of its young hero)—could also reflect an abandoned intention of explaining the entire story as a literal nightmare (a theory supported by the film's abandoned original title).

When Landini finally steps out into the open to share his story with Nora, he is almost never lighted in a conventional, naturalistic manner. He stands out as a theatrical character—half haunted, half apparition himself. His reminiscences of the original Alphabet Murders investigation are illustrated entirely with distorted angles, lenses, and filters. The first (depicting the A murder) is an uncantered, slightly unfocused shot, with Vaselined periphery, filmed with a 40 mm lens to allow movement and composition in depth; the second (depicting the B murder) combines low-angle camera placement with a wide-angle 28 mm lens, bending the periphery and throwing the depth of the composition out of focus; the third (the Emily Craven murder) is a 24 or 25 mm lens shot, distorting the wide angle even more, while using the statically held "water glass" to mottle the image; the apprehension of Straccianeve is depicted in long-shot with a crystal-clear 40 mm lens, but the image is rendered liquid by the water-glass, which Bava (as always) manipulated in front of the lens himself. The remaining, expressionistic shots of Straccianeve's trial and cries of innocence are depicted with a series of close-up shots, similarly distorted with the water glass—each shot economically composed for maximum narrative impact, not unlike the panels of a comic book story.

The film's finale provides other opportunities for inventive lighting and suspense. According to director Jonathan Demme, Roger Corman once told him that the most psychologically unsettling image that could be put on the screen was a slightly angled shot of a closed door.[7] In this movie, Bava plants a locked room in the center of the Torranis' apartment and it looms so overtly in the set design (and scenario) that it fairly screams with psychological portent. Here, and in the cabinets and cupboards where Nora makes other



A CLEAR *view of the flashback to the original Alphabet Murders, seen in the film through Bava's "water glass."*

shocking discoveries, we see the first signs of what would become a recurring touchstone in Bava's *oeuvre*—secrets that lurk inside cupboards or behind ornately carved doors. It is impossible to know their specific relevance to Bava, but he offered one possibility when he once described the unpredictable atmosphere of his father's workshop, where he spent so much time as a child—a place where "you could open a drawer and find a wax figure inside, or find a lathe inside a cupboard, or a ball somewhere else."

When Nora finally enters this forbidden place, the lighting is made disorienting by the rocking luminance of a knocked-over lamp, which is doubled by its reflection in a mirror on the wall. As Nora sees, and reaches out to, the sweater whose fastenings match the button clutched in the dead hand of Maria Straccianeve, her outstretched arm is grabbed by Laura, whose face framed in a sphere (a button?) of light. (As is, incidentally, the dead face of Ethel, much earlier in the film.) Indeed, our Alphabet Killer is ultimately defeated by an outpouring of light, which is shown issuing through two bullet holes fired into her back through the once-locked study door. Two decades later, in the wake of Joel and Ethan Coen's *Blood Simple* (1984) and Lawrence Kasdan's *Silverado* (1985), shafts of light beaming laser-like through bullet-riddled walls became an action film cliché, particularly in Hong Kong movies. *La ragazza che sapeva troppo* stands out as one of the earliest uses of such imagery.

Tastefully and economically designed by Giovannini, Bava's film conveys much the same atmosphere of rococo elegance as their subsequent collaboration on the "*I telefono*" segment of *I tre volti della paura*, which would take Bava's *giallo* experiment to the next level. A close examination of the Torranis' apartment reveals that AIP donated some set dressing to the picture: in particular, a cloverleaf-patterned partition previously glimpsed in the dungeon catacombs of Roger Corman's *Pit and the Pendulum* (1961), which Giovannini would subsequently use again to dress Michèle Mercier's apartment and outer corridor in the "Telephone" segment of the AIP coproduced *I tre volti della paura.* But the film's outstanding set is undeniably Trinità dei Monti and the Spanish Steps, one of the few exterior locations ever filmed by Bava that truly seems an extension of his cinematic universe.



A PATROLMAN *revives Nora, only to find her hysterical at the memory of the murder she witnessed.*

La ragazza che sapeva troppo was the last of Bava's films to credit Ubaldo Terzano as "camera assistant." For his remaining collaborations with Bava, Terzano would always be formally credited as "director of photography," which would seem to confirm Armando Govoni's view that Terzano has not received his due recognition for what he contributed to the look of Bava's 1959–65 period. It is true that, neither before nor after that time frame, can anything be found in Bava's work to parallel the strikingly fragmented, cubist framing of the sequence of Nora's visit to Landini's vacant apartment; however, such framing can be found in Dario Argento's *Profondo rosso* as a heavily perspiring David Hemmings attempts to bait a killer by sitting at his piano—and Luigi Kuveiller's "assistant cameraman" on that picture was none other than Ubaldo Terzano.

Nevertheless, all cinematographic decisions were dependent upon Bava's ultimate approval, so the look of the films remained under his firm guidance. As Govoni explains, "Mario was a born director of photography, and that aspect of his personality was always the most important." Perhaps, just as novice screenwriters in the Italian film industry of the day broke in by signing their scripts with the names of their teachers, Terzano's credit was assigned to Bava during a period of professional apprenticeship.

One thing is undeniable: the films that Bava made with Terzano—produced at a time when his own additional responsibilities as director forced him to relegate more and more responsibility to his camera assistant—are his most lavishly beautiful works. These films all share a certain velvety quality of lighting and suave assuredness of camera movement that Bava never achieved with other cameramen, including himself.

After *La ragazza che sapeva troppo*, Bava would not work again as a nominal director of photography until *Il rosso segno della follia/Hatchet for the Honeymoon* in 1969. Considering what his status as a cameraman had been throughout the 1950s, one cannot help but wonder what a career Bava might have enjoyed, had he not accepted the opportunity to direct. But he was hereafter committed to his identity as a director.

7 Demme says this in his audio commentary for the Criterion Collection's LaserDisc and DVD release of his film *The Silence of the Lambs.*

Music

La ragazza che sapeva troppo follows the pattern of many popular features of its era by having a theme song, though it does not lyrically address either the title or the shooting title of the movie. Written by the songwriting team of Adricel and Vivarelli, "*Furore*" was recorded by Italian pop phenomenon Adriano Celentano.

Born in Milan in 1938, Celentano first entered the public eye in 1957, at the Italian Rock 'n' Roll Festival, where his well-received performance resulted in his signing by the Saar label. His first release, "*Ciao Ti Dirò,*" was a major local hit, and it was not long before Italian producers sought him to appear onscreen. Celentano made his screen debut in *I frenetici* (1958), and he subsequently made a memorable cameo appearance as himself in *La dolce vita*. By 1962, contemporaneously with "*Furore,*" he had become successful enough to found his own recording label, Clan Celentano—almost a decade before The Beatles made international headlines by announcing the formation of Apple. Throughout the rest of the '60s, Celentano became as beloved as an actor in Italy as a recording artist, though his work never had much cachet for export. One of his better-known screen roles is as the hapless hero of Dario Argento's *Le cinque giornate/The Five Days of Milan* (1971). He continues to act and make top-selling recordings today.

"*Furore*" is a sultry, urban ballad similar in execution to Gene Pitney's chart-topping hit, "Town Without Pity." Pitney's song, composed by Dmitri Tiomkin and Ned Washington, was itself the Oscar-nominated theme of a 1961 feature by director Gottfried Reinhardt, and it was re-recorded in a special Italian language version ("*Città spietata*"), so the resemblance of the Celentano recording may not be purely coincidental. *"Furore"* was prominently used in the film's promotion, and provided the sole soundtrack of the movie's Italian trailer.

The remainder of the score was written, once again, by Galatea's resident composer Roberto Nicolosi. Like Nicolosi's earlier scores for Bava, *La ragazza che sapeva troppo* consists mostly of short accent cues, used primarily to soften transitions from one scene to another, or to emphasize suspense and other interior tensions. Consequently, while it doesn't amount to a terribly aggressive or memorable score, it occasionally packs tremendous atmospheric value. The murky, churning, hypnotic accompaniment to the murder, for example—with its gradually accentuated, soaring strings (recorded with the sweet severity one associates with Riz Ortolani)—is a standout cue, and Bava wisely replays it under the scene in Trinità dei Monti when Nora recounts the details of the murder to the incredulous Marcello. (Incidentally, Bava himself makes an Hitchcockian cameo appearance during this sequence, passing behind Roman and Saxon.) During the scene of Nora preparing a trap of string and talcum powder, the extended accompaniment takes the form of a bluesy jazz piece, suggesting that Nicolosi's real passion may have been for less orchestral, more contemporary forms of music.



FRENCH *grande affiche, unsigned though the anonymous stone lithographer based his design on the original Italian due-foglia by Sandro Simeoni.*

Variants

La ragazza che sapeva troppo was released in Italy, by Warner Bros., on February 28, 1963. It was a poorly timed premiere, as the world was riveted that weekend to television coverage of the escalating tensions between the United States and Russia, as the discovery of an estimated 17,000 Soviet troops stationed in Cuba edged the two world powers toward the frightening possibility of nuclear war. Consequently, Bava's innovative thriller closed after a single week, earning only 55 million *lire* [$34,000], thus failing to recoup its budget, and making it the lowest-earning release of his directorial career. The poor performance of the European release did nothing to hasten American International's release of the picture stateside; in fact, the picture would wait fifteen months, enduring radical tinkering, before seeing the light of a movie theater projector.

For all its points of interest, *La ragazza che sapeva troppo* is not the definitive version of this production. Especially when compared to *Evil Eye*, the alternative cut that AIP would eventually release, *La ragazza* seems not only incomplete, but possessed of such an entirely different character that one can't help pondering which of the two versions is most authentic. For example, throughout the Italian version, the heroine is called "Nora Davis," but the AIP version contains a scene that gives her surname as "Drowson"—so which do we accept?[8]

The early part of the Italian version, in particular, is hobbled by a preponderance of abrupt jump cuts and impatient, hastening dissolves, offering a rare glimpse of the usually gifted editor Mario Serandrei working at wit's end. The Italian version was also pruned of several ironic asides to Italy's Fascist past, and caricatures significant to Bava and his personal life, which suggest that the director may have felt capable of speaking more freely to audiences abroad. AIP's reworking of *La ragazza che sapeva troppo* was not simply a matter of cutting explicit gore and maudlin romance and rescoring the picture. This time, the American edition is actually longer, rescuing some excellent scenes from the cutting room floor, which flesh out the story and characters in valuable ways, while also conveying the sense of the romantic thriller that Bava personally thought ridiculous.

Unfortunately for film historians, the professional correspondence of American International Pictures is presently under the strict lock-and-key of Sony Entertainment, and is not accessible for research purposes. In most cases, it is possible to make an educated guess about what transpired between Bava and AIP during the productions on

which they were partnered, either on the basis of the finished product or from comments made by Bava or others in interviews. In the case of *La ragazza che sapeva troppo* and its transformation into *Evil Eye*, however, there is less documentation than usual to tell us what happened, and why. But by connecting some dots, we can learn a bit more.

The fact that the film began shooting in the spring of 1962 (according to Armando Govoni's production diary) and was not delivered to the Italian censor until February 10, 1963—nearly a full year afterwards—indicates, at the very least, that some additional post-production filming was done later in the year. (One scene that appears only in the AIP version shows Leticia Roman and Robert Buchanan bundled up in warm-looking overcoats, which would not have been necessary for spring shooting in Rome. John Saxon is also conspicuously absent from the scene, though he accompanied them in the dinner scene immediately preceding it.) The ending of the American version differs from that of the Italian one, but Govoni recalls that both were filmed during principal photography in the spring, and both do feature Saxon—who, if reshoots were done, was evidently not flown over for them.

Evil Eye is sometimes touted as a "comic" version of *La ragazza che sapeva troppo*, but this is not entirely accurate. Whereas the Italian version is more or less a straight, if somewhat overwritten, suspense picture, *Evil Eye* is more of a suspense *soufflé*—a "*brilliante* horror thriller," as John Saxon has aptly termed it—lighter in touch, more representative of the expectations of a young American tourist visiting a foreign country, and it is built around a far more vivacious and spirited heroine. Of the two versions, *Evil Eye* also seems more expressive of Bava's own personality—a complete turnabout from the usual state of AIP's "revised" versions of his films.



US *one-sheet poster, art by Albert Kallis.*

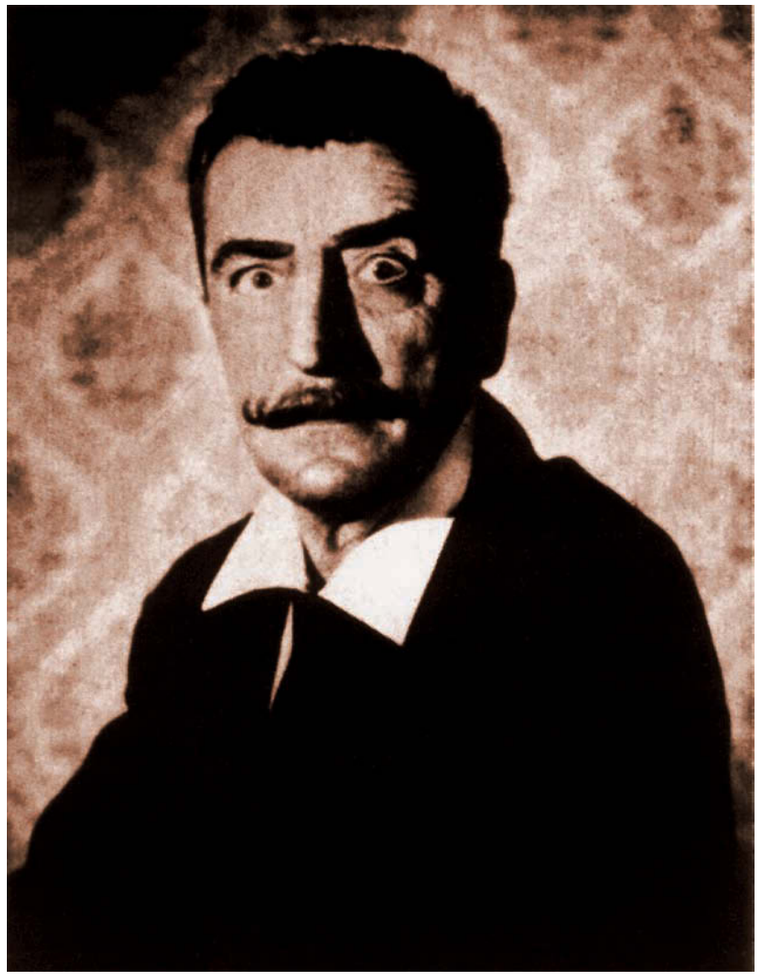
8 To further complicate matters, the Warner Pathé pressbook for the film's British release refers to the film's heroine as "Nora Dralston."

The following is a list of the points where *Evil Eye* differs from *La ragazza che sapeva troppo*:

• The first obvious change is that *Evil Eye* has been rescored by Les Baxter. The opening shot of the TWA jet (like the shot that opens Bava's 1972 film *Baron Blood*, though here the plane is flying right-to-left) is scored with light, piquant music that turns spooky as the title *Evil Eye* looms onscreen.

• Inside the plane, the camera travels down the aisle, eavesdropping on the thoughts of passengers: an old woman in a flowered hat is knitting, telling herself that she will learn to do this, even if it kills her; an intense man in sunglasses signals for a stewardess while adding up figures in his head; a plain, middle-aged woman daydreams about Italian fashions ("the best in the world now") and buying a dress in Rome that Jackie Kennedy might wear; an elderly man thinks in Italian; a man with a nervous stomach worries about the jet's engines; and then we come to the stern, cold countenance of a beautiful young woman, thinking, "What an idiot! He should never have washed the blood off that knife in a bathtub! Even a public washroom would have been better . . ." This is our heroine, Nora Drowson, and before we get the wrong idea about her, the camera pans down to the *giallo* paperback tightly held in her white-knuckled hands. (The Italian version cuts almost immediately to Nora, and is narrated by a third-person male voice; the AIP version is narrated entirely with Nora's own thoughts, bringing the viewer much closer to her. Leticia Roman dubbed her own performance.)

• The scene between Nora and her fellow passenger was acted in English. Whereas the Italian version cuts to the airport after she accepts his cigarette, giving a cold impression of her, the AIP version moves into a close-up as she smiles to herself: "Smooth, isn't he? But nice. Ah, Rome . . . Michelangelo, da Vinci, Marcello Mastroianni! The sun, the ruins . . . A whole month! No typewriter, no switchboard, just Rome! I know it will be wonderful!" She reaches for a map of the continental



THE PORTRAIT *of Uncle Augusto was modelled by Mario Bava himself, hiding behind a false handlebar mustache.*

boot in the pocket in front of her, and the camera zooms in—followed by a shot of the jet landing. (Only in the AIP version do we learn the length of Nora's projected stay, or details of the kind of life she leads in America.)

• There is an additional shot of the team of narcotics officers conferring with airport security police before locating the queue where they make their arrest of Nora's fellow passenger. Baxter's accompaniment is nonstop, energetic, and upbeat. All references to drugs are eliminated from the dialogue as the man is arrested, as is the shot of multiple packs of Kents hidden inside his suitcase; consequently, we don't understand why Nora is so eager to get rid of the packet of smokes passed on to her.

When the packet she drops is returned by a helpful guard, we cut outside as a rush of new arrivals bolt for taxicabs. Nora is knocked out of a cab by one pushy man, and bumps heads with another, knocking her to the ground. She opts to take a bus instead, but refuses to let the driver carry her luggage, being fearful of foreigners. (When she bumps heads with Marcello on their first meeting a moment later, it mirrors this earlier bump.)

• The dialogue during Nora's reunion with Ethel is also different. Though she refuses to kiss Nora in the Italian version for fear of giving her a cold, here her first words are, "Well? Aren't you going to kiss me?" (With the English dubbing in place, it's easy to see that all three actors in this sequence were speaking English on-set.) Ethel's conversation turns immediately to her late husband, Uncle Augusto: "Somehow I haven't been well since Augusto died. You knew him, didn't you? Of course not; you weren't even born then . . . His picture is hanging in your room. I couldn't bear looking at his picture; it made me too sad." She excuses Nora and throws a feather boa around her shoulders as Nora and Marcello leave the room, saying, "And Marcello—pretty girl, isn't she?" The scene ends with a shot of the feathered Ethel stroking her cat.

After Marcello advises Nora on the precariousness of Ethel's health and exits, she steps into close-up and gushes, "Two hours in Rome and I've already had my hand kissed twice! Ahhh!" Fade to black.

We then fade in on a scene later that night: Nora is lying in bed, on her stomach, reading her book on a stormy night. There is a storm raging, causing the lights to go on and off—mostly off, so she has lighted a candle. She reaches into her purse for a cigarette and finds her own pack empty. Using the candle, she lights one of the Kents she was given on the plane instead. She continues to read the thriller, written in the blunt style of Mickey Spillane, the hard-boiled prose segueing in and out with rhapsodic thoughts of Marcello Bassi and how he kissed her hand. She decides to go to bed.

Nora takes off her robe, revealing a short black nightgown, and extinguishes her Kent cigarette after wincing at its odd taste. As she bends over to check her face in a mirror, the oval portrait of Uncle Augusto on the wall leers at her jutting backside. As she walks from one side of the room to another, the eyes of the antique photo pursue her, and when she bends over again, she feels her late uncle's heated gaze and turns about—only to see his eyes feigning innocence. "Oh no, you don't—you Peeping Tom!" she admonishes, covering the portrait with a cloth.

This is an outrageous scene for several reasons, but mostly because the portrait of Uncle Augusto is played by Mario Bava himself, wearing a false handlebar mustache for this second (and far more noticeable) Hitchcockian cameo. The scene is evidently modelled after a comic scene in Preston

Sturges' *Sullivan's Travels* (1941), in which the portrait of a dead husband reacts to his widow's amorous overtures toward her hobo handyman (Joel McCrea); it is interesting to note, too, that the man in that earlier portrait was Paul Jones, Sturges' associate producer—in other words, a similar private joke. Since Bava had no public recognition value at the time, especially not in America, his cameo was surely intended as a private joke, yet he did not sanction it to be included in the version distributed in Rome, the only place where the joke could have been fully appreciated for what it was. Bava was, I believe, using his anonymity—consciously or unconsciously—to venture a personal statement. The character of Augusto's wife Ethel—overweight, jovial, but also reclusive, hypochondriacal, fretful about her heart palpitations, fearful of excitement—corresponds perfectly to the kind of person Bava's wife Iole had become at this stage of her life, and Bava's depiction of himself as a man with a "roving eye" (indeed, as a *photograph* with a roving eye!) would seem to make an admission of the pleasure he took in voyeurism.

This "sight gag" clearly impressed Arkoff and Nicholson at AIP, whose Edgar Allan Poe and "Beach Party" series had separately evolved a tradition of scenes involving peculiar family portraits. In *Bikini Beach* (1964), made almost two years after *La ragazza che sapeva troppo*, a portrait of Keenan Wynn's father responds to his son kissing Martha Hyer in a series of similar reaction shots.

• After Ethel dies, there is an additional shot of Nora rushing to the window, where she looks outside and is illuminated by flashes of lightning. There is also a much longer shot of her running outside and down the steps of the Piazza di Spagna. After she revives from being knocked out by the purse snatcher, there is an additional sustained profile shot of Nora as she steps out into the open, where she hears the woman's scream. As Torrani pulls the knife from the woman's body, Nora faints—the shot of Torrani throwing the knife away and dragging the corpse back into the shadows is cut.

When the patrolman rushes to Nora's assistance, the dialogue is rewritten so that her original, vivid rantings about the body lying in a pool of blood (all presumably washed away by the rain) are replaced by incoherent, alcoholic ravings. Likewise, in the scene of Marcello revisiting the Piazza di Spagna with Nora, his effusions about Rome are replaced by upbeat music. Nora's painstaking description of the murder she witnessed is also presented in shorter form.

• The funeral sequence opens with an additional low-angle shot of the pallbearers lowering the coffin into the ground. (One of the men looks quite a bit like actor Andrea Checchi, and may be his son Enrico, who served as Bava's personal assistant on the production.) There is also an additional shot of Landini, viewed from behind, watching the proceedings at a distance, from behind a tree. Nora also additionally discusses with the priest the murder she witnessed, and is brought to tears by thoughts of the murdered woman in whom the police have refused to believe. After Nora is taken inside the Piazza apartment by Laura, there is a longer shot of Landini watching from the steps outside—it actually shows his face, as opposed to the Italian version, which picks up the shot only after his back turns to climb the stairs in retreat. (Though Baxter scored the murder scene with original music, for this shot of Landini he employs a vertiginous theme very much like the theme Nicolosi used to score the murder.)

• The shot revealing the photograph of Torrani (the apparent murderer, at this point in the story) is introduced differently. The Italian version cuts away from Laura's insistence that Nora stay in her apartment while she's away in Berne ("Your mother will be more than happy!"), gathering her in a friendly embrace and walking her offscreen. The AIP version continues the shot, to reveal the framed photo displayed atop a piano. The Italian version cuts from the ominous shot of Torrani's locked study door to the shot of the photograph, implying that the photo (and the truth of Torrani's identity and role in the murder) resides behind that door. Bava also executes a lap dissolve, so that the photo vanishes from the frame before our eyes. In the AIP version, we cut from the door to the empty picture frame. Instead of listening to "*Furore*" on her record player, Nora listens to a Les Baxter instrumental. The scene with the portière is followed by an exterior shot of her exiting the apartment and locking the gate, which extends into the shot of Landini hesitantly walking down the steps.

• When the phone rings after Nora's accidental discovery of the newspaper clippings and alphabet blocks, the caller says nothing in the AIP version—eliminating the important line "D . . . as in Death?"

• The restaurant scene with Dr. Alessi is also altered. The AIP version opens with a close shot of a turkey being carved as Alessi describes a form of brain surgery used to solve mental problems. As it appears in the AIP version, the scene suggests that Alessi harbors some lustful feelings for Nora, as he repeatedly clutches and holds

ITALIAN *fotobusta.*



her hand, much to Marcello's annoyance. (The Italian version explains these reaction shots as expressions of Marcello's pragmatic impatience with supernatural mumbo-jumbo.)

• This scene is followed by another, which does not appear in the Italian version at all—and, as mentioned earlier, appears to have been added to the picture later in post-production, closer to the end of the year. Here, on a different night, so cold that you can see the actors' breath in the night air, Dr. Alessi arranges a private meeting with Nora at "a place that provokes in me an effect much as that which you experienced the other night, a form of resurrection of the memory . . . As I stand here, I can feel a toga on my shoulders, a wreath of laurel upon my brow, I stand awaiting my chariot . . ."

He pats, smooths, caresses her hands, but she breaks away and confesses her fear that she is going to become the killer's next victim.

"But my dear!" Alessi says, "the last killing was more than ten years ago, and the killer vanished after the Craven murder! And even if he were to reappear, it would be a long time before he got to the letter R!"

Nora pivots to face the camera and says, "But you don't understand, Professor—my name isn't Rowson, it's Drowson with a D!" (Naturally, this scene could have no counterpart in the Italian version, in which Nora's surname is Davis.)

She then steps out of frame, revealing in the far distance the famous Bocca della Verità ("Mouth of Truth") at the Chiesa di Santa Maria in Cosmedin, a mask-like stone carving with an open mouth, which Gregory Peck famously used to tease Audrey Hepburn in William Wyler's *Roman Holiday* (1953).

• This exchange is directly followed by a long-shot of Nora returning to the Torrani apartment after dark; Landini, again viewed from behind, steps into the foreground to light a cigarette. Nora brightens the room, closes the door, and looks cautiously about the apartment, before and after locking the door. A wide-angle lens mildly distorts the interior. She walks to her bed, turns on a lamp and removes her coat—and the phone rings, until she unplugs it. After testing the locked room's door handle, she proceeds to set the string and talcum powder trap, but in this version, there is no narration (not even Nora's interior monologue) to explain what she's doing. Baxter's musical accompaniment here is mechanical and a bit slapstick, with repetitive, honking horns, woodblock, xylophone, and underpinnings of woozy trombone—it sounds very much like a recycled cue from Jacques Tourneur's *The Comedy of Terrors*, which AIP released the same year.

• The montage of Marcello (his finger bandaged after he falls into the trap) guiding Nora around the historical landmarks of Rome contains a few additional shots; one shows Marcello indicating a main thoroughfare and pantomiming a Nazi goose-step, another finds them shopping, another shows the poor beau weighted down with toys and other presents, straggling along after Nora, who is delightedly riding in a pony wagon.

• After Marcello takes Nora back to her apartment, there is an additional shot of him walking down the Spanish steps and pausing to light a cigarette. His bandage interferes with the procedure long enough for him to see Nora dash back out in answer to Landini's message. Once she steps out of the elevator in his building, her approach to his apartment is extended by a couple of extra atmospheric shots. When Marcello catches up with her and they discover the tape recorder, the joke Bava made at the expense of "*Furore*" is missing, replaced by a different shot of the couple playing the tape recording that Nora heard resonating through the empty apartment. The following scene at the Torrani apartment is extended by Nora's suggestion that they stay awake (it's 5:30 a.m.) and track down Landini at his hotel in the morning ("Why don't you wait for me there, and I'll go take a shower, okay?").

• At the hotel, the desk clerk's assumption that Marcello and Nora have come for a room, and Marcello's offended reaction, are both cut. After the scene at the printers' shop, there is an additional scene where they follow the printer's lead to a restaurant, where a dishwasher tells them he "just left a few minutes ago" in search of "a waiter who owes him some money."

• This scene is then followed by the very strange beach scene—where Marcello's sullen stare and advancing moves momentarily frighten Nora into thinking that he's the killer, when in fact he's just boiling over with sexual frustration. The scene is made all the more peculiar by an awkwardly filmed kiss that shows Saxon and Roman rolling down the beach in a clutch, being struck by the surf, and standing in the foam, before resuming their kiss. In both versions of the film, this scene feels gratuitous and



THIS US *lobby card pictures the alternate American ending.*

awkwardly placed, as if AIP had urgently telegraphed Bava to find some way of getting Leticia Roman into a bikini. The placement of the scene, after a sleepless night and the couple's early morning pursuit of Landini, drains all the urgency out of their search, and it's unflattering (especially to herself) for Nora to show such sudden distrust of Marcello's intentions, when he has already suffered so much just to be near her.

• Their kiss cuts to their goodnight kiss on Nora's doorstep, where Marcello presses to be invited inside. When she sends him away with another kiss of her hand ("You'll know when the time is right by the sound of my voice, by the way I say your name . . ."), the shot is extended by a close-up of Nora smiling fondly after him, and an additional shot of Marcello stepping into a shot of the Trinità dei Monti, his shoulders slumped with dejection. When she calls Marcello back because there's a man in her apartment, she calls his name twice—the way he expects it will sound when she's ready to make love—and there's an additional shot of him turning around, looking incredulous at his good fortune, an impression soon to be corrected. It's a clever moment.

• Aside from some minor re-editing of shared scenes, there are no more obvious divergences from the Italian continuity until the scene at the Forte Italico. Here, after Nora and Landini go their separate ways, Nora is pursued by a burly stranger, causing her to walk faster and faster past the ornamental statues of athletes. She finally halts out of terror and exasperation, and the brute turns out to be an ordinary masher ("Hey, beautiful, you've sure got some shape on you, all right!") She turns and clobbers him with her purse—which Bava follows with a zoom into a soccer ball gripped by one of the ornamental statues (the "kick in the balls" symbolism of this shot is actually quite daring for the time)—and as she storms away, the man calls to her from the racing track: "Hey, American, let me know if you get lonely!" Again, one gets the sense that Bava was expressing himself more candidly with this scene than he cared to be heard in his homeland—juxtaposing the brutish reality of Roman athletes with the propagandistic exaggerations of the Fascist era statuary, and perhaps also venturing a comment of Rome's Fascist past, as well—and thus, the scene only appears in the AIP version.



THIS ITALIAN *manifesto curiously shows Milo Quesada riding a cable car with his murdered lover—a scene not included in the Italian version of the film.*

• A terrible miscalculation in both versions of the movie is the reintroduction of Laura before the climax, as she returns from Berne to console her housesitter. In the AIP version there is additional dialogue between Laura and Marcello, in which it is confirmed that Prof. Torrani will be returning to Rome that evening. Marcello suggests that they all have lunch the next day. Nora's discovery of the newspaper story about the dead woman found in the river, whom she recognizes as the victim of the murder she witnessed, is extended with a close-up of her shocked expression.

• There are additional shots of Nora returning to the Torranis' apartment, which is now strangely unoccupied, and longer deliberation before she decides to try the door handle of the locked room. The subsequent scene of Laura's crazed confession is also longer, providing a more effective showcase for Valentina Cortese's alternately tender and savage performance (which she dubbed herself). She wears a leopard skin dress in this scene, which contrasts nicely with the snakeskin coat worn by Nora in the early scenes.

• Finally, the AIP version is distinguished by a completely different ending. Bava executes a clever match-cut from the twin bullet holes shining light through the study door with the twin lenses of a man's binoculars. The man is a jealous husband, spying on his beloved, whom he sees riding the sky rail with her lover. Nora and Marcello are also on the sky rail, planning their future together. He promises to marry her on the condition that she give up murder mysteries ("No more reading about them, no more talking about them . . ."). When the jealous man boards the rail himself and fires several bullets into his wife and the other man, Marcello calls out to other witnesses that he's a doctor and will come right back to be of assistance. He tells Nora not to be upset, to which she coquettishly asks, "Why? Did something happen?"

In addition to depicting side-by-side a possible "before and after" of marriage, this alternate ending roots the proceedings even more explicitly in fantasy and hallucination, by suggesting that Nora's insatiable appetite for murder mysteries, her overactive imagination, have been traceable to her lack of a sexual outlet. Now, with a lover, she has no need for other sources of arousal. Indeed, the Freudian interpretation would be to relate the movie's central image of horror—the knife planted bloodily in Maria's back—to a fear of sexual penetration. Now that Marcello (who has proven his patience and gentleness) has consented to be her husband, Nora can stake a claim in the real world, so to speak—but the dreamy, kittenish look on her face (and the fact that she failed to see an attempted murder that took place in plain sight, in broad daylight) indicates that Nora has simply exchanged one fantasy for another, and is probably already imagining herself as she will look in her wedding gown.

In both versions of the finale, Marcello takes advantage of their marriage plans to insist that Nora give up her diet of murder mysteries. It is an aspect of the scene that surely had personal resonance for Bava, whose wife did not approve of the "trash" he read at home.

Although the version eventually released by AIP was lighter in tone, more tongue-in-cheek than the Italian version, the company rejected a direct translation of its original, parodic title in favor of the more ominous-sounding *Evil Eye* (or *The Evil Eye*, as print campaigns called it). It may seem odd that the spoofy title would appear on the more serious cut, and vice versa, but *La ragazza che sapeva troppo* adhered to the ongoing pattern of ironic (one might even say "post-modern" or "recursive") titles given to each of Bava's Italian releases thus far. When it was released in May 1964, *Evil Eye* was treated to one of the most uninspired and poorly executed AIP ad campaigns ever; the artwork also committed the cardinal sin of revealing the killer's identity. For whatever reason—bad campaign, black-and-white photography, indifferent word of mouth—*Evil Eye* did not fare well commercially.

Bava's thriller found its most enthusiastic reception in *auteur*-conscious France, where *La Fille qui en Savait Trop* was released in the summer of 1964. In the pages of *Midi-Minuit Fantastique*, critic Jérome Caulandre published an influential review that put forth a Freudian analysis of the film's imagery. "The matter of Mario Bava . . . is in fact much more subtle than one might lazily suppose when confronted by the vision and superficial approach of this film," he wrote. "Much more than a common 'banal police procedural' or a 'fourpenny thriller,' here we are presented with a film that needs to be interpreted entirely on the level of its images, a film that provides nothing less than the illustrative details of a psychopathological case transposed to the romantic level. In this way it portrays, let us not be afraid to say the words, the loss of a young woman's virginity . . . That is the true subject of *La Fille qui en Savait Trop* (a title which I personally find sufficiently explicit), a particularly bold and perilous subject that Bava, thanks to his skilled and incisive use of transparent symbols, milks with unusual control and a grand sense of humor."[9]

In a point worth making, Caulandre's short but insightful review was accompanied by a cast and credit listing which identified Leticia Roman as playing "Nora Drowson" (the character's name in the AIP version) and Valentina Cortese as playing "Laura Curtis." These Americanized names, and Caulandre's reference to the film's humor, would suggest that the French release was a dubbed version of the AIP recut, but it was in fact *a French-dubbed version of the original Italian director's cut*. The only explanation for Caulandre's comments is that the French version may represent a *third* version of the film: the more serious Italian cut made lighter and wittier in the French dubbing, which incorporated the Americanized names concocted for the AIP version.

Perhaps as a result of the film's poor US performance, and because its black-and-white photography gave it the look of a B-picture by the mid-1960s, *Evil Eye* was further withheld from a British release until the autumn of 1965. The belated Warner Pathé/Anglo-Amalgamated release actually followed Bava's next two, highly colored films into UK release, which further worked against it, giving it the appearance of an anachronistic, creative retreat. Even so, their unchronologic exposure to *Black Sabbath* and *Night Is the Phantom* primed the British press to take any new film from Bava with a measure of seriousness it might not have been accorded if released three years earlier.



ITALIAN *manifesto emphasizing top-billed John Saxon.*

An unsigned review appearing in *Monthly Film Bulletin* pegged *Evil Eye* as "a tolerably silly but really quite enjoyable thriller . . . individual scenes are often given an electric charge by the broodingly atmospheric photography . . . Leticia Roman is adequately distraught as the harried heroine, but the film really belongs to that excellent and much-neglected actress Valentina Cortese, whose final 5 minutes of gleeful histrionics are quite in the Joan Crawford class."

In the September 1965 issue of *Films & Filming,* Raymond Durgnat expressed what may have been the earliest signs of Mario Bava being taken seriously by the English press: "Mario Bava, like Roger Corman, is an intelligent director who's often betrayed by his subjects. Is he too content to accept the subjects he's given, or does he lack a really good script sense? Too often, as in *Black Sabbath* or *The Wonders of Aladdin*, he seems ready to take on slightly rehashed clichés and 'try to do something with them' by little variations of style when he would do far better to tear up his scripts and have them rewritten by a first-class writer . . . Without trying to start a Bava 'cult' (though it would be as justified as a Corman one), his films, like Corman's, zigzag from fascinating to awful, for much the same reasons . . . It's a pity because Bava has tried many fascinating things. He photographs familiar Roman tourist-spots so as to give them a macabre, deserted atmosphere. Memory images are treated to some rather fetching distortions, Leticia Roman's lightly agreeable personality . . . keys the film's offbeat humor, like the girl's doctor–admirer continuously pointing his ridiculously bandaged finger at her as they chat. The film mischievously touches on a sore point or two in Italy's history, as when the camera strays through the huge, ugly Fascist era statuary at the Mussolini forum . . . if Bava needs a really good scriptwriter, he certainly deserves one."[10] Durgnat's review also made reference to some of the Freudian analysis given the film by Jérome Caulandre in *Midi-Minuit Fantastique*, unaware

that he had seen a substantially different version of the picture.

Never wasteful, AIP had registered the *Girl Who Knew Too Much* title with the Writers Guild of America while the film was still in production. Though they never used it in connection with Bava's film, they later awarded it to a completely unrelated picture which they co-produced with British impresario Harry Alan Towers. Distributed under the Commonwealth United soubriquet. *The Girl Who Knew Too Much* (1969) was a spy spoof starring Adam West, Nancy Kwan and Robert Alda, directed by Francis D. Lyon (*Cult of the Cobra, Destination Inner Space*). Released into a marketplace distinguished by a new breed of progressive adult releases like *Midnight Cowboy*, *The Girl Who Knew Too Much* looked quite a few years out of date when it was brand new, and it also fared poorly.



MEXICAN *lobby card.*

In October 2002, when Turner Classic Movies showed it as part of a four-title Mario Bava retrospective, *La ragazza che sapeva troppo* was revealed as another title significantly altered to enable a 2000 copyright for its acquisitor, Alfredo Leone. Though the dramatic content of the picture remained untouched, the opening titles were once again relocated to the end of the movie, with only Leone's presentational credit and "A Mario Bava Film" preceding the story. To be absolutely accurate, the credits were removed entirely and recreated over a freeze-frame of the closing shot of the seminarian, as the end music played. This change appears to have been affected in order to wholly remove Adriano Celentano's song *"Furore,"* a loss that deals an important blow to the film's atmosphere and its story's specific time and place in history.

The film was released (as *The Girl Who Knew Too Much*) on DVD in the United States in 2001, marking the long-overdue US debut of Bava's director's cut, with the Celentano song intact. One hopes that this revised 2000 edition will not eventually replace the more integral version in circulation. One also hopes that the superior *Evil Eye* version will someday resurface, but since AIP's (now Sony's) American rights to that unique version have expired, no one seems to know exactly who, if anyone, owns the US edition.

Legacy

Though *Evil Eye* went unrecognized in America, *La ragazza che sapeva troppo* inspired a filmic revolution in Italy. The film was a major inspiration for the young Dario Argento, though he now vehemently denies it.

"I do get rather bored with people going on about Mario Bava," Argento complained to Alan Jones. "We didn't really meet properly until I started my fifth picture, *Profondo rosso*. Some influences in his costume design, perhaps . . . but we worked differently. Bava is more baroque than I normally like. Bava's first work was in the *pepla* and he could never lose that obvious style. I was never influenced by Bava's *La ragazza che sapeva troppo*, as some have said." [11]

These protests aside, when one watches *La ragazza che sapeva troppo* today, the archetypes of Argento's "universe" are present everywhere: the American-in-Rome protagonist who witnesses a crime their perceptions have not fully grasped or processed . . . the killer's infantile shrine of talismans to his/her primal trauma . . . the crank phone calls from evil people with high, squeaky voices . . . the typewriter loaded with a sheet of paper bearing the words, "I must stop myself before I kill again" . . . the series of amusing, everyday characters met along the way of investigating the crime . . . the unresolved clue that cannot be fished free of the backtides of memory . . . "I'm sure I've seen this button before—but where?" Argento's entire career has been built upon protagonists who ask such questions, and showing these things.

Argento is a *Maestro* in his own right—he is, without question, the most important sustaining force in the history of the *giallo*—but his disavowal of Bava's influence is preposterous. Thanks to torchbearers like Argento, Lucio Fulci, and Sergio Martino, the *giallo* would become the most enduring of all film genres native to Italy, outlasting neorealism, white telephone movies, *pepla,* even the Spaghetti Western.

Ultimately, *La ragazza che sapeva troppo* marks a birth pang of the *giallo*, but not the birth itself. The genre would not achieve full flower for another couple of years, when it reached the defining moment of Bava's *Sei donne per l'assassino*.

9 Jérome Caulandre, "La Fille qui en Savait Trop," *Midi-Minuit Fantastique* 9, July 1964, 119–20.

10 Raymond Durgnat, "The Evil Eye," *Films & Filming* 11:12, September 1965, 27–28.

11 Alan Jones, *Mondo Argento* (London, UK: Midnight Media, 1996), 1-74.



FRENCH *affiche for Alberto De Martino's PERSEO L'INVINCIBILE, art by Constantin Belinsky.*

PERSEO L'INVINCIBILE

The Medusa Against the Son of Hercules

IN THE AUTUMN of 1962, between the main shooting schedule of *La ragazza che sapeva troppo* and the reshoots that followed in the winter, Mario Bava agreed to assist his friend Italo Zingarelli on his next production, *Perseo l'invincibile*, which he and co-producer Emo Bistolfi were about to make in tandem with Copercines of Madrid. The Italian-Spanish co-production would reunite Richard Harrison and Leo Anchóriz, the stars of the successful *Il gladiatore invincibile*. Mario's father Eugenio was also recruited to serve as a technical advisor, *Perseo* being one of very few films on which he accepted screen billing.

Although the main titles list five screenwriters—Mario Guerra, Alberto De Martino, Ernesto Gastaldi, Luciano Martino, and José Mallorqui Figueroa, and a sixth individual credited with having the idea (Edoardo Giorgio Conti)—the author of the original treatment was Gastaldi, a 28-year-old screenwriter who had authored the first commercially successful Italian horror film: Piero Regnoli's *L'amante del vampiro/The Vampire and the Ballerina* (1960).







"I had previously written another movie for Alberto De Martino—*Akiko* [1961]," Gastaldi says, "but it was during my 'black' period and I wasn't able to sign it; Ugo Guerra did." To explain Gastaldi's words: at the time he entered the Italian film industry, it was customary for new screenwriters to break into the business as ghost writers, delivering scripts that were signed by established screenwriters. In this case, Gastaldi's early scripts (about twenty of them, by his count) were signed by Ugo Guerra (b. 1920), one of his teachers at the Roman film school, Centro Sperimentale di Cinematografica. In the Italian vernacular of the time, this phase was called a "black period," a non-PC term denoting a period of professional servitude. With this in mind, we can see that it is possible that the highly prolific Ennio De Concini may not have been personally involved in some of the pictures bearing his name as screenwriter.

"*Perseo l'invincibile* was a story of mine," Gastaldi continues, bemoaning his association with the picture. "I wrote only the treatment, but the producer Emo Bistolfi listed me as one of the screenwriters. When Bistolfi died, our Tax Service began to persecute me, demanding that I somehow prove to them that I *didn't* write the script! I told them, 'I couldn't have written the script, because I have no contract,' et cetera. This persecution has lasted to this very day, because my name is there on the screen, among the other suspects who didn't pay their taxes!"

Produced only a year or so before the *pepla* phenomenon reached its dead end, *Perseo l'invincibile* is a surprisingly vital chapter in the genre's latter-day history. It is one of the most cleverly scripted films of its type, incorporating matters of geography and politics as well as the usual tenets of myth and mysticism, but it sticks in the memory for two particular reasons: the enormously likeable and humanistic performance of Richard Harrison, and the monsters created by Carlo Rambaldi, the best of which offers a fresh and visionary reinterpretation of one of the most frightening characters in Greek mythology.

RICHARD HARRISON *as Perseus in the valley of the Medusa, standing before a cyclorama supervised by Mario Bava, followed by two glass mattes painted by Bava.*

The kingdom of Seriphos is in crisis. Its only direct route to the nearest seaport is through a dreaded valley inhabited by two monsters: a fire-breathing dragon and the Medusa, a living thing of snaking tendrils whose gaze can turn men into stone. During a conflict with King Acristus of Argos (Arturo Dominici) and his son Prince Galanore (Leo Anchóriz), Prince Alceus of Seriphos is forced into the valley of

Perseo l'invincibile

"Perseus the Invincible"
Filmed at Cinecittà and on location in
Rome and Estudios Ballestreros (Madrid)
Fall 1962
First released: February 7, 1963
Eastmancolor, Totalscope, 2.35:1, 95 minutes

Production: Emo Bistolfi (Rome), Copercines (Madrid). Distributor: Warner Bros.

Argentina: *Perseo el Invencible*, 4/2/64
France: *Persée l'Invincible*, 11/18/63
Germany: *Perseus—der Undesiegbare*, 5/22/64
Spain: *El Valle de los Hombres de Pietra*, "Valley of the Stone Men," 8/30/65
UK: *Perseus Against the Monster*, Miracle Films Ltd., 4/64, 89m 56s, Certificate "A," passed with cuts
US: *The Medusa Against the Son of Hercules*, Embassy TV, 1966
Venezuela: *El Valle de los Hombres de Piedra*, 1964

the Medusa, where he and his troops are gorgonized, badly decimating their country's ability to defend itself from attack. In a phony show of generosity, Acristus grants the people of Seriphos the right to use Argos as a route for sea trade, but he exacts a heavy toll for the privilege. At the same time, he sends Galanore to woo Princess Andromeda (Anna Ranalli), in the hopes of gaining control of Seriphos through marriage rather than outright conquest. Queen Danae of Argos (Elisa Cegani) is possessed of mediumistic gifts and, in a violent outburst, she announces to her stepson Galanore that his father was responsible for the murder of her husband, the previous King of Argos. She promises that the King's murder will someday be avenged by her own true son—presumed dead since his infancy in wartime—who will be recognized by the three marks on his shoulder, "the sign of Jupiter."

While courting Andromeda in Seriphos, Galanore runs afoul of a peasant fisherman, Perseus (Richard Harrison)—Andromeda's true love, who has been flirting with the Princess for some time without knowing her true identity and royal status. When Perseus' pet deer is slain by Galanore, the hero challenges him in anger and is whipped nearly to death. Andromeda intervenes and insists that the two men fight one another on equal ground. When Perseus gains the upper hand in battle, his shoulder—and thus the sign of Jupiter—is exposed, frightening and cowing Galanore. Acristus is offended by his son's cowardice and insists that he abduct the Princess; he nearly succeeds, but Perseus follows his flight on horseback and manages to retrieve Andromeda. The conflict between the two cities now out in the open, war is imminent and Seriphos' only hope of triumph rests with Perseus, who must enter the valley of the Medusa and slay the indomitable creature, in order to free the city's soldiers from their stony sleep.



RARE *American publicity card for Giacomo Gentilomo's SIGFRIDO, a film featuring the talents of Eugenio Bava and Carlo Rambaldi.*

Perseo l'invincibile was filmed over a two-month period, with the final week of shooting devoted to special effects. Working anonymously, Mario Bava contributed some glass matte paintings and oversaw the preparation of a scenic cyclorama for the production. Officially in charge of the film's special mechanical effects was Carlo Rambaldi, with whom Eugenio Bava had worked previously on Giacomo Gentilomo's *Sigfrido* (1957). But according to Richard Harrison, Rambaldi never set foot on the set. At this point in time, Rambaldi was still viewed by many people in the film business as an anomaly; he was specializing in a method of special effects—lifesize, and larger-than-lifesize, mechanical creations—that had no real precursor in the history of Italian cinema. Producers liked his results well enough, but they didn't understand why his creatures were so expensive to make, or why they needed Rambaldi to operate them on-set once they were built. Therefore, in the case of *Perseo l'invincibile,* Eugenio Bava joined the production as a kind of insurance policy. He oversaw the work that Rambaldi was doing, and when Emo Bistolfi could not reach acceptable financial terms for Rambaldi to operate his creations, Eugenio came to the set to interpret the machinery and explain to other crew people how to bring these creatures to life, as best they could. Eugenio may have also had a hand in creating the sculptures representing specific actors in the cast who fall victim to the Medusa's gaze.

Harrison, who was a personal friend of Rambaldi, recalls the aggravating circumstances under which the film was made: "Rambaldi lived about a block and a half away from me, in Rome, so we became good friends. I used to go over there just to talk with him and watch him work. It's funny; I picked up right away that this man was really good, and I did everything I could to get him into films with me, but nobody wanted to pay to use him. Carlo wasn't cheap! On *Perseo,* Bistolfi paid Carlo the money to build these things, but he wouldn't pay him to operate them! So while the monsters were built very well, in my opinion, they weren't properly operated. We just had regular crew people manipulating them, and they didn't know what the heck they were doing. So you never got to see all the great movements that were built into the monsters, because [Bistolfi] didn't want to spend the money."

Harrison's story about the difficulties of operating the creatures on-set are supported by the film itself, which showcases Rambaldi's dragon in three very choppy, awkwardly shot scenes that hardly allow it to interact with the stunt men raising their swords against it. At the same time, the footage also reveals the dragon as a remarkable construction—not only fully



SPANISH *poster art for SIGFRIDO.*



THIS *combination of frame enlargements illustrates the perfect fusion of Bava's glass matte painting (positioned above the actors on horseback and plaster statues in the valley) with the painted landscape extending the territory of the Medusa's valley.*

submersible, but also able to emerge from a lake and project a steady blast of flame from its fully articulated head.

Nevertheless, it is Rambaldi's Medusa that is most impressive. A startling new interpretation of the snake-haired spinster of Greek mythology, *Perseo*'s Medusa is an ambulatory tree, fleshed in bark of cobalt blue, its branches actually slithering, snapping snakes, with a single eye glowing from a knothole like a bloodshot sun. As this evil, repellent thing lunges toward the camera with its insinuating movements, it's easy to understand how the soldiers of Seriphos could have stood transfixed by the sheer surprise of it. Composer Carlo Franci accompanies its every appearance with an unforgettable theme of jittery strings, such a perfect complement to the creature that it seems a sound issuing naturally from its hypnotic orb.

Impressive as it is, Rambaldi's Medusa would have been no more than a mechanical prop without a convincingly desolate environment to reign over, and this is where Mario Bava's talents came into play. Richard Harrison: "I didn't know Mario well at that time, but I remember him painting some mattes for that picture and others that I did. Bava and I used to laugh . . . We were making this movie at Cinecittà at the time *Cleopatra* was also happening there, and it seemed that every movie in town was stealing from it—stealing props, costumes, or whatever. Also, the Americans didn't know what anything really cost in Italy, so they were being overcharged for everything. I knew one fellow who produced an entire film by overcharging *Cleopatra* for water. *Water!*"

For the scenes in the valley of the Medusa, Bava accentuated the natural scenery with a series of glass mattes reconfiguring the entire valley and peopling it with the gorgon's petrified conquests, man and horse alike. We see the first of the matte paintings early in the film as Prince Alceus and his army are shown riding into the valley; the camera shows them in long-shot riding on a dirt road along the edge of a sparsely wooded lake. The road, the lake, and the extras on horseback were real, but Bava capped the scenery with a dramatic desolate-looking mountain range, placed above the action on a large pane of glass.

Bava also painted an impressively stylized cyclorama on glass to serve as a backdrop to the valley of the Medusa. It depicted an ominous-looking cave whose entrance shows a gaping maw of stalactites and stalagmites positioned like hideous, needle-sharp teeth. This matte was impressively extended to encompass an approximately 160° view of the entire valley, furnished with a combination of actual plaster statues and paper cut-outs affixed to glass. "Those Plaster of Paris things were so cheap, they put 'em out there for nothing," Harrison notes.

When Perseus arrives in the valley late in the movie, he is shown walking through a haze (partly suggested by a thin coating of Vaseline applied to the bottom of the camera lens), passing a series of petrified men as he moves toward the central area dominated by the image of the cave. The camera begins to move with him as he passes a large, pointed boulder that nearly reaches to the top of the frame. By watching the scene closely, it is possible to see Harrison step onto a slightly higher platform as he passes this boulder, which actually marks the edge of a long, curving, scenic cyclorama that seamlessly replaces the actual location backgrounds for the rest of the shot. The cyclorama is used in concert with the matte painting of the cave, but now the lower area—the valley of petrified men and horses—is painted on the cyclorama, with the brushstrokes diffused by the haze. It takes Harrison eleven steps to traverse the length of this backdrop, and as it begins to curve, he passes behind a foregrounded boulder—a technique often used by Bava to sell matte paintings with a false aspect of dimension, which here also helps to conceal the curving of the backdrop. As Harrison passes behind the plaster rock, and seems to stare out at a field of petrified bodies that stretch as far as the eye can see, he is actually staring at painted cardboard and sandwiched between two layers of illusion scarcely far enough apart to accommodate his shoulders. While the majority of the stone figures were painted directly onto the board, the filmed evidence shows that director De Martino may have wished for more, as others were painted on paper, clipped, and added to the painted vista on location. (They can be seen flapping slightly in the breeze in the shot where the Medusa's spell is broken.)

Elsewhere in the film, Bava also executed a glass matte that placed the kingdom of Seriphos—a huddle of ancient buildings bookended by two columned structures—on the hillside overlooking a lush, green, rustic valley.

The movie contains other basic illusions which did not involve Bava. For instance, there are a few close shots of Perseus and other characters riding on horseback, in which the horses are visible only in the backgrounds of the shots. "There was no blue screen work, not on that one," Harrison attests. "For that, I remember there was a truck on the backlot, and I climbed onto the back of it." As the truck drove side-by-side with costumed extras on horseback, Harrison was photographed jogging along on the back of the truck. The actor also remembers that the movie was so cheap that other "effects" scenes had to be done for real—for example, the

sequence in which Galanore's troops surprise Perseus and his men by attacking them from above with a hail of flaming tumbleweeds and logs. In the uncut European version of the film, one of the flaming logs can be seen falling onto a horse's face, blinding the poor animal.

"I can't tell you how crazy that was," Harrison marvels. "None of the stunt men wanted any part of that scene. Bistolfi got really upset, so I rushed in and those flaming logs and bushes were falling right on top of us! It wasn't just the horses; it was *all* of us!"

Elsewhere in the film, Perseus' pet deer is actually shot in the throat by an arrow; Harrison's anger in the scene seems quite sincere, but he claims to have not been present for the animal's death—though he admits to witnessing a great deal of animal abuse on film sets during the course of his career, "especially in the Far East."

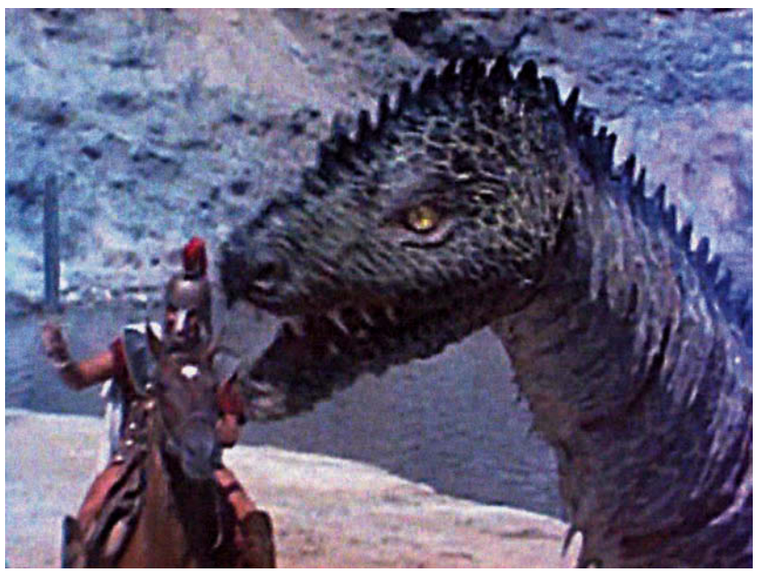
The film's skillful Totalscope cinematography is jointly credited to Dario Di Palma and Eloy Mella, a fact lending further mystery to the production. With the exception of a single set-bound romantic drama (Vittorio Caprioli's *Parigi o cara,* 1962), Dario Di Palma had only worked as an assistant cameraman up to, and for some time beyond, 1963. Typically, he seconded his more accomplished brother Carlo Di Palma on such films as Sergio Corbucci's *Romolo e Remo/ Duel of the Titans* (1961) and Michelangelo Antonioni's *Il deserto rosso/ Red Desert* (1964). Di Palma is not credited at all on Spanish prints, where the photography is attributed to Eloy Mella, a Spanish cameraman with screen credits dating back to the late 1930s, who would not have been involved in the filming in Rome or at Cinecittà.

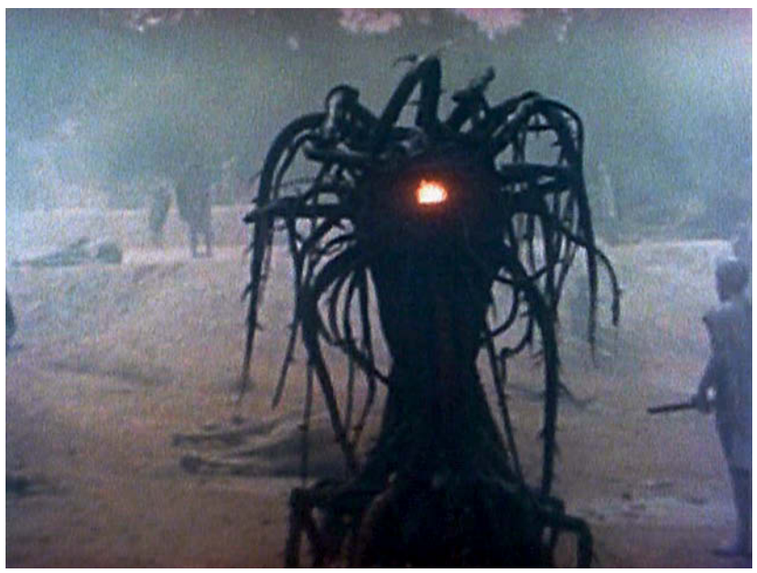
Richard Harrison has no recollections of Dario Di Palma, but he remembers working with Eloy Mella in Madrid, primarily because Mella had also co-photographed, *Il gladiatore invincibile.* "I remember Eloy well because he once told me, in his heavy Spanish accent, that I should change my name," he laughs. "I asked him why he thought so, and he said my name: *Hrrrrickarrrd Hrrrrgasso!* He said I should have an easier name to pronounce, like *Hark Hablay.* You know who that is, don't you? Clark Gable!"

Harrison was never paid for appearing in *Perseo l'invincibile.* "I've always been very cooperative with film companies, if I know that money is tight," says Harrison. "There have been times when I've been put up in luxury hotels, and I don't need all that, so sometimes I've volunteered to change hotels, because I'd rather see the money on the screen. If a producer is genuinely broke and can't meet my salary, I can understand that, and I'm willing to work something out. But with Bistolfi, I resented it because he always had a classy-looking lady on his arm and he always ate in the finest restaurants, and he really made me chase my money down and made me feel desperate. He died shortly after that film was completed, incidentally, of cancer."

Various past and future cohorts of Bava also worked on the picture. Screenwriter Mario Guerra had been a chief contributor to Steno's *Le avventure di Giacomo Casanova* (1955), the production was designed by Franco Lolli (*Ercole al centro della terra*), it was edited by Otello Colangeli (*La morte viene dallo spazio*), and the assistant cameraman was Alberto Spagnoli, who would later serve as the director of photography on Bava's final feature, *Schock/Beyond the Door II* (1977).







CARLO RAMBALDI*'s monsters for PERSEO L'INVINCIBLE: two shots of his submersible fire-breathing dragon, and one of his remarkable Medusa.*







PERSEUS *fights the Medusa, whose death releases its gorgonized victims from stony slumber.*

Perseo l'invincibile was given a theatrical release in most world countries, but not in America, where it has yet to be screened anywhere, even on video, at its full length or in its correct 2.35:1 screen ratio. Instead, it was released directly to television in the mid-1960s as part of Embassy Pictures' *Sons of Hercules* TV package, a series which misrepresented a whole assortment of unrelated *pepla* as the adventures of Hercules' various offspring. *The Medusa Against the Son of Hercules* (prepared by the dubbing director–writer team of Richard McNamara and John Hart) was shown in two-hour commercial timeslots, and it was also sold to some outlets in an hour-long format that presented the film in *primo/secondo tempi*. (In Italy, all films of this period were broken into two parts—*Primo Tempo* and *Secondo Tempo*—and shown with an intermission, during which candy and cigarettes were sold. The film was cut slightly from its original 95-minute length, because the main and end titles (which depict Benvenuto Cellini's famous bronze sculpture of Perseus and the Medusa) were extended to accommodate the Embassy series' theme song, and furthermore, the first two minutes were devoted to a narrative lead-in that was more or less a part of every *Sons of Hercules* picture. As shots from the movie are presented in a baiting montage, the narrator (Bernard Grant) intones:

> *"Through the centuries, in olden times, there lived the Sons of Hercules—heroes supreme! They roamed the Earth, righting wrongs, helping the weak and oppressed, and seeking adventure. They were the mightiest of mortal men. One of them was . . . Perseus! It is of his deeds we tell now, of his struggle against . . . the Medusa!"*

This, of course, is an utterly garbled *précis* of the original Greek myth. Perseus was not the son of Hercules; he was his half-brother. Like Hercules, he was sired by the immortal Zeus with a mortal mother, Danae, the daughter of King Acrisius. After being foretold that Perseus would someday kill him, Acrisius set mother and son adrift, and the two of them were saved by the king of Seriphos. The myth offers many opportunities for special effects of which De Martino's film doesn't avail itself: Perseus ultimately conquered the Medusa—beheading her, not by gouging out her eye—with the help of Hermes and Athena, who provided him with winged sandals and a cloak of invisibility; he also first encountered Andromeda while rescuing her from a rock to which she had been chained as fodder for a dreaded sea monster. Many of these aspects would later be covered in Ray Harryhausen's version of the story, *Clash of the Titans* (1981).

In the case of *Perseo l'invincibile*, the filmmakers took intelligent license with the myth, and were wise in omitting these additional flights of fancy, which could have depleted its confrontations of man against monster of all dramatic tension. The film's success is due in no small way to the characterization of Perseus as a common but resourceful man; it's better that he faces these monsters armed with nothing more than his own sweat and strength, rather than overwhelm these aberrations of nature with his own aberrant arsenal of magic. While not a front-rank example of the *peplum* cycle, *Perseo l'invincible* represents the very best of the second-rank efforts in the genre. Though he received no credit for his contribution, it is a worthy footnote in Mario Bava's ongoing career.



FRENCH *affiche, art by Boris Grinsson. A magnificent example, highlighting the beauty of (left to right) Jacqueline Pierreux, Michèle Mercier and Susy Andersen.*

RÉALISATEUR MARIO BAVA

I TRE VOLTI DELLA PAURA

Black Sabbath

IN 1962, EUROPE began to invade American theaters with anthology films. It was the year of the De Sica/Visconti/Fellini omnibus *Boccaccio '70* and also *Love at Twenty*, which collected short variations on a common theme by François Truffaut, Max Ophuls, Andrzej Vajda, and other international filmmakers. Meanwhile in America, television was becoming a haven for short form entertainment, particularly in the field of horror and suspense, represented weekly by such programs as *Alcoa Presents* (later renamed *One Step Beyond*), *Alfred Hitchcock Presents*/*The Alfred Hitchcock Hour*, *The Twilight Zone*, and *Thriller*. Given these circumstances, it was inevitable that someone would pick up the ball dropped by *Dead of Night* in 1946 and produce a new horror film in the episodic format.

This finally happened when Roger Corman made *Tales of Terror* (1962)—an omnibus of three Edgar Allan Poe stories scripted by Richard Matheson—for American International Pictures. That same year, AIP's Samuel Z. Arkoff and James H. Nicholson signed horror legend Boris Karloff to a multi-picture deal beginning with Corman's horror comedy *The Raven* (1963). Karloff had just completed a two-year stint hosting (and occasionally starring in episodes of) NBC's *Thriller*, as well as a short-lived British anthology series, *Out of This World*. Having Karloff under contract was an enormous incentive for AIP to follow *Tales of Terror* with a second shock triptych, in which the venerable actor could star as well as host. As with *La ragazza che sapeva troppo*, AIP combined forces with Galatea and Emmepi Film of Rome, as well as Societé Cinématographique Lyre of Paris, to produce this horror omnibus with Mario Bava at the helm. The idea was to take advantage of the European basis of production to assemble a cast that would satisfy not only horror fans, but followers of the European *nouvelle vague*, as well.



THIS *uninspired Italian poster art is one of the few publicity designs from any country to feature the likeness of star Boris Karloff.*

Bava was an excellent choice to direct this project because he had always been a voracious reader; furthermore, since becoming a director, he had become increasingly interested in horror and mystery fiction. He was always looking for new stories, new ideas, and new images to spark his imagination. "Read, read, read," says his son Lamberto Bava, when asked how his father spent his time between movies. He subscribed to various Italian *giallo* (mystery) and science fiction story digests, but in preparing for this new assignment, Bava's grounding in the classics proved most helpful. In selecting stories for the film, Bava was encouraged by AIP to stay away from Poe, as a courtesy to Roger Corman. They urged him to seek out works by other overlooked, classic practitioners of the macabre. "Classic" because neither AIP nor his Italian/French producers were interested in acquiring the rights to stories protected by copyright.

Bava's next film had its genesis in a concept that he shared with screenwriter Alberto Bevilacqua (b. 1934), whose only previous credit was Anton Giulio Majano's well-photographed *Seddok (L'erede di Satana)/Atom Age Vampire* (1960), a film often misidentified as a film produced by Bava. [1]

As Bevilacqua recalls, "Mario told me, 'I have a project I want to make: to follow a chain of terror, by first setting it in a contemporary metropolis, and then tracing it back to an ethnic, historical setting, telling three different stories [in three different times] about the different ways terror can strike mankind. So bring me some stories, inspired by books.'"

The terror anthology got underway as *La paura* ("The Fear"), a title shared by two stories that Bava found particularly inspirational; one written by Guy de Maupassant (1850–93), the other by Anton Chekov (1860–1904). Neither story lent itself to narrative padding, but elements of the Maupassant story—no more than a sketch, really—were absorbed into the film's eventual centerpiece *"I wurdalak"* ("The Wurdalak"), while refractions of Chekov's tale can be seen in *"La goccia d'acqua"* ("The Drop of Water"), whose subject may have originated in Bevilacqua's own name. Both writers received screen credit, as the authors of tales "liberally adapted."

Any attempt to trace the stories of *I tre volti della paura* to their true literary origins inevitably leads one into a Bavian labyrinth of smoke and mirrors. *"I wurdalak"*—which Boris Karloff mistakenly attributes (in the AIP version, *Black Sabbath*) to the nonexistent author "Ivan Tolstoy"—is in fact an adaptation of *"La Famille du Wurdalak"* ("The Family of the Wurdalak"), a story written in French by the Russian Count Alexei Constantinovich Tolstoi (1817–75). [2] *"La goccia d'acqua"* was, according to Bava's own later confession, "my own concoction, written with a lot of Dostoevsky and a

I tre volti della paura

"The Three Faces of Fear"
Working title: *La paura,* "The Fear"
Filmed at Titanus Studios (Cinecittà)
and on location in Cianciano and Canale Monterano
February 4 – March 30 1963
First released: August 17, 1963
Technicolor, 1.85:1, 99 minutes

Production: Galatea, Emmepi (Rome), Societé Cinématographique Lyre (Paris). Director: Mario Bava. Screenplay: Marcello Fondato, Alberto Bevilacqua, Ugo Guerra, and Mario Bava, based on stories by Anton Chekhov, Alexei Tolstoi and Guy de Maupassant. Director of photography: Ubaldo Terzano. Camera operator: Mario Mancini. Camera assistant: Enrico Fontana. Art direction: Giorgio Giovannini. Set decoration: Francesco Bronzi. Wardrobe: Tina Grani. Makeup: Otello Fava. Hairdresser: Renata Magnanti. Production manager: Paolo Mercuri. Production associate: Armando Govoni. Editor: Mario Serandrei. Assistant editor: Lina Caterini. Music: Roberto Nicolosi. Sound: Fausto Ancillai, Nino Renda. Distributor: Warner Bros.

Additional US credits: Music: Les Baxter. Production assistant: Salvatore Billitteri.

Boris Karloff (host). *Il telefono* ("The Telephone"): Michèle Mercier (Rosy), Lidia Alfonsi (Mary), Milo Quesada (Franco/Frank). *I wurdalak* ("The Wurdalak"): Boris Karloff (Gorka), Mark Damon (Vladimir), Susy Andersen [Maria Antonietta Golgi] (Sdenka), Glauco Onorato (Giorgio), Rika Dialina (Giorgio's wife), Massimo Righi (Pietro). *La goccia d'acqua* ("The Drop of Water"): Jacqueline Pierreux (Miss Chester), Milly Monti (housekeeper), Harriet White Medin (Miss Perkins, the concierge), Gustavo De Nardo (inspector).

Argentina: *Sábado Negro*
Austria: *Der Ring der Verdammten,* "The Ring of the Damned"
Belgium: *De Driehoek van de Angst,* Rank Organization, Eastmancolor
Denmark: *Tre Raedselsnaetter,* "Three Nights of Horror," Kawall-Film, 6/9/69
France: *Les Trois Visages de la Peur,* Rank Organization, 1965, 92m
Germany: *Die Drei Gesichter der Furcht,* Pallas Film, 8/21/64; *Drei Mysterien der Furcht,* "Three Mysteries of Fear," Atlas (16 mm), 90m
Spain: *Las Tres Caras del Miedo,* Distribuciones Cinematograficas Rosa Films S.A.
UK: *Black Sabbath,* Anglo-Amalgamated via Warner Pathé Ltd., 12/6/64, 95m 29s, Certificate "X," passed with cuts
US: *Black Sabbath,* American International Pictures, "Color by Pathé Color," 5/6/64, 95m 26s

pinch of de Maupassant."[3] His confession was apparently not a full disclosure, as Italian critic Antonio Bruschini—heroically—was later able to trace the story's origin to *Dalle tre alle tre e mezza* ("Between 3:00 and 3:30"), a story attributed to P. Kettridge, that was published in the 1960 Einaudi anthology, *Storie di fantasmi* ("Ghost Stories"). In his filmography for Troy Howarth's book *The Haunted World of Mario Bava*, Julian Grainger has identified Kettridge as a pseudonym for Italian writer Franco Lucentini (b. 1920), and offered "Ghosts Don't Kill" as an English title for the story, but without revealing its whereabouts in print.

The most difficult story to pin down is *"Il telefono"* ("The Telephone"). It is credited to Guy de Maupassant in the AIP credits while foreign press materials name F. G. (or Howard) Snyder as the source author, though no publication data for such a story has ever been determined. It is widely assumed that the Snyder story, if it exists, originated in the pages of a Mondadori



ITALIAN *locandina shows Frank closing in on Rosy, whose headboard may look familiar to eagle-eyed Bava fans.*

1 American prints of *Atom Age Vampire* open with an animated title card of a bat, flapping halfway across the screen, at which point it becomes the "V" in "Mario Fava Presents." No one of this name appears in the Italian credits.

2 In 1971, "The Wurdalak" was refilmed by Giorgio Ferroni as *La notte dei diavoli/Night of the Devils*, a modern-day interpretation that is truer to Tolstoy's tale than Bava's version, at least in terms of structure. Like the story, *La notte dei diavoli* is told in flashback, with a lumber merchant (Gianni Garko) reliving in memory his encounter with Gorka's family while being treated with electroshock therapy in a mental hospital. This crudely filmed adaptation is hardly recognizable as the work of the man who made the elegant *Il mulino delle donne di pietra/Mill of the Stone Women* (1960); it suffers from an unnecessarily static first half, but manages to present a handful of memorably visceral images before reaching its bitter climax, as when Gorka's wurdalak granddaughter embraces her mother only to tear out her throat and savage her bared breasts with tiny talons. The film is presently available only on Spanish-language cassettes, under the title *La Noche de los Diablos,* a censored version dating from its Franco-era release. Holland's Video for Pleasure label offers an English-language version of the film with Dutch subtitles, which is uncut. The Japanese video release (label unknown) is also in English and complete, save for the optical censorship of full frontal nudity. Tolstoy's story was also twice made into films by Lenfilm Studios of Russia: *Pyushchiye Krov* ("Blood-Suckers," 1972), directed by Yevgeniy Tatarsky, and *Papà, Umer Ded Moroz* ("Daddy, Santa Claus Is Dead," 1973), directed by Yevgeniy Yufit and Vladimir Maslov.

3 Alberto Abruzzese, et al., *La città del cinema—produzione e lavoro nel cinema italiano 1930–70* (Rome, Italy: Napoleone, 1979), 83–89.



MARIO BAVA *directs Michèle Mercier in "Il telefono."*

giallo magazine—whose Italian contributors sometimes lurked behind English pseudonyms. (The story's theme of intimidation by telephone has been a hallmark of the mystery genre since Lucille Fletcher's 1940s radio drama *Sorry Wrong Number* was filmed in 1948, starring Barbara Stanwyck.) Whatever the truth may be, the F. G. Snyder name does not appear on Italian prints of *I tre volti della paura*, so its origin is a moot point. As screenwriter Bevilacqua has admitted, "As for *'Il telefono*,' based on Maupassant and '*La goccia d'acqua*,' based on Chekov, they were basically invented; those two names were just to protect ourselves . . . while Tolstoy's short story, *'I Wurdalak*,' had a seed that was really literary."

Bevilacqua's recollections of working on the screenplay with Bava are happily vivid: "I thought of Mario as a kind person, but he could also be strong-willed. He would tell me: 'Listen, you must write the screenplay the way I want it.' He wanted to shoot in Chianciano during the fall, when it becomes a totally spooky place. We worked mostly at night, because in *I tre volti della paura* it was the night, the dark, that had to stick out. We had our script meetings in his den, which was dominated by his dog, a very long basset hound that laid at our feet and kept staring at us. I must say that, more than the things we were creating, it was this dog that scared us—or me at least!

"Our starting point—before we began to write—was always some questions from Mario. For example: 'What is the scariest thing for the viewer to watch?' He had an answer for this: 'An intravenous injection.' If, in particular, the camera shows an injection in close-up, everybody will lower their gaze, and so on. He had this list of top scares that he was constantly updating: 'Now this is scarier than the other thing.'"

After Bevilacqua had completed the initial draft of the screenplay, other writers were brought in to develop the property further. One of these was Marcello Fondato (b. 1924), whose only previous genre credit was Steno's horror spoof *Tempi duri per i vampiri/ Uncle Was a Vampire* (1959), starring Renato Rascel, Sylva Koscina, and Christopher Lee. His other previous credits included several films for director Luigi Comencini, including *Mogli pericolose* (1958) and *Le sorprese dell'amore* (1959)—both of which also starred Sylva Koscina—and the international co-production *Tutti a casa/ Everybody Go Home* (1960). His most recent credit at the time was *Totò Diabolicus* (1962), which must have intrigued Bava, as it was a parody of Angela and Luciana Giussani's popular *fumetto nero* (*noir* comic book) *Diabolik*, which had published its first issue early that year. In the film, Totò played no less than six different characters, many of whom were killed off by the super criminal Diabolicus. (Five years hence, Bava would later direct the first official adaptation of the Giussani sisters' creation: 1968's *Diabolik*.) Fondato and Bava worked so well together that they would continue their collaboration on *Sei donne per l'assassino/Blood and Black Lace* in 1964.

However, as Bevilacqua explains, his duties were not yet over: "No doubt the script was very detailed, with all the progressions of the story very clear. Then, once [Bava] was on the set, he called us—me and the other screenwriters who were with him then—and we did rewrites on the set. We rewrote the film during production . . . very often throwing away some takes and very effective sequences. I can remember, for example, a sequence that we created in the studio, of two young lovers making love in bed; but the eye of the viewer, while all this was happening—and this was the power of Bava!—the viewer's attention was subliminally drawn to a shape on a chest of drawers. When their lovemaking was at its height, this shape came to life . . . it was a sewer rat, a very long rat that jumped onto the edge of the bed and then, suddenly, onto the man's back! The woman looked in the red eyes of the big rat and the man was thunderstruck. I think this was one of the most incredible sequences I ever saw Bava shoot, but it was never shown in its entirety."

A useful index to the film's production is the Italian theatrical trailer for *I tre volti della paura*, which, like many trailers, was compiled from alternate footage and unused material to spare the production the expense of reprinting and the trouble of recutting the "good" takes. In the trailer, all of the footage is different to what is seen in the finished film, except for the scenes from *"Il telefono,"* featuring Michèle Mercier and Lidia Alfonsi. This subtle detail confirms that *"Il telefono"* was the first story to be shot and handed over to Mario Serandrei's editing table. It was followed in production by *"La goccia d'acqua,"* and then by the arrival of Boris Karloff and Mark Damon for the filming of *"I wurdalak"* and Karloff's various "introductions" in his role as host.

Because American International again took an active role in the film's production, as they did with *La*

ragazza che sapeva troppo/Evil Eye, no English-language version of Bava's original director's cut—no *The Three Faces of Fear*, so to speak—exists. However, as with the earlier movie, an entirely different AIP-sanctioned version exists: *Black Sabbath*, a re-edited, rescored and extensively reworked variant that was concocted for release in America and other English-speaking markets, such as the United Kingdom and Australia. Though this version is much loved by those who were chilled by it in childhood, it is—like *Hercules in the Haunted World*—a distortion of Mario Bava's original intentions, of value only for preserving Boris Karloff's vocal performance.

Il telefono

Rosy is an attractive social climber whose late-night homecoming is terrorized by phone calls from an anonymous source capable of spying on her every move. When a newspaper clipping detailing the escape of Frank Rainer, a lover whom she helped send to prison, is slipped under her door, Rosy phones Mary—an estranged lesbian friend—and pleads with her to come over and spend the night, to lend her support and protection. Unknown to Rosy, Mary has been placing the calls in a disguised voice in order to gain just such an invitation. As Mary writes an apologetic note to her sleeping lover, Frank breaks into Rosy's apartment and strangles her, holding her responsible for the alienation of Rosy's affections. Seeing Rosy in bed, Frank then lunges for her—only to be stabbed by a knife that Mary placed under Rosy's pillow for her protection.



MICHÈLE MERCIER *as Rosy, a high society call girl troubled by the persistent ringing of "The Telephone."*

"Il telefono" opens the Italian version of the film, but was repositioned as the second story when AIP prepared their alternate version. By placing it first, Bava may have been echoing (or parodying) an earlier Italian anthology film directed by his former colleague Roberto Rossellini. *L'amore* (1948) opened with "*La voce humana*," an adaptation of Jean Cocteau's dramatic monologue, starring Anna Magnani as a woman conversing with her lover on the telephone. Of Bava's three stories, *"Il telefono"* suffers the most in its American reinvention. English-speaking audiences commonly regard this episode as a terrible disappointment, but they base this opinion on a story that bears little resemblance to the one told in the Italian version.

As Bava filmed it, *"Il telefono"* serves as an intermediary evolutionary step between Bava's black-and-white thriller *La ragazza che sapeva troppo* and the brilliantly colorful, full-blown *giallo*, *Sei donne per l'assassino*. Technically, *"Il telefono"* is the first color *giallo*, very much in the spirit of a short story from a Mondadori *giallo* pulp, *glacéed* with a fabulously stylish *mise-en-scène*. Its visual style is actually a reversion from Bava's then-current expressionistic color style to the method he introduced in his first color film, Steno's *Le avventure di Giacomo Casanova*, in which he lit the sets and actors as if he were shooting in black-and-white—with lots of moody shadows and scrim-work, and far fewer color gel effects, limiting himself to an appropriately rose-colored gel (to bring out the best in Michèle Mercier's skin tones) and an occasional amber spotlight. Bava also appears to have begun experimenting here with keylight diffusion and cross-lighting, which gave the episode a sexier, velvety look that enhanced its ambiance of sin and criminality, *à la* the cover art of *giallo* paperpacks. Because so much of the episode is set in a single room, the intricate cross-lighting had a practical value other than lending more sculptural lighting accents to the actors; it allowed Bava to light the set in a manner that would require few, if any, adjustments when shooting the action from different angles.

The amount of attention lavished on the look of the piece is appropriate given the fact that it posits the audience at the same vantage as that of the unseen *voyeur* who is harassing Rosy (Mercier), who has been driven mad by her beauty. The concept of a mind driven mad by feminine beauty was evidently a personal one for Bava and/or Fondato; they would summon this same *modus operandi* once again in *Sei donne per l'assassino*, when Inspector Silvestri (Thomas Reiner) supposes, "Perhaps the sight of beauty makes [the killer] lose control of himself and kill?" The entire aspect of this episode, and the restricted viewpoint of the camera—we can see only the main rooms of Rosy's studio apartment (our eyes cannot follow her into her bathroom, for example)—imply that we are viewing the action through her tormentor's own covetous eyes, which would occupy a specific vantage point. This is perhaps the most important mutation of *giallo* technique proposed by the episode; whereas *La ragazza che sapeva troppo* was necessarily told from the standpoint of Nora, all the details filtered through her fantasies

and phobias, *"Il telefono"* extends the examples of John Brahm's *The Undying Monster* (1942) and *The Lodger* (1944), as well as Robert Siodmak's proto-*giallo* classic *The Spiral Staircase* (1946) by viewing the action from the standpoint of the threat. Hereafter, the use of subjective camera would become an essential ingredient of all *gialli*.

The prowling camerawork has all the character of a roaming, excited eye, thirstily drinking in every detail of Rosy's apartment and her curvaceous figure; its level of interest makes what is actually a fairly limited set more interesting. The eye is also kept active and alert by the sheer variety of Giorgio Giovannini's set decorations, which are attractive and fanciful and not far removed from those of Laura Craven Torrani's apartment in *La ragazza che sapeva troppo*; the two sets actually share some of the same furnishings, notably the clover-patterned partitions that the earlier film seemingly imported from the set of Roger Corman's *Pit and the Pendulum*. (AIP was known to fly props and set decorations abroad when filming overseas.) The ornate, rococo headboard of Rosy's bed dates back to *I vampiri* (it's the same headboard of the Duchess du Grand's bed, where Wandisa Guida is seen recovering in the film's penultimate shot) and *Le meraviglie di Aladino*, and it would resurface again, years later, in Bava's *Il rosso segno della follia/Hatchet for the Honeymoon* (1970) and *Lisa and the Devil* (1973). Another enticing detail are a number of carved angels scattered around the apartment, which carry a constant subtextual reminder of the tenuous partition separating life and afterlife, while also providing a visual reminder that Rosy's actions are under constant observation from without. In *Sei donne per l'assassino*, similar (perhaps identical and repainted) prop statues of angels and cherubs would be used to provide ironic counterpoints to the aftermath of murder.

But once the telephone starts ringing, the wide range of visual interests constricts to that single appliance—a red telephone with a black receiver—and this sudden constriction, in itself, generates fear. Rosy herself also adds to the atmosphere when, convinced by his words that the caller has the ability to peer into her apartment, she moves a living room lamp onto the floor to make it more difficult for spying eyes to see her—which also has the desired cinematographic effect of throwing the apartment's shadows off-kilter and creating a spookier environment. Because the lateral movements of the camera are necessarily restricted, Bava and Ubaldo Terzano occasionally interject surprise by changing the height of the camera as one shot cuts to another. For example, after the first call is depicted from a low-angle vantage, the shock of the second ringing is accentuated by the camera's unexpected leap to a higher vantage. We therefore anticipate the next call almost as nervously as Rosy, knowing that another call will come, but not from which direction.



A SHOT *that should please Rosy's watchful admirer.*

All three episodes of *I tre volti della paura* make marvelous use of ambient sound—the original Italian cut, that is, for which the soundtrack was supervised by Fausto Ancillai and Nino Renda. *"Il telefono" and "La goccia d'acqua"* are particularly strong in using natural sounds to evoke menace. Ancillai and Renda understood the value of silence in generating suspense and terror, and working in concert with Roberto Nicolosi's spare but effective "crime jazz" score, *"Il telefono"* becomes a textbook example of how to unsettle an audience with sound manipulation. Earlier suspense films centered around the telephone, such as *Sorry Wrong Number* and *Midnight Lace* (1960), relied more on the respective performances of Barbara Stanwyck and Doris Day than on manipulated sound, but Bava's innovation went unrecognized; instead, William Friedkin received acclaim for shocking audiences with a calculatedly loud telephone ring in *The Exorcist* (1973), and another decade further on, Sergio Leone generated even more critical discussion for opening his *C'era una volta . . . America/Once Upon a Time in America* (1984) with the insistent ringing of an unanswered telephone, which is exactly the way *"Il telefono"* opens.

The episode also uses sound to indulge Bava's predilection for backstory, by having the telephone ring *before* the story properly begins—just before Rosy returns to her apartment after an evening on the town. Depending on which version you see, Rosy is depicted as either a social climber (English), the mistress of a wealthy executive (French), or—pun presumably intended—as a high-class call girl (Italian); each of these interpretations lends its own interesting shade of meaning on Michèle Mercier's facial expression in her first close-up. The fact that the phone is heard ringing before she returns establishes that her caller's harassing calls are based more on guesswork than on any real ability to peer into her world. Mary's subsequent "all-seeing" comments about Rosy's behavior are based solely on how well she—in her own thwarted romantic obsession—knows and can predict her nightly routines and reactions where Frank is concerned.

Apart from its sly emphases on sound and subjective camera, *"Il telefono"* relies on backstory to such an extraordinary degree that it is less a story in its own right than the postscript of a story delineated solely through allusion. This method of storytelling adds to the uneasiness of the narrative, which has the feel of being governed by things in the past—that is, by invisible forces.

Both actresses in *"Il telefono"* had worked with Mario Bava before: Michèle Mercier as Princess Zaina in *Le meraviglie di Aladino* (1961), and Lidia Alfonsi in *Vita da cani* (1950) and as the crimson-cloaked Sibyl in *Le fatiche di Ercole* (1958).

After *Le meraviglie di Aladino*, Mercier co-starred in Domenico Paolella's *Il*

giustiziere dei mari/Avenger of the Seven Seas (1960) opposite American actor Richard Harrison, who describes her even today as "the most beautiful woman I've ever seen." At the time of filming *"Il telefono,"* Mercier was married to André Smagghe, an assistant and second unit director on such films as Richard Fleischer's *The Vikings* (1958), Billy Wilder's *One Two Three* (1961), and David Lean's *Lawrence of Arabia* (1962). Her subsequent brushes with Italian horror include the Spaghetti Western *Cimitero sensa croci/Cemetery Without Crosses* (1968, co-scripted by Dario Argento) and Antonio Margheriti's *Nella stretta morsa del ragno/Web of the Spider* (a 1970 remake of his 1964 *Danza Macabra/Castle of Blood*, with Mercier playing the Barbara Steele role). Despite a talent nearly equal to her beauty, Mercier's screen career was ultimately a disappointment, and she voluntarily withdrew from the screen, supposedly to escape being typecast as a result of her *Angélique* films of the late 1960s. She and Smagghe eventually divorced, and she remarried to the American film director Arthur Hiller, from whom she is now also divorced. Today, Mercier resides in France. Her recently published memoirs—*Je ne suis pas Angélique* (Paris: Denoel, 2002)—contain no reminiscences of her work in *I tre volti della paura*.

Lidia Alfonsi's role as the Sybil in *Le fatiche di Ercole* stereotyped her to a degree. After that performance, she was cast in *Gli amori di Ercole/The Loves of Hercules/Hercules and the Hydra* (1960, with Mickey Hargitay and Jayne Mansfield), and two Steve Reeves films from 1961, *Morgan il pirata* and *La guerra di Troia/The Trojan Horse*, a Giorgio Ferroni film in which she gave a superb performance as the mad prophetess Cassandra. After *I tre volti della paura*, Alfonsi began to work more and more on stage and television, though she made a return to the big screen in Roberto Benigni's international success, *La vita è bella/Life Is Beautiful* (1997).

Milo Quesada, who plays Frank in one brief scene, was born in Buenos Aires, Argentina, on April 16, 1930. Active in films since 1958, he appeared in a number of films released by AIP over the years, beginning with an unbilled appearance as the lover of the woman assassinated by her jealous husband in the alternate ending of Bava's *Evil Eye* (the US recut of *La ragazza che sapeva troppo*) and continuing with bits in Roger Corman's *The Young Racers* (1963) and Jeremy Summers' *House of 1000 Dolls* (1967) and a larger part in Jess Franco's *El processo de los Brujas/Night of the Blood Monster* (1969). One of his more visible roles was as Rudi, Ursula Andress' handsome escort in *La decima vittima/The 10th Victim* (1965), and several years further on, he would be featured in another film starring Boris Karloff, the Spanish-made *La Colleccionista de Cadáveres/Cauldron of Blood* (1970).

Although the film credits its studio locations as Titanus Studios, *I tre volti della paura* was in fact filmed at Cinecittà. Present on the set throughout the production, as a representative of American International, was Salvatore Billitteri, a former editor and dubbing director at the New York-based Titra Sound Corporation. Billitteri had been in charge of cutting all of the company's overseas acquisitions since *Black Sunday*, and had stepped up to the nominal role of producer with *Prisoner of the Iron Mask* and *Samson and the 7 Miracles of the World*.

"We used to bring Sal every Italian picture we wanted to release theatrically," recalled Sam Arkoff. "Sal would cut 'em down to our specifications and redub them—because the Italians' English dub was done without much care, to make easy sales to Hong Kong and Africa and other action-seeking countries. Later, when we started coproducing in Italy, Sal would often go over while a picture was going on."

Credited as "production assistant," Billitteri's job was to observe the filming from an editorial viewpoint, to be alert to potential problems, and to suggest mutually acceptable ways of dealing with them. He helped Bava to keep the story within the guidelines of AIP's specific tastes and needs—not in an interfering way, but pointing out whenever an alternate take or approach to a scene or shot might be required. Bava resented the interference, but was professional enough not to let his feelings show.



THIS TINTED *British front-of-house card shows an anonymous caller encouraging Rosy to wear less.*

One of the major problems that AIP needed to nip in the bud, at least as far as *their* version was concerned, was the lesbian subtext of this episode. *"Il telefono"* never makes clear whether Rosy and Mary are former lovers, or former friends estranged by Mary's expression of desire for Rosy, but Mary's sexual profile is unmistakable—and that alone was forbidden subject matter in an AIP entertainment. Billitteri devised an approach that allowed Bava to shoot the episode as he wanted, and by shooting only a modicum of additional footage, would also provide AIP with the material they needed to neatly sidestep the issue. In Billitteri's revision, Frank Rainer is not a criminal sent to prison by Rosy's testimony, but the vengeful ghost of a dead lover. To AIP's way of thinking (which was not necessarily misguided), *"The Telephone"* also wasn't "spooky" enough; by adding a ghost, it became a more suitable companion for the film's other two stories, which were supernatural in nature. Since the only references to lesbianism were verbal, they could be erased by rewriting the dialogue of the telephone conversations between the two actresses. Remarkably, the rewritten/redubbed dialogue doesn't seem to affect Alfonsi's performance in the least; she was playing a sly, predatory lesbian, but in this altered context, the tenor of her acting seems to deliberately project the airs of mystery and suspicion commonly found in "red herring" performances.

The following is a side-by-side comparison of the French and English dialogue scenes from this episode, revealing the full extent to which Billitteri revised the story for domestic audiences. I have chosen the French track over the Italian one, to represent the original source, because it more accurately reflects the dialogue as it was spoken on-set between Mercier and Alfonsi, whose performances alternated between English and French.



The Telephone [4]

FIRST PHONE CONVERSATION

THE THREE FACES OF FEAR		BLACK SABBATH
ROSY:	Hello? Hello?	Hello? Hello?
VOICE:	How pretty you are, Rosy. A little too pretty, perhaps . . .	Hello, Rosy. How are you?
ROSY:	Who's calling? Who are you?	Who is this speaking?
VOICE:	You'll find out who I am, a few seconds before dying. I can see the shape of your body. The tension of your arms. The line of your perfect legs. Don't cover them! A build like yours. Enough to drive someone crazy! I'm going to kill you.	Don't you know? Think, Rosy. How nice you look with that towel around you. You always did have a beautiful body. Beautiful! A body to drive someone crazy. No! Don't cover yourself. I like seeing you this way. Are you listening, Rosy?
ROSY:	But who are you? Who? Hello?	But who are you? Who? Hello? Hello?

After the first phone call, CAMERA PANS DOWN to the red telephone.

CUT to a LONG SHOT of Rosy by her bed, smoking a cigarette.

The following shots do not appear in the European version:

- *LONG SHOT of Rosy putting on her white robe. She walks around the apartment. Lights cigarette from box on table. Goes to sofa, looks at window. Turns on lamp. Paces.*
- *CUT to ZOOM-IN to CLOSE SHOT of telephone.*
- *CUT to Rosy walking back over to the bed.*

SECOND PHONE CONVERSATION

THE THREE FACES OF FEAR		BLACK SABBATH
ROSY:	Hello?	Hello?
VOICE:	Why did you put on your dressing gown? I told you to stay as you were. I really like you better when you're almost nude. That's how I want to see you when I return. Soon I'll be knocking on your door.	Why did you put on that dressing gown, Rosy? I told you to stay just as you were. I like you better when you have nothing on.
ROSY:	But who are you? What do you want of me?	Who are you? What do you want of me?
VOICE:	I told you. I want to kill you. I want to make you suffer. That's how I'm going to make you die. Understand, Rosy?	Everything. Everything that you have. But for now I just want you to take off that dressing gown. I want to watch you. Embrace you with my eyes. See you.

THIRD & FOURTH PHONE CONVERSATIONS

THE THREE FACES OF FEAR		BLACK SABBATH
VOICE:	Rosy . . . Rosy . . . Rosy! You know I'm right beside you. I saw you. You hid your money and jewelry. You're so stupid. I'm not after your money! You really don't understand anything. It's not your money I want, it's *you*. I want your magnificent body. And I'll get it. No, not to caress it, but to feel your throat in my hands and strangle you. I'm going to kill you, Rosy . . .	Rosy . . . Rosy . . . Rosy! Why did you hide your money and jewelry? How stupid of you! You always did think money was the answer. It can't help you. Nothing can help you. Because I want you. I want that beautiful body of yours. And I'll get it. I want us to be joined together . . . and we will be. Soon.
ROSY:	But who are you? Who are you, answer! I beg you, answer! Hello, answer! But what have I done to you? What have I done to you? Ah, if this is some stupid joke . . . !	But who are you? Who are you, tell me! I can't stand it any more, I can't stand it! What have I done to you? What have I done? You're driving me mad! Please, tell me!
A letter tumbles through the mail slot. Rosy climbs stairs. Picks up letter.		*Rosy climbs stairs. Sees letter on floor. She picks it up, then opens door to check the hall. Entire following sequence of neighbor walking dog and talking to Rosy is not in European prints.*
Rosy opens the envelope. Inside, she finds a newspaper clipping with a photograph of a man under the headline "FRANK RAINER HAS ESCAPED!"		*Rosy opens the envelope. A blank sheet of paper is enclosed, upon which a note writes itself (in animation) before her very eyes, as if in reappearing ink: "There's no way of avoiding it, Rosy . . . it won't be long now! Frank."* [5]

The telephone rings.

ROSY:	Hello?	Hello?
VOICE:	Hello, Rosy. You're beginning to understand. Tell me the truth. You didn't expect this. I swore I'd find you. And now I'm near you at last. Very near, Rosy. And there's nothing you can do to me. Even if you call the police, I'll be there before they arrive. Remember, I'm very near.	You're beginning to understand now, aren't you, Rosy? You didn't expect me, did you? I had to come and find you. I'm near you at last. Very near. There's nothing you can do, Rosy. Nothing in this world. You can't call the police. They won't be able to help you. Because I'm much closer to you than the police. Remember that! *Much* closer!
ROSY:	Frank, listen! Listen to me, Frank!	Frank is dead! This can't be Frank!

ROSIE CALLS MARY

	THE THREE FACES OF FEAR	BLACK SABBATH
MARY:	Hello?	Hello?
ROSY:	Mary! It's me, Rosy!	Mary! This is Rosy!
MARY:	Oh! Good evening. I wasn't expecting you to call. You told me you never wanted to speak to me again.	Oh? What happened? Whatever made you call me, of all people?
ROSY:	Oh, I beg you! Forget that! Frank has escaped!	Mary, it's important. *Frank* just called me!
MARY:	Yes, I saw it in the papers. But that's none of my concern. You're quite free to go back to him.	What are you talking about? You worry me. You know as well as I do he's dead.
ROSY:	But you don't understand. I'm afraid. Because he wants revenge. I'm certain of it. Come and keep me company, I beg you!	No! He's alive! [MARY: Take it easy.] Oh, Mary! Mary! I'm afraid. He wants to get even. I know he does. Come over here. Right away! Please. You can't imagine the things he said when he spoke to me.
MARY:	You want . . . [SIGNIFICANT PAUSE] *me* to come over? Did I hear you right?	What? He spoke to you? Did I hear you right?
ROSY:	Yes, yes! I beg you, Mary! Come quickly, please! And spend the night!	Yes, yes! I beg you! Come right away. He's been threatening me!
MARY:	I understand, my dear. I'll be over in just a few minutes. But calm down, I beg you.	All right, I'm coming. I don't have any hard feelings. I will be over right away.
ROSY:	Thanks, I'll be waiting for you.	Thanks. Hurry!
	The telephone rings again.	
VOICE:	Rosy? Why did you call your friend Mary? Did you imagine she could help you? You thought I wouldn't know?	Why did you call our old friend Mary? How she loved me! But I gave her up for you. So you could turn me in! Now call whoever you want. It won't help because . . . you'll be dead before dawn!
	CUT to a shot—not in AIP prints—beginning with a CLOSE SHOT of the telephone jack, then PANNING along the phone cord to a MEDIUM SHOT of Mary on the phone, speaking to Rosy through a voice-distorting handkerchief! [6] *She continues:*	
	And so you called over there. But it was useless. Because I'm near you. I told you that. Very near. Call whomever you like, Rosy, it won't do any good. Even if you have a hundred people around you! Before the next sunrise, you will die. You understand, Rosy? Before the sun rises again, you'll be dead.	



MARY *(Lidia Alfonsi) is reviled as the caller terrorizing Rosy.*

MARY'S ARRIVAL

Mary's arrival at Rosy's apartment does not appear in AIP's version. It follows:

There is a knock at Rosy's door.

MARY: Rosy, it's me! Open up!

ROSY: Ah, it's you? Is it really you, Mary?

MARY: Good evening. Something bothering you?

ROSY: Yes. If you only knew how afraid I've been!

MARY: Good evening.

Mary walks languidly into the apartment, caressing Rosy's chin as she passes by her.

MARY: Oh! So much light! My word, Rosy! [UNINTELLIGIBLE] Oh, forgive me! I forgot that your lovers tend to be such important people. You're the mistress of a chairman of the board. I see things haven't changed much. Everything's just as it was when *we* were friends.

Mary strolls over to the bed and seats herself on the edge while Rosy brings a couple of cocktails. The AIP version resumes here.

MARY *and Rosy toast their rekindled relationship.*



4 Translated from the French by Alan Upchurch.

5 Bava created this trick "magic writing" shot himself, animating Frank's elegant handwriting as it fills a beautifully-lit sheet of blank paper. It was not an insert shot filmed in the US.

6 Bava's knack for color-coding visual information shines through in this shot: Mary's telephone is black, like the receiver of Rosy's otherwise red telephone; when Mary disguises her voice to call Rosy, the handkerchief she speaks through is also red.

MARYS VISIT

THE THREE FACES OF FEAR		BLACK SABBATH
MARY:	Let us drink to renewed friendship. Come on over here and tell everything to your old friend.	Rosy, take your time. Let's hear the story.
ROSY:	Please! It's not a joke, you must believe me!	I can barely talk about it, it's so awful.
MARY:	Fine. Very well. Just as you wish. We'll be serious.	You say he threatened you? How could he?
ROSY:	He's alive, I tell you! I heard him speak. With a cold and menacing voice. He said terrible things to me. He knows everything I do in the house, he . . . he knew my every movement. The first time he called, I wasn't wearing a stitch of clothes. And he knew it. Then I put on my dressing gown and he knew that, too. He even knew immediately that I had called you. As though he were in this very room. Finally, he even threatened to kill me.	I tell you he's alive. I know it was him. I heard him on the telephone. He spoke in a nightmarish voice and he said such frightening things to me. He knows everything I do, move by move. Even when I took off my dress and was wearing a dressing gown. How is it possible, Mary? He died three months ago! We both knew about the same time. I'm sorry, Mary. Sorry for what happened. I never meant to hurt you. But you must help me now. You can't imagine how he sounded. It was terrifying. He's after me.
MARY:	Crank calls. [ROSY gasps.] Coincidence. Nothing but coincidence.	Frank is dead. You're distraught . . . imagining things.
ROSY:	That's what I thought, too. But how did he know I called you? He called me right afterwards. He always knew we had been . . .[SIGNIFICANT PAUSE].	He's alive, I tell you. Why, he knows I called *you*! He called me right afterwards.
MARY:	There's one thing he doesn't know. That you swore never to see me again.	Don't. Don't think about it. Listen to me. What you need is to go to bed and relax.
ROSY:	He said . . . that I would die before dawn.	He said . . . that I would die before dawn.
MARY:	You know very well that he won't come back here. You can believe that. He only said that to scare you.	[LAUGHS] Probably a crank call. And if it were him, why would he want to kill you?
ROSY:	Mary! Don't forget that I was the one who turned him in! And he knows it. I am afraid!	Mary, I was the one who turned him in! And he knew it! I'm scared.
MARY:	You're not alone, Rosy. You have no reason to be afraid. I'll stay with you tonight and tomorrow we'll go to the police. The telephone can ring as much as it likes. Be so kind as to find me a nightgown. I'll go make us some camomile tea.	You are all right. I'm here now. And tomorrow we'll go together to the police. Now. No one can call you. Get me a nightgown now, and I'll go make us something to drink.
	Rosy spies Mary in the kitchen holding a butcher knife. She gasps.	
ROSY:	Why the knife?	What are you doing? What's that for?
MARY:	One never knows! Still afraid?	You never know. Still scared?
ROSY:	No. I feel safe with you.	I . . . feel better now.
MARY:	That's better. Come on, let's go to bed.	I'm glad. Get to bed.
	Mary prepares the tea.	
ROSY:	What's that?	What's that?
MARY:	Poison . . . from Frank. Only a seasoning, you idiot! Here, drink it down. All of it this time. You have too much imagination, Rosy. Come on, hurry up. Drink.	Poison . . .from Frank. It's a tranquilizer. There! You drink this and you won't feel a thing.

MARY'S LETTER

Next morning. Rosy is sprawled sideways on the bed. CAMERA PANS LEFT and DOLLIES across the room to a small writing table, where Mary is writing a letter. In the European version, the shot is a long and unbroken take—unlike the AIP version, which bluntly CUTS from Rosy to the end of the DOLLY-IN on Mary. CUT to a CLOSE SHOT of the letter she is writing.

THE THREE FACES OF FEAR

"Dear Rosy,

I'm so sorry to have caused you such a fright, but it was the only way I had of making you break your oath, which had caused me such pain. It was the news of Frank's escape that gave me the idea. His voice . . . that was me. Don't hold it against me."

BLACK SABBATH

"Dear Rosy,

I put the tranquilizer in your tea not only because you needed it, but also because it would give me the opportunity to consult a psychiatrist about your disturbed state of mind before you could awake. These hallucinations about Frank's being alive . . . talking to you . . . threatening your life . . . are obviously signs that you need help."

FRANK'S ARRIVAL

THE THREE FACES OF FEAR

The scene of Frank strangling Mary contains two shots cut from the AIP version:

• *Following the CLOSE SHOT of Mary's face while being strangled, there is a MEDIUM SHOT of Frank violently choking her and lowering her limp body to the floor. CUT to a CLOSE SHOT of Rosy recoiling in terror on the bed. CUT to MEDIUM SHOT of Mary dead on the floor, Frank poised above her. He releases his grip on her.*

• *Frank grabs a fistful of Mary's hair and mutters . . .*

FRANK: Ugh! Filthy bitch! You're always hanging on my sleeves!

Frank looks at Rosy menacingly. He comes toward her. No dialogue.

Frank is stabbed by Rosy through bedsheet. Camera PANS left, rotates on phone, continues left to rest on MEDIUM SHOT of Mary's dead body.

No dialogue.

No zoom.
No scream.

BLACK SABBATH

ROSY: No! No, Frank! It's not you! You're dead! Don't you understand? You're dead!!

Camera PANS left, rotates on phone, still off the hook, then continues left to rest on medium shot of Mary's dead body. We hear Frank's voice filtering through the telephone, still off the hook.

VOICE: Rosy! You can't kill me. I'll always be here. Close to you. I'll be talking to you every night, no matter where you are. I'll be calling you. On the telephone!

ZOOM-FREEZE on telephone.
Offscreen, Rosy screams.



ROSY *does not suspect Mary's true motives coming to her rescue.*

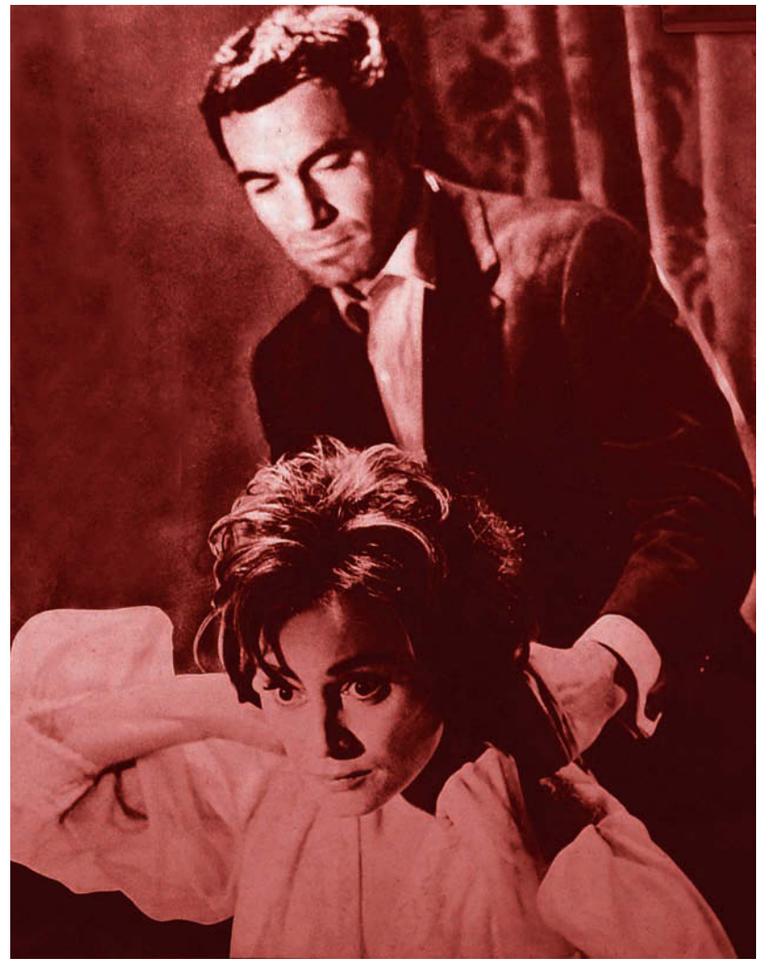
In addition to the dialogue changes shown here, AIP's *"The Telephone"* includes footage directed by Bava that is not found in the Italian cut. Both versions of the episode unreel at approximately the same length, so each version contains an equal amount of exclusive material.

In both versions of the story, when Rosy breaks down in tears on her couch after the third call, the camera pans across the room to a pair of blue eyes peering through her venetian blinds. In the Italian version, the shot is never explained (and, it seems, was included by mistake); in the AIP version, the shot of the eyes cuts back to Rosy weeping, and the camera pans back to her door—then cuts to the outside corridor (the only noticeable decoration is the same set of the cloverleaf-patterned partitions seen in Rosy's apartment), where we see the rear view of a tall, thin, 50-ish man in a dark hat and overcoat walking down the hall in sinister fashion. Abruptly, he turns to the camera, crouches, and calls to his dog, Deke, whom he's taking for walkies. (The dog's name was an in-joke directed at Louis M. "Deke" Heyward, a former staff writer for *The Ernie Kovacs Show* who had recently joined American International as a writer and script doctor—indeed, he may have had a hand in writing the revised dialogue for *Black Sabbath*—and soon after became the head of the company's London office and their European "watchdog" line producer.) The camera follows this funny little man outside—it's the same building exterior Bava would later use, redressed with some camera trickery, as the exterior of Castle Menliff in his next picture, *La frusta e il corpo/The Whip and the Body*—and as he passes out of frame, admonishing Deke ("What are you barking at? There's nobody there!"), we see the shadow of a man lurking behind a shrub.

Later, after picking up the envelope containing the "magic writing" message from Frank, Rosy opens the door of her apartment and comes face-to-face with her dog-walking neighbor, whom she addresses as "Colonel." He sees how upset she is and seems genuinely eager to be of service, but the flustered young woman explains, "I'm sorry, I was frightened—frightened by nothing at all!" and slams the door in his face.

Though these additional scenes explain the eyes peering into Rosy's apartment, they also seriously defuse the episode's claustrophobic tension and—due to the quirky performance of the uncredited player cast as the Col.—introduce an unwelcome dimension of light comedy.

Unfortunately, Billitteri's rewrite created more narrative problems than it solved. How could a ghost haunt



MARY *is caught unaware by the surprise return of Frank.*
MARIO BAVA *directs Lidia Alfonsi and Milo Quesada in the scene.*





anyone via the telephone? How could a supernatural entity assume corporeal form to strangle its victims? Why would someone guard themselves against a ghost by placing a knife under their pillow? How could Rosy kill Frank when he was already dead? Furthermore, by changing the identity of the caller to eliminate the story's lesbian subtext, the rewrite makes nonsense of certain shots retained in the final cut: Mary's stalking move behind Rosy as she monologizes her fears, Mary's mysterious additive to Rosy's cup of camomile tea, the shot of night turning into day through the transom window (in the Italian version, the equivalent of an averted gaze as Mary takes advantage of Rosy's drugged body) and, most significantly, the shot of Mary's black-gloved hand extracting a butcher knife from a kitchen drawer and pausing to admire the play of light on the blade as she tilts it left and right. It's a throwaway shot for Bava, but another seminal moment in the definition of the cinematic *giallo.* Dario Argento would base his entire career on the reiteration of this single image.

The hopelessly jumbled nature of the rewrite betrays the haste with which it was improvised during production, and in the context of *Black Sabbath* (where *"The Telephone"* is repositioned as the second of the three stories), the episode's muddled quality causes the middle of the movie to sag badly, despite its prettiness.

As originally scored by Roberto Nicolosi, *"Il telefono"* defines this composer as better suited for this kind of small combo band music than for classical orchestra. Using a limited jazz ensemble of saxophone, bass, trombone, vibes, and drums, Nicolosi accents the story with suggestively sinful underpinnings, alternatively romantic and menacing, which perfectly support the story's themes of thwarted love, transgression, and revenge.

Once again, AIP hired Les Baxter to replace the Nicolosi score, and his work for *"The Telephone"* is a particular disappointment. Unlike the Nicolosi score—which is typically spare, allowing Bava to generate

JACQUELINE PIERREUX *as the covetous Miss Chester.*

suspense with the sharp contrast between silence and the invasive trilling of the telephone—Baxter's score is one of those wall-to-wall, "we want to hear what we're paying for" scores that never lets up, and resorts to an idiot card ethic which orchestrates the viewer's desired responses to the action: silken provocations as Rosy undresses, dithering passages in the wake of false alarms, and blasts of brass as Frank twists a discarded nylon stocking around Mary's neck. It's the equivalent of the laugh track on an old TV sitcom. The rest of the score is the typical, truncheon-swinging police drama score of the day.

In all fairness to Baxter, there is every indication that he was obliged to score the film quickly, possibly without being certain of its final content. As late in post-production as the preparation of *Black Sabbath*'s pressbook, AIP was apparently still undecided about whether or not to use Billitteri's version. In AIP's campaign manual, the synopsis of the episode describes Frank only as a man whom Rosy has betrayed, not as a ghost. So while Nicolosi had the advantage of scoring an episode he had actually seen, Baxter probably had to proceed blindfolded and against the clock.

In a final irony that Bava would have appreciated, all of AIP's editorial meddling was for naught. When *Black Sabbath* was finally released in 1964—making its New York bow on the bottom half of a double bill with, of all things, *McHale's Navy*!—the Catholic National Legion of Decency all but condemned the film, giving it their "B" rating, indicating the presence of elements which could cause "serious harm in the areas of Christian morality and traditionally accepted moral behavior patterns." Their principal objection: "The second episode of this three-part horror film dangerously concentrates on the erotic and violent details of sadism."

Ironically, the Legion cited no objections to the film's other episodes and their portrayals of incest, infanticide, or triumphant evil—they were wringing their hands over the episode AIP had worked so hard to clean up for popular consumption.

La goccia d'acqua

One stormy night, Miss Chester is summoned by telephone to the home of the village medium, who has reportedly died of a stroke while still entranced.[7] *Arriving at the forbidding house, she is led by a nervous housekeeper through corridors overrun with dolls and mewing cats, toward the bed of the lifeless, staring medium. While left alone to dress the corpse for burial, Miss Chester notices a jewelled ring on the medium's finger and—after closing the staring eyes of the dead woman—pries it off and secretes it in her bosom. A buzzing fly, drawn to the smell of death, alights on the corpse's ring finger—frightening the nurse, who knocks over a bedside glass of water. The sound of dripping water fills the room.*

Returning home later that night, Miss Chester dons the ring to admire it—and a fly alights on her finger! Her apartment proceeds to come alive with the sounds of dripping water, flies, and mewing cats, until an apparition of the medium herself rises from Miss Chester's bed and compels the nurse to strangle herself. Was it a true visitation from a vengeful ghost, or was it perhaps a frenzy of illusions brought on by a fit of guilt? Miss Chester's body is found the next day, her own hands clenched about her throat, her dead eyes staring in cold accusation. The police look around the apartment and see nothing out of the ordinary—there's a white nightgown laid out on the bed, suggesting that she meant to go to sleep as usual—until a scar on her finger reveals that a ring has been torn off. Her concierge claims she doesn't know anything about it . . .

The second episode to be filmed was similar to *"Il telefono"* in that it depicts a single character trapped in a web of escalating fear, haunted by persistent sounds. Set in the late 19th century, *"La goccia d'acqua"* is Mario Bava at his very best: a masterpiece of macabre short-form storytelling that is told almost entirely through sight and sound, with the eponymous sound effect evolving into an unsettling, supernatural presence.

As Lamberto Bava reveals elsewhere in this book, his father was simultaneously drawn to the ocean and terrified of it, which offers some explanation of how he was able to invest so much terror in a single drop of water. By an odd coincidence, AIP's radio



MISS CHESTER *receives no assistance from the dead medium's superstitious housekeeper (Milly Monti).*

7 For unknown reasons, Miss Chester is identified in AIP's *Black Sabbath* pressbook as "Helen Corey," which also assigns the name of "Madame Perkins" to the episode's nameless medium. Perkins is actually the name given to the concierge played by Harriet White Medin.



MISS CHESTER *cannot resist rewarding her efforts with a ring stolen from the corpse's finger.*

spot advertisements for *Black Sunday* were marked by a persistent dripping sound, which announcer Paul Frees (using his Orson Welles voice) explained thusly: "This is the sound of dripping blood! This is the sound of *Black Sunday*!"

According to actress Harriet White Medin, the episode was scripted with the working title of *"Le mosca"* ("The Fly"), drawing attention to another disturbing presence (and sound effect) in the scenario, but it was likely changed at the suggestion of American International, wishing to avoid unnecessary confusion with Kurt Neumann's 1958 science fiction classic of the same name. (*The Fly* had been released in Italy as *L'esperimento del Dottor K*, so Bava could be forgiven for thinking he was coining an original title.) It is one of the episode's great achievements to evoke such piercing menace from something as tiny and commonplace as an ordinary housefly, but ultimately, it is the sound of dripping taps—like the ringing telephone in its companion episode—that rattles the viewer.

Among the many people who have been permanently frightened by this episode is Mario's own grandson. "Of all his movies, [it's] the one that scares me the most," Roy Bava admits. "Even today, if there's something leaking, a drop falling from far away, I have to wake up—even if I'm sleeping, I have to wake up and look for it and switch it off, because otherwise I cannot sleep. It's like it's really dropping on my brain!" [8]

"La goccia d'acqua" is also the most adventurous of the film's three episodes in its uses of color, lighting, and sound. Bava allowed himself an uncommon measure of pride where this episode was concerned, particularly in terms of its technical details: "That's one film that still looks good to me, *'La goccia d'acqua.'* There is a sequence where I made the camera slowly move toward an object after showing the face of the person watching it. It's technically perfect." [9]

Giorgio Giovannini's art direction is exceptional throughout *I tre volti della paura*, but it is particularly striking in this episode, which opens with Miss Chester indoors, gazing through an oval window at a flashing light outside, so that her cluttered, darkened apartment appears to throb with pulsations of saturated green light. [10] From this captivating opening shot, *"La goccia d'acqua"* invests its environments and inanimate objects with a life of their own. The woman seeks to amuse herself by cranking up her Victrola and playing a disc of an Oscar Straus waltz (I'm told it is the one he composed for Max Ophuls' 1950 film *La Ronde*, which would make it an anachronistic touch), which is promptly interrupted—by the ringing of her telephone. She accepts the job and leaves her apartment with the Victrola playing, whereupon we linger behind to listen as it runs down in the strobing dark—its joyous music stretching into the monstrous, elongated, guttural language of the dead.

Our introduction to the medium's house is a lowering shot of a round table strewn with Tarot cards, which proceeds to encompass a view of a large, spacious room with vaulted ceilings, furnished with broken, neglected dolls and wandering cats; the juxtaposition of the dolls and the cats suggest bodies left inert as their wandering spirits roam free, aimless, and lost. The set, incidentally, was freezing cold—you can see the actresses' breath as they converse in the kitchen, where the housekeeper has laid out a burial dress on the table for ironing, before a ceiling lamp on a retractable cord memorably descends of its own mysterious volition to kiss it. The *mise-en-scène* amounts to an almost complete restatement of the scene of Aunt Edith's death in *La ragazza che sapeva troppo*: the storm, the watchful cats (a black one is shown entering the room just before Miss Chester steals the ring), the dead woman's staring eyes, the blonde by the bedside, even the spilled glass of water are restaged here, investing each of these elements with talismanic significance, as if Bava was obsessively working through a traumatic episode from his personal life, or trying to exorcise the remnants of a bad dream.

When I asked Lamberto Bava if the shared images of these sequences may have had some personal significance for his father, he sensibly replied, "You would have to ask Mario." However, when asked if the prevalence of cats in her grandfather's movies was an indication of his fondness for felines, Georgia Bava responds, "No! He didn't like cats. Always in my family, our best friends have been dogs." So the scene works, in part, because Bava furnished his *mise-en-scène* with elements that made him personally fearful.

As we stand in contemplation of the medium's deathbed, it should be pointed out that *I tre volti della paura*—and it is not the only Bava film to do so—posits many of its most horrific scenes in and around beds. In *"Il telefono,"* Rosy receives her first call while undressing for bed, Mary wants very much to get into Rosy's bed, and it is in Rosy's bed where Frank is ultimately stabbed to death. In "*La goccia d'acqua*," nearly all of the scenes of the medium's corpse involve a bed, and in "*I wurdalak*," a sleeping Vladimir is startled into wakefulness by sensing Gorka standing over his bed (a shot that appears to consciously restage Graf Orlok's night visitation of Hutter in F. W. Murnau's silent classic *Nosferatu*, 1922), Gorka steals his young grandson out of bed, the child's mother rises from her own bed at the sound of her undead child's cries and slays her husband in the bedroom, and later, Vladimir succumbs to Sdenka's bite in her own bedchamber,

as other undead family members look on from an adjacent window. Each segment likewise portrays the bedroom in a different light: as a place where love is made and betrayals are bred, where one is most vulnerable, and where we die. One of the film's most frightening shots is a long-shot of the medium's deathbed, which initiates a slow dolly toward the unsettling, unblinking gaze of its lifeless occupant; there is something about the inexorable camera movement here—in the shot that Bava admitted was "technically perfect"—that suggests the very inevitability and inescapability of death.

Like cats, beds were another source of subjective fear for Bava. Asked to describe his father in an interview, Lamberto Bava replied, "A scaredy cat! When he found himself alone in the house, he would look under the bed. There's nothing strange about this; if you have fears, you can succeed in making others feel them, too. You know exactly what needs to be said." [11] Throughout his life, Bava was never the type of person who would retire early for the pleasure or need of rest; he preferred to put off sleep, reading in solitude through the early hours of morning, until he could no longer avoid going to bed. As it happens, his apprehensions concerning bedtime were well-founded: he would eventually die in bed.

At the end of "*La goccia d'acqua*," the cold, stiff, waxen hands of the dead medium reach out to grip Miss Chester by the throat, but as we cut to an objective angle, it is *her own hands* that we see wrap around her throat to squeeze the life out of her. (The change is perfectly choreographed, so that Pierreux's hand appears to be reaching into frame as the medium's hand would do at the beginning of this objective shot.) Bava leaves the viewer free to interpret the story as an account of a genuine haunting, or as the story of a thief whose superstitions combine with guilt to produce a lethal karmic cocktail. The ambiguity of Miss Chester's death can be viewed as a dry run for the finale of Bava's next feature, *La frusta e il corpo/The Whip and the Body*, which ends with its heroine Nevenka (Daliah Lavi) subjectively slaying the ghost of her lover—and in the same movement, as her action is viewed objectively by witnesses, slaying herself.

Jacqueline Pierreux, the star of this episode, was born in Rouen, France, on January 15, 1924, and is perhaps best-known as the mother of actor Jean-Pierre Léaud (discovered by François Truffaut in *Les Quatre Cent Coups/The 400 Blows,* 1959). Pierreux—who, for some reason, is credited as "Jacqueline Soussard" in the AIP version—made her screen debut in 1942 (Robert Péguy's *Les Ailes Blanches*) and appeared in many kinds of movies, spread out over many different countries, during her unexceptional acting career. (In 1955, already midway through her filmography, she was still making uncredited appearances in supporting roles.) Perhaps her most notable earlier films were the French thriller *Série noire* (1955) with Erich von Stroheim, and Wolfgang Staudte's 1962 remake of *Die Dreigroschenoper/The Threepenny Opera*. In the 1970s, Pierreux retired from acting to focus on a new and more successful career as a film producer. Among her productions—many of which are Belgian or Dutch in origin—are *Home Sweet Home* (1973, starring her son's onscreen wife in Truffaut's "Antoine Doinel" series, Claude Jade), Harry Kumel's *Het Verloren Paradijs/Paradise Lost* (1978), Gérard Corbiau's *Le Maitre de Musique* (1988), and Chantal Akerman's *Un Divan à New York* (1996). In 1978, she made a brief return to acting for director Claude Chabrol, in his thriller *Violette Nozière/Violette*. Well-cast, Pierreux invests the role of Miss Chester with appropriate shadings of aging, overripe glamor and covetousness; it's doubtful that the part was so well-delineated on the page, but it's clear from her performance that her character is a spinster, isolated from life and love by her unpleasant work with the dying and the dead (one remembers the superstitious neighbor in *Operazione paura/Kill, Baby . . . Kill!* who refuses to admit Erika Blanc, begging for shelter, because she touched a dead girl during the performance of an autopsy) who seeks some material gratification to complement her daydreams of a different life. She is referred to as "Nurse Chester" in some references, but there is some doubt as to whether or not she was intended to be an actual nurse; in the French version, she is known only as Mlle. Chester, and there is a still photo from the production that shows her parading coquettishly around a policeman seated on a bed, implying that she may have been scripted as a representative of a more illicit trade.

Appearing briefly as the medium's housekeeper is Milly Monti (1905–80), who had enjoyed a popular singing career in the pre-war years as "Milly." It was with this singular name that she made her screen debut in 1932 in two films for Mario Bonnard—*Cinque a zero* and *Tre uomini in frack*—in which she was the lead ingenue. Such was her international celebrity as a singer in the 1930s that she appeared in the American detective drama *The Girl*



ONE *of the great hair-raising moments from I TRE VOLTI DELLA PAURA.*

8 Roy Bava, *Mario Bava Maestro of the Macabre* interview transcript, unused, 2000.

9 Dante Matelli, *L'espresso,* May 1979.

10 Bava may have been inspired to employ this pulsing light effect by Milton R. Krasner's photography in Fritz Lang's classic *film noir Scarlet Street* (1945), in which Edward G. Robinson is driven to suicide by the ghostly voices of Joan Bennett and Dan Duryea in a fleabag hotel whose flashing neon sign posits his haunting between light and shadow.

11 "*Intervista con Lamberto Bava*," *La Lettura*, (Cattolica 1st Festival internazionale del giallo e del mistero), September 1980, 107.

from Scotland Yard (1937, directed by Robert G. Vignola) cast as herself. She vanished from the cinema during the war years, which she spent in Rome, and did not return until the mid-1950s, when she began to essay (with now-careworn features) "mother" and "nun" roles as Mirella Monti. By 1960, her career floundering, she resumed her original identity for Alberto Lattuada's *I dolce inganni* and was given formal, yet affectionate billing as Milly Monti in *I tre volti della paura*, where she makes a strong impression in a role that, again, must have barely existed on the page. The moment in which she turns her back to Miss Chester to take a clandestine, fortifying slug of brandy speaks volumes about a woman we scarcely meet. Her last screen credit was a triumph: in Bernardo Bertolucci's *I conformista/ The Conformist* (1971), she played the sickly, incestuously fawning mother of the protagonist, Marco (Jean-Louis Trintignant). In *I tre volti della paura*, Monti appears to have been deliberately dressed and made-up to resemble Eleonora Duse in *Cenere*.

One of the most frightening apparitions ever captured on celluloid, the story's dead medium was—in most shots—a lifesize dummy sculpted in wax by the man who photographed Duse's only performance for the cinema: Eugenio Bava. Three heads were made: one with eyes open, another with eyes closed (seen after Miss Chester closes the body's eyes before redressing it for burial), and a whole-head latex mask which could be worn by an uncredited performer in shots requiring movement (sitting up in bed, rocking in a chair, etc.). The shot of the medium sitting up in Miss Chester's bed appears to have been patterned after a similar shot in the "Case of M. Valdemar" episode of Corman's *Tales of Terror*, and the movement of the live actor is essential to its success. However, in the subsequent shot of the ghost approaching the woman who has stolen her ring, the actor is replaced with a mechanical wax figure on a caster board, which raises its arms stiffly as it "floats" toward its intended victim. Bava had used this Cocteauvian technique with live actors before, but, in this shot, the very stiffness of the wax figure works to the effect's chilling advantage.

Appearing together in the story's postscript are two actors who had worked with Bava before: Gustavo De Nardo (Dr. Facchetti in *La ragazza che sapeva troppo*) as the inspector, and Harriet White Medin (a dialogue coach on films such as *La donna più bella del mondo* and *Esther and the King*), who plays Miss Chester's thieving concièrge, Miss Perkins. Born March 14, 1914, in Somerville, Massachusetts, Harriet White was the first American actress to relocate to Italy during the post-war years to work in the Italian cinema. She had no previous film experience at the time, but she had appeared in a Broadway play (*Take It As It Comes,* 1944); it ran only two weeks, but it helped her to get an Actor's Equity card, which enabled her to get a role in a traveling USO play called *Junior Miss,* which took her all over the world from November 1944 – April 1945. When she returned to New York, a friend—a casting agent for Paramount—recommended that she try out for a picture that was going to be filmed in Naples. "After what I had seen of [wartime] Europe, Naples sounded awful, but I said, 'All right,'" she told me.



MISS PERKINS *(Harriet White Medin) is questioned about the death of her tenant by a police inspector (Gustavo De Nardo).*

After being interviewed in New York by Sol Geiger, Harriet was cast with six other inexperienced actors who became known as "The Seven From the US"—the working title of Roberto Rossellini's *Paisà/Paisan* (1946). Harriet played a nurse in the "Firenza/ Florence" segment of the picture, one of the great neorealist masterpieces of world cinema. Immediately afterwards, she was cast in the lead role of Primo Zeglio's *Genoveffa di Brabante,* her only starring performance, the story of a Belgian queen who became a Catholic Saint. Not wishing to become typecast as a paragon of virtue, Harriet paid to have a series of sultry photos taken of herself by Italy's leading fashion photographer, Elio Luxardo—the maternal uncle of future Italian horror director Dario Argento.

"I wasn't exactly what you would call the feminine ideal of a leading lady," the actress admitted. "The more *formose* girls, shall we say, were more interesting to the producers, so I started doing character roles. I was the first foreign actress to work in Italian films after the war, but after 1949, they started bringing in stars from other countries." Consequently, her opportunities for good roles began to dwindle. During this period, she married Italian art director Gastone Medin and began to work primarily as a dialogue coach, working with Gina Lollobrigida and Vittorio De Sica, and later with Daniela Rocca, Rik Battaglia, and others. In 1960, her old friend Federico Fellini—whom she first

met while filming *Paisà*—cast her as Anita Ekberg's prim secretary Edna in *La dolce vita.* Harriet made her entrance into horror films in 1962, when Riccardo Freda cast her in his necrophilia mystery, *L'orribile segreto del Dr. Hichcock/The Horrible Dr. Hichcock.* Harriet's character—a sinister housekeeper named Marta, whom screenwriter Ernesto Gastaldi based on Judith Anderson's Mrs. Danvers in Alfred Hitchcock's *Rebecca*—would become an instant fixture of many of the Italian horror pictures that followed in its wake. At the time she filmed her small role in *I tre volti della paura,* Harriet had just reprised that influential role in Freda's semi-sequel, *Lo spettro/The Ghost* (1963).

"I suppose that Bava knew of me primarily as a dialogue coach, because he seemed surprised to find me a competent actress," surmised Medin. "The first thing we did together was the last scene in a story called *'The Fly'* . . . It's called something else now, but that's what it was called at the time. I remember Bava coaching the expression on my face, as [Gustavo] De Nardo was questioning me. I was giving him this challenging look and playing it very cozy. They were shooting MOS [without sound] of course, and as they did the zoom into my face, Bava was telling me, 'Okay, look up . . . look down . . . look to your right.' And I remember how I felt doing it, that it would look as if someone offscreen was telling me what to do. I felt uncomfortable doing it, but the results seemed to please him. Bava came up to me afterwards and said, 'Ah, you're good!'—as if he didn't expect me to be. And I said, 'Of course I am!'"

Bava was sufficiently pleased to cast Harriet again in his next two films, *La frusta e il corpo* and *Sei donne per l'assassino.* To fans of Italian horror, Harriet White Medin is regarded as the outstanding *carraterista* ("character actress") of the genre's "golden age" (1956–66).



MARIO BAVA *whispers direction to the uncredited performer who is being outfitted with the wax mask by its sculptor, Eugenio Bava.*

"The Drop of Water" survived AIP's meddling hands fairly intact, but several of its images lost their meaning as a result of Titra's insensitive re-recording of its soundtrack. Titra failed to preserve the mewing of the medium's cats over one particular climactic moment, when Miss Chester hears them crying behind her bedroom door. Opening the door to let them out, she sees the medium sitting upright in her own bed, then sitting in her rocking chair with a cat in her lap. AIP's version of this scene offers no logical reason for the woman to look behind the door, making her seem like a superstitious fool who fully expects to see a ghost. Pursuant to this moment, the final shot of the climactic scene shows a cat walking along the apartment's outer window sill—an image which seems to subtly endorse the supernatural explanation of events, but which has no resonance whatsoever in domestic prints.

With respect to its emphasis on natural sound effects, the episode's original score was understandably sparse and non-interfering; a handful of atmospheric accents from organ, kettledrums, a cymbal scattered throughout extensive, nerve-whittling silences—and no more. The icy organ is particularly effective, lending shadings of gooseflesh to each of the medium's reanimated appearances. Baxter's rescoring of the segment is mostly effective, accentuating the mood and shocks well, but his contribution is vulgarized by overlays from the sound effects man, who goes completely over the top as Miss Chester's apartment is plunged into darkness, cranking up the sounds of mewing cats, tattooing drips, and dive-bombing flies into an unforgivable cacaphony.

Although AIP declined to edit this powerful episode, they considered it too intense to stand as the film's closing act, as Bava intended. In short, they didn't want to give their young audience nightmares or send them home in wet pants. So while "*La goccia d'acqua"* provides a resonant, bone-chilling climax to *I tre volti della paura, "The Drop of Water"* serves as the opening act of *Black Sabbath,* a rearrangement causing it to overpower everything that follows, making the AIP version a far less satisfying experience, as a whole.

I wurdalak

Handsome, young Vladimir d'Urfe is travelling on horseback through the countryside when he finds a headless corpse, stabbed in the heart with a distinctive dagger. He extracts the blade and rides on, finding shelter that night at a country cottage where a family tensely awaits the return of their patriarch, who swore to kill the dreaded wurdalak Olibek or die trying, warning his children not to trust him should he return home after midnight. Vladimir notices a dagger missing from the wall, where the one he found fits perfectly—therefore, the corpse he found must have been that of Olibek . . . or that of Gorka, the family's father. As midnight tolls, Gorka crosses the bridge to his home with a wound in his chest. He is pale and

changed, and the family dog howls as though he is a stranger. After having the proud stories of his trip repeatedly disrupted by the dog, Gorka orders his sons to put the animal to death. After the dog is shot, Gorka produces from a sack the trophy of his travels—the severed head of Olibek!—which he demands be displayed on the property's gatepost. Is Gorka now a wurdalak or not?

That night, Gorka shows his true colors by murdering his son Pietro and abducting his tiny grandson Ivan. The boy is later found dead, but his mother refuses to allow her husband to defile the corpse by putting it to rest in the traditional manner. After his burial, the child returns home as one of the undead, crying to his mother that he's cold. Crazed by the conflict between her maternal instincts and common sense, she slays her interfering husband in order to reach her son—finding Gorka at the door instead. As the family succumbs to vampirism one by one, Vladimir escapes with Gorka's attractive daughter Sdenka, the two of them finding shelter in the ruins of a chapel. The undead family appear, luring Sdenka back with assurances of their love. Vladimir searches for Sdenka, eventually finding her in bed, back at the cottage. Her eyes have an eerie, otherworldly cast. After indulging him with a kiss, Sdenka bites Vladimir's throat and we see Gorka, his daughter-in-law, and little Ivan outside the bedroom window—witnesses to what is undoubtedly a wedding.



MARIO BAVA *is teased by a fanged Jacqueline Pierreux on the set of "The Drop of Water."*

The filming of "*Il telefono*" and "*La goccia d'acqua*" occupied the first three weeks of shooting. The last episode to be filmed, "*I wurdalak*" began shooting on either February 25 or 27 (sources differ) and occupied the remaining month of production. It is the most ambitious of the three episodes in scope and length. Unlike its more intimate companion stories, it involves a full cast of characters and encompasses many wintery exteriors and a fair amount of travelling from place to place. Given its narrative variety and a length that occupies nearly half the running time of *I tre volti della paura*, "*I wurdalak*" is very nearly a feature in its own right. It is also distinguished by Boris Karloff's last great performance in a traditional horror role, the only vampire role he would essay in his career.

Mario Bava claimed to have been raised in ignorance of vampires. "As a child, I remember the maid telling us fables about Sardinian and Sicilian bandits that frightened me, but I never heard of a vampire," he once said. "In our country, the sun drives away such things. This, I tell myself, is why my films have been successful in America and in the Northern countries, but never in Italy." [12] To arrive at his conception of a wurdalak, Bava explained that "I studied myself and, little by little, found that certain images simply came by themselves, that one has them deep inside." [13]

"A wurdalak," we are told, "is a vampire who drinks the blood of those [whom] they love the best." The word is actually a corruption of the Romanian word *vrkolak*, which was derived from *vukodlak*, the Serbian word for "werewolf." One may remember that, in the mythology invented for Universal's *House of Frankenstein* (1944), a werewolf can only be killed by someone who loves him enough to set him free.

Certainly, Bava's wurdalak was partly derived from the stories of the Sardinian and Sicilian bandits he remembered from childhood. Without delving too much into armchair psychology, the character of Gorka may have its roots in Mario's boyhood memories of his father, Eugenio—the unpredictable parent who went away on long journeys, who sent him affectionate drawings on postcards, but who slapped his face when he dared to sign his own name to a drawing—and in Mario's primal fears that his father might not return from one of his many wanderings, which sometimes involved elements of danger, or that he might return somehow changed or in an unpredictable mood.

Gorka's physical appearance may have been modelled on Bram Stoker's memorable description of the undead Count in his 1897 novel *Dracula*—never before utilized by the cinema, which had always chosen to make the character more repellent (as in Murnau's *Nosferatu*) or more attractive (as in the 1931 *Dracula*):

> *". . . a tall old man, clean-shaven save for a long white mustache, and clad in black from head to foot, without a single speck of color about him anywhere . . . His face was a strong—a very strong—aquiline, with high bridge of the thin nose and peculiarly arched nostrils; with lofty domed forehead, and hair growing scantily round the temples, but profusely elsewhere. His eyebrows were massive, almost meeting over the nose, and with bushy hair that seemed to curl in its own profusion."* [14]

Only a few years earlier, in 1957, Boris Karloff had been approached by New York-based producer Richard Gordon to star in a remake of *Dracula* to be filmed in Technicolor and CinemaScope. A complete script for the production was written before Gordon discovered that the novel's literary rights were not in the public domain, as presumed. One wonders if Karloff's Dracula would have resembled Gorka, or indeed, if Gorka made use of makeup ideas which the actor had not been able to realize in the earlier, stillborn production.

Screenwriter Alberto Bevilacqua was present on the set during the filming of "*I wurdalak*" and witnessed the development of Bava's working relationship with the world's greatest horror star. "At the beginning, Boris Karloff was somewhat dubious of Bava's work," he admits. "[Karloff] was a bit of a bore. But Bava had this strange magnetism, and so Karloff was won over, to the point that he always wanted Mario close to him. Mario found his way into the actors. As he said himself, 'I find my way into the actors by attuning myself to their sadness. Everybody has sadness, but actors moreso than other people; they are more like children. So I insinuate my way into them *like* a sadness; they must feel me like a remorse . . . not like a person directing them, but like a person who can blackmail them psychologically.' We can also see from these words, which I am quoting to the letter, that Bava didn't have a simplistic background. Both from a



THIS CLASSIC *Bava image shows the undead witnesses of Vladimir and Sdenka's neckbite nuptials.*

cultural point of view and that of his moviemaking knowledge, he had an instinctual depth and a sixth sense that were remarkable."

"The personable" Mark Damon (as AIP's trailer for the film pegged him) was born Alan Harris in Chicago, Illinois, on April 22, 1933. His family moved to Los Angeles in his high school years, and it was there—according to AIP publicity—while working at a summer job in a children's amusement park, that Damon was approached by a man who told him that he had the necessary good looks to have a career in films. The man left him with the card of his brother, a talent agent; when Damon read the name on the card—Gummo Marx—it dawned on him that his sponsor had been none other than Groucho Marx! Damon pursued theater during his college years at UCLA, and after graduation, he studied acting with drama coach Sanford Meisner. He won his first film role in Fred F. Sears' *Inside Detroit* (1955, an independent production picked up by Columbia), followed by Richard Fleischer's *Between Heaven and Hell* (1956) and his first lead role in William F. Claxton's juvenile delinquency "exposé" *Young and Dangerous* (1957). After this came several other JD roles, which brought Damon to the attention of American International Pictures, who were also making films of this kind. One of Damon's first roles for AIP was Philip Winthrop, the romantic male lead of Roger Corman's *The Fall of the House of Usher* (1960). Damon made his first European film in 1962: Edward Dmytryk's *The Reluctant Saint*, which was shot in Italy. He reunited with Corman for 1963's *The Young Racers*, but did not return to America to loop his performance; consequently, Damon's performance was dubbed by another promising young actor, William Shatner. Damon stayed on in Europe, to work with Mario Bava in "*I wurdalak*."

Europe suited Damon. He eventually relocated there, continuing to work in international co-productions—primarily Italian—throughout the early 1970s, such as Ferdinando Baldi's *Il figlio di Cleopatra/The Son of Cleopatra* (1964), Sergio Corbucci's *Johnny Oro/Ringo and His Golden Pistol* (1966), Riccardo Freda's *La morte non conta i dollari/Death at Owell Rock* (1967), Antonio Margheriti's *Nude . . . si muore/The Young, the Evil and the Savage* (1968, based on a script co-authored by Mario Bava), and Radley Metzger's *Little Mother* (1973). Damon became a film producer in 1973 with Joe D'Amato's *The Arena*, a film primarily funded and distributed in America by Roger Corman's New World Pictures. He subsequently produced or co-produced such films as Robert Aldrich's *The Choirboys* (1977), Wolfgang Petersen's *Das Boot* (1981) and *Die Unendliche Geschichte/The NeverEnding Story* (1984), and Stephen Sommers' live action *The Jungle Book* (1994), as well as the successful Zalman King cable series *Red Shoe Diaries*. He continues to produce films today through his company MDP Worldwide, his most recent success at the time of this writing being *Monster* (2003), with its Academy Award-winning performance by Charlize Theron.

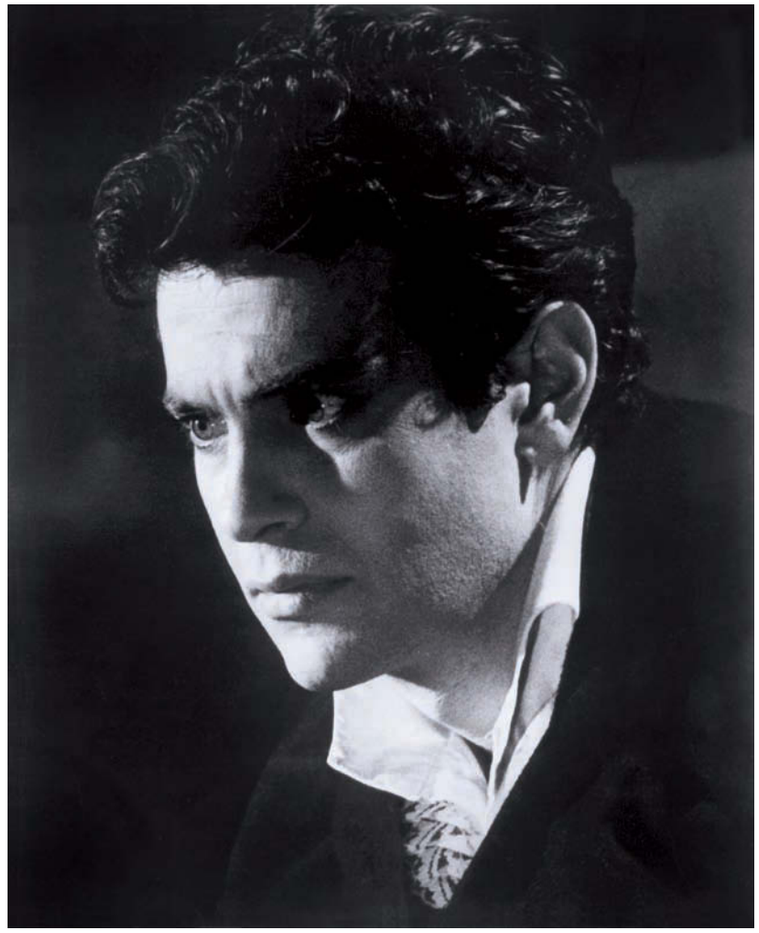
Susy Andersen, who plays the female lead role of Sdenka, was born Maria Antonietta Golgi in Pola, Italy, on April 20, 1940. She began her career as a model, and broke into films with a supporting role in Antonio Leonviola's *Le gladiatrice/Thor and the Amazon Queen*, which was made

12 In the course of reading some of Bava's favorite authors, I discovered that he had cribbed this observation from Guy de Maupassant. In his story *"Fear,"* one of the bases for scenes in *"I wurdalak,"* Maupassant writes about the topical emotion: ". . . the North is its true home; the sun disperses it as though it were mist . . . The clear eastern nights foster none of those gloomy forebodings which haunt the minds of those who dwell in cold countries." [Guy de Maupassant (trans. Arnold Kellett), *The Dark Side* (New York NY: Carroll & Graf Publishers, 1989), 42.]

13 Abruzzese.

14 Bram Stoker, as quoted in Leonard Wolf, *Leonard Wolf's The Annotated Dracula*, (New York NY: Clarkson Potter, 1975), 20–21.





SUSY ANDERSEN *as Sdenka, whose beauty transfixes Mark Damon's Vladimir.*

shortly before *I tre volti della paura.* She was subsequently featured in Primo Zeglio's Western *I due violenti/Two Violent Men* (1964), Antonio Pietrangeli's *Il magnifico cornuto/The Magnificent Cuckold* (1964, opposite Claudia Cardinale and Ugo Tognazzi), *Roma contro Roma/War of the Zombies* (1964), Antonio Margheriti's spy picture *A 077, sfida ai killers/Bob Fleming . . . Mission Casablanca* (1965), and Alfonso Brescia's *Nel labirinto del sesso/The Labyrinth of Sex* (1969), a *faux* documentary in which she appeared as a nymphomaniac. Retired from acting since 1970, Andersen currently resides in Rome.

Glauco Onorato was born in Turin on December 7, 1936, the son of Italian theater actor Giovanni Onorato. He entered films in 1962, playing a role in *Lo sciecco rosso/The Red Sheik,* co-directed by Fernando Cerchio and Mel Welles. *I tre volti della paura* was Onorato's only Bava film; he spent most of the 1960s working in Italian Westerns like Giuseppe Colizzi's *La collina degli stivali/Boot Hill* (1969), but he worked three times in the 1970s for Dario Argento—in *Le cinque giornate/The Five Days of Milan* (1972), the TV movie *Testimone oculare* ("Eyewitness," 1973; co-directed by Roberto Pariante), and the classic *giallo, Profondo rosso/Deep Red* (1975). Today, Onorato works predominantly on the stage and in the Italian dubbing industry.

"*I wurdalak*" marked Bava's first encounter with character actor Massimo Righi, who would become one of the director's "favorite faces" of his 1960s period. Born in Rome on May 10, 1933, Righi made his earliest screen appearances in Antonio Margheriti's *Il pianeta degli uomini spenti/Battle of the Worlds,* Antonio Leonviola's *Maciste nella terra dei Ciclopi/Atlas in the Land of the Cyclops* (both 1961), and in Richard Fleischer's *Barabbas* (1962). Blonde and blue-eyed, but possessed of a tense-browed, tightly wound demeanor that seemed in constant conflict with his good looks, Righi was perfect for Bava's uses, and had memorable bits in a few of his films—none moreso than his role as the epileptic, unrequited lover in *Sei donne per l'assassino.*

Above all, "*I wurdalak*" was a worthy star vehicle for Boris Karloff, who at the time was considered the greatest of all horror stars. He was born William Henry Pratt on November 23, 1887, in Camberwell, London, England, to a civil servant father aged 60 and a mother of 29. Their marriage lasted less than one more year, and some historians have suggested that William Henry, born with an olive complexion, was the result of his mother's extramarital affair with an Egyptian gentleman met during a holiday cruise. Drawn to acting from an early age, "Billy" became the black sheep of his family and followed his dream to Canada, where he worked his way through many jobs (and reportedly four wives) before winding up in Hollywood in 1919, where he began working as a film extra. He worked his way into the foregrounds of features in roles that suited his exotic appearance: maharajahs, princes, native Americans, spies, and criminals, and played his first truly macabre role in the 1926 silent *The Bells*, which cast him as a bespectacled, fright-wigged mesmerist. He was reportedly discovered in the Universal commissary by British expatriate director James Whale, who thought his face had "startling possibilities." Indeed it did. Such was Karloff's impact in his role as the Monster in Whale's *Frankenstein* (1931), that he was billed as "Karloff the Uncanny" less than a year later, in ads for Karl Freund's *The Mummy* (1932); the honor of being represented only by one's surname had been a privilege known previously only to

Garbo. Unlike Universal's other horror star, Bela Lugosi, Karloff pursued his career with care and alternated his classic horror performances—*Bride of Frankenstein* (1935), *The Black Room* (1935), and *The Body Snatcher* (1945), for example—with high profile, mainstream fare on the stage and screen, including *Charlie Chan at the Opera* (1937), *The Secret Life of Walter Mitty* (1947), and the popular plays *Arsenic and Old Lace* and *Peter Pan*. By the 1950s, as American interest in horror pictures waned, Karloff's career began to slow down and he sought refuge in television. He played a detective in the British series *Colonel March of Scotland Yard* (1954–55), appeared in secondary roles in several acclaimed TV dramatic productions (including *The Mudlark* with Julie Harris), and then found his ideal niche as the host of *Thriller*—the weekly horror anthology series which suggested a template for *I tre volti della paura*, Karloff's first serious horror film since 1958's *Grip of the Strangler/ The Haunted Strangler*.

As with Steve Reeves' dramatic uprooting of a tree trunk in *Le fatiche di Ercole* or Barbara Steele's hound-flanked entrance in *La maschera del demonio*, Bava designed a remarkable introductory shot for Karloff, arguably the best the actor had since his "reverse walk-on" in *Frankenstein*. As Gorka's family discuss whether the late hour portends his death, we cut to a crabbed, silhouetted figure in long-shot crossing a bridge toward the family cottage as the clock tolls the late hour. [15] (Once again, the timing of Gorka's return lends it a dimension of ambiguity that is symptomatic of Bava's handling of supernatural themes.) Responding to the howls of the family dog, Gorka's adult children rush outside. The camera pans around the interloper, moving in close shot from a pair of dusty boots straggling up the road to a place behind his back; we watch breathlessly as this dark, hunched, larger-than-life silhouette ambles toward home and hearth. When Karloff turns his face to the camera at last, Bava zooms into his familiar, haggard features—like his watchful children, attentive to Gorka's behavior and the slightest detail that might define him as human or wurdalak. We watch in mounting horror as the patriarch's homecoming soliloquy deteriorates from "I'm wounded!" to "I am *hungry* . . ." to his demand that his howling dog be shot into silence, and then his sinister insistence on cuddling his grandson.

Though "*I wurdalak*" had its basis in Alexei Tolstoy's *"La Famille du Wurdalak*," the marvelously intimidating scene of Gorka's homecoming was inspired by an episode from Guy de Maupassant's aforementioned story, "Fear." In this tale, a man recounts the story of how he became lost in a darkening woods while hunting and found his way to a remote cottage, where he was greeted by a family petrified with terror—a man holding a rifle, two younger men holding axes at the ready, and two kneeling women with their faces pressed to the wall. "You see," the rifle-bearing man explains to the narrator, "two years ago tonight, I killed a man. Last year he appeared and called to me. I expect him to come again tonight." [16] The family unit in "*I wurdalak*" is exactly as Maupassant describes—right down to the dog, whose howling at the returning dead man causes it to be sent outside.



GLAUCO ONORATO *and Rika Dialina as the distraught parents of a child who dies and returns to them a wurdalak.*

The episode introduces a startlingly poignant tense of terror when little Ivan, abducted from his bed by grandfather Gorka, later returns to the family home, begging to be let in because he's cold. Ivan, whose cries are initially indistinguishable from the howling wind without, is the first of Bava's "spectral children," a presence that would recur more than once in later films and always with special meaning. Ivan's appearance, as he kneels at the door and appeals to his mother, strikes an emotional chord never before felt in horror cinema—one that strikes the deepest and most complex chords of adult fear with a poeticism worthy of Cocteau or Franju. The image of the crying undead child is, in some ways, an inversion of a scene in Stoker's *Dracula*, as related by Jonathan Harker in Chapter IV, diary entry of 24 June, as he is imprisoned in Castle Dracula. Count Dracula has been donning Harker's travelling clothes to perpetuate awful crimes in the locality, including the abduction of a child as food for three undead maidens:

> *"As I sat I heard a sound in the courtyard without—the agonized cry of a woman. I rushed to the window, and throwing it up, peered out between the bars. There, indeed was a woman with dishevelled hair, holding her hands over her heart as one distressed with running. She was leaning against a corner of the gateway. When she saw my face at the window she leaned forward, and shouted in a voice laden with menace:*
>
> *"Monster, give me my child!"*
>
> *She threw herself on her knees, and raising up her hands, cried the same words in tones that wrung my heart. Then she tore her hair and beat her breast, and abandoned herself to all the violences of extravagant emotion. Finally, she threw herself forward, and though I could not see her, I could hear the beating of her naked hands against the door."*

Perhaps even more chilling than the wailings of this dead child is the

15 Though Gorka's family cottage was built in the studio, the bridge leading to it was an actual location. It can also be seen in Antonio Leonviola's *Maciste nel terra dei Ciclopi/Atlas in the Land of the Cyclops*, released in March 1961.

16 Guy de Maupassant (trans. Arnold Kellett), *The Dark Side* (New York NY: Carroll & Graf Publishers, 1989), 44.



OLD GORKA *(Boris Karloff) tells the story of how he defeated Olibek to his worrisome family and guest Vladimir in "The Wurdalak."*

ensuing altercation between Giorgio and his wife, who would rather murder her husband than let her child's cries go unanswered. Here Bava makes a devastating commentary on the fragile bonds of marriage, as the knife Gorka used to slay Olibek is wielded against his own progeny.

The climactic image of Sdenka's eyes, when Vladimir finds her hiding in her bed, has also haunted many viewers, unable to explain precisely why this fleeting shot is so disturbing. The shot shows Susy Andersen's unblinking eyes framed in a pool of light, their pupils almost fully dilated. For the shot, makeup artist Otello Fava fitted Andersen with a special pair of contact lenses. The effect is wonderfully subtle, yet every bit as unsettling as any bloodshot lenses Christopher Lee ever wore.

Unlike its set-bound companion episodes, "*I wurdalak*" was partly filmed on location in Canale Monterano, a spooky "city of the dead," northwest of Rome, which was destroyed by an earthquake in the late 18th century. [17] Also, to maximize his control over his environments, various seeming exteriors were in fact constructed on a sound stage at Cinecittà. The ruined chapel landscape in which Vladimir and Sdenka seek shelter—another resonant plot twist—was part studio construction (screen left) and part glass shot (screen right), which Bava had prepared by pasting clippings of a photographed ruin on a sheet of glass. In one memorable shot, Karloff fits his head into the space between the camera and the matte, as Arturo Dominici does when returning to the campsite in *Caltiki il mostro immortale,* providing a live, interacting foreground to sell the matte's authenticity as scenery.

Though it has always been one of Bava's most popular works, "*I wurdalak*" has never quite received its due as the genre milestone it is. Michael Reeves' *Witchfinder General/The Conqueror Worm* and George A. Romero's *Night of the Living Dead*, both produced in 1968, are the films most often named by writers trying to pinpoint that pivotal moment in the horror cinema when Evil was first allowed to win the upper hand. In fact, "*I wurdalak*," made five years earlier, marks the first time Evil was allowed to prevail in a Gothic horror film—without humor and without irony, but also without the passing of judgment, and without the forces of Evil suffering any punishment or, indeed, any setback whatever. [18]

Prior to "*I wurdalak*," such pessimism was indulged onscreen only in dystopian science fiction dramas like Don Siegel's *Invasion of the Body Snatchers* (1956) and Joseph Losey's *The Damned/These Are the Damned* (1961, which also featured eerie children who were "cold"—albeit with radiation), two films which similarly explore infective simulacra of the human species. Though both Siegel and Losey saw the darkness of their respective visions ultimately compromised for commercial release, the cynicism displayed by their films was acceptable in the context of science fiction because audiences of that era generally distrusted science. It is one thing, however, to see dehumanization prevail in science fiction and quite another to present the same scenario within the context of a horror film—particularly a Gothic horror film, which touches the viewer on the vulnerable, primal level of fairy tale. In *"I wurdalak,"* Mario Bava was not saying that Science might fail Man someday, but portraying a Manichean "Once Upon a Time" in which Good is overthrown by the forces of Evil. The message which Siegel and Losey had failed to circulate as speculation finally got out in the guise of a *fait accompli*, primarily because AIP was too distracted by the film's allusions to homosexuality to notice any other subversive content. [19]

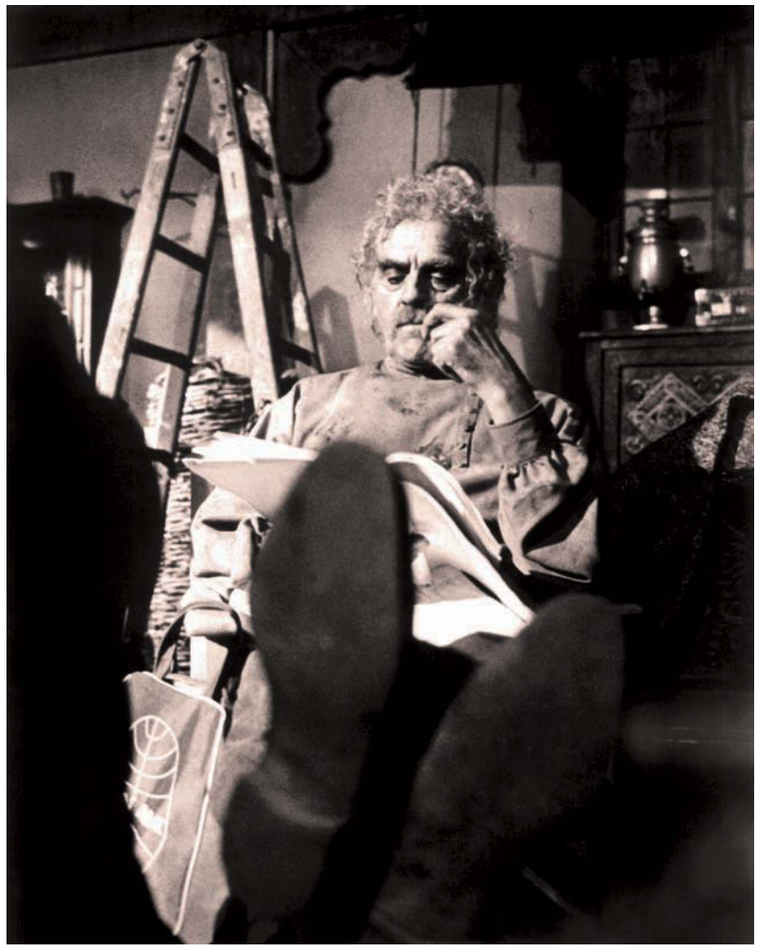
"*I wurdalak*" was also to influence the horror genre in other ways. In *La maschera del demonio*, Bava briefly hinted at incestuous predation in a portentous yet unfulfilled scene between Princess Katia and the awakening corpse of her father Prince Vajda. In "*I wurdalak*," this promise is more than fulfilled; the unspeakable graduates into shocking, powerfully dramatized acts of incestuous predation and pedophilia. For the first time, the decimation of an entire family structure by vampirism is documented—an angle for which Peter Sasdy's *Taste the Blood of Dracula* received much acclaim in 1970, though its implications dealt only with adults and were far less harrowing.

One hesitates to use the word "evil" in describing Gorka's campaign against his family, because he is driven by love, not bloodlust, to reclaim his family in death. Bava observes the phenomenon with great sympathy for his characters, yet with

an almost scientific detachment for the goals of their guiding virus. As Gorka's family move one by one beyond the veil to join him, we are disturbed to find our own loyalties shifting, as it becomes apparent that the family is not being destroyed—merely reinvented on the other side of life. Though not an official remake, David Cronenberg's feature debut *Shivers/They Came From Within* (1975) follows the structure of Bava's film fairly closely. Set in a modern highrise apartment, *Shivers* begins with the arrival of a new tenant, then documents the unit's gradual infestation by sexually transmitted parasites. As in "*I wurdalak*," families infect their own members (even their children) before branching out, social structures disintegrate and, finally, the infected are not destroyed but recreated by the disease. Like Bava's short film, *Shivers* reaches its conclusion with a darkly triumphant kiss. The casting of Barbara Steele in a supporting role accentuates the debt, and suggests that "*I wurdalak*" may represent the true genesis of what we know today as "venereal horror."



BORIS KARLOFF *poses with the head of Olibek, a Eugenio Bava sculpture barely seen in the American version.*



To understand that "*I wurdalak*" worked only too well, one must examine its presentation in the context of *Black Sabbath*. AIP ordered several changes for this episode, in order to dilute its unusually high shock value. For example: at the moment when Gorka removes the severed head of the undead Olibek from his traveling sack, *I tre volti della paura* holds the shot, until Karloff produces the head—a scarifying prop sculpted by Eugenio Bava—and displays it at such an angle that its dead eyes gaze *directly* at the camera.[20] The AIP version eliminates Olibek's head from the shot by enlarging (and thus cropping) the image, as is apparent from the shot's sudden increase in grain. Seconds later, when the head is shown dangling from the gatepost by its long, black hair, *I tre volti della paura* shows the head being buffeted about by the wind in slow motion, while *Black Sabbath* substitutes an abbreviated take projected at normal speed. *"The Wurdalak"* also forfeited a few throat wounds (particularly during the scene in which the undead family plead with Sdenka to join them), and a full-length view of the blindfolded corpse of little Ivan, laid out inside the cottage beside his murdered Uncle Pietro.

To ears raised on Les Baxter's soundtrack, hearing Roberto Nicolosi's original string orchestrations in this segment for the first time is a pleasurably unsettling experience. Whereas Baxter's music never leaves *Black Sabbath* for very long, Nicolosi once again understands the value of silence; his violins and violas are all the more ominous and sinister for their tasteful placement and restraint. The choice of instrumentation here is equally significant, the strings evoking a sense of country while their frenzied melody conjures images of ghostliness; Baxter's trademark use of pompous brass instruments gives *"The Wurdalak"* a galloping zest that is both picturesque and robustly Russian, but otherwise not nearly as enhancing to the material.

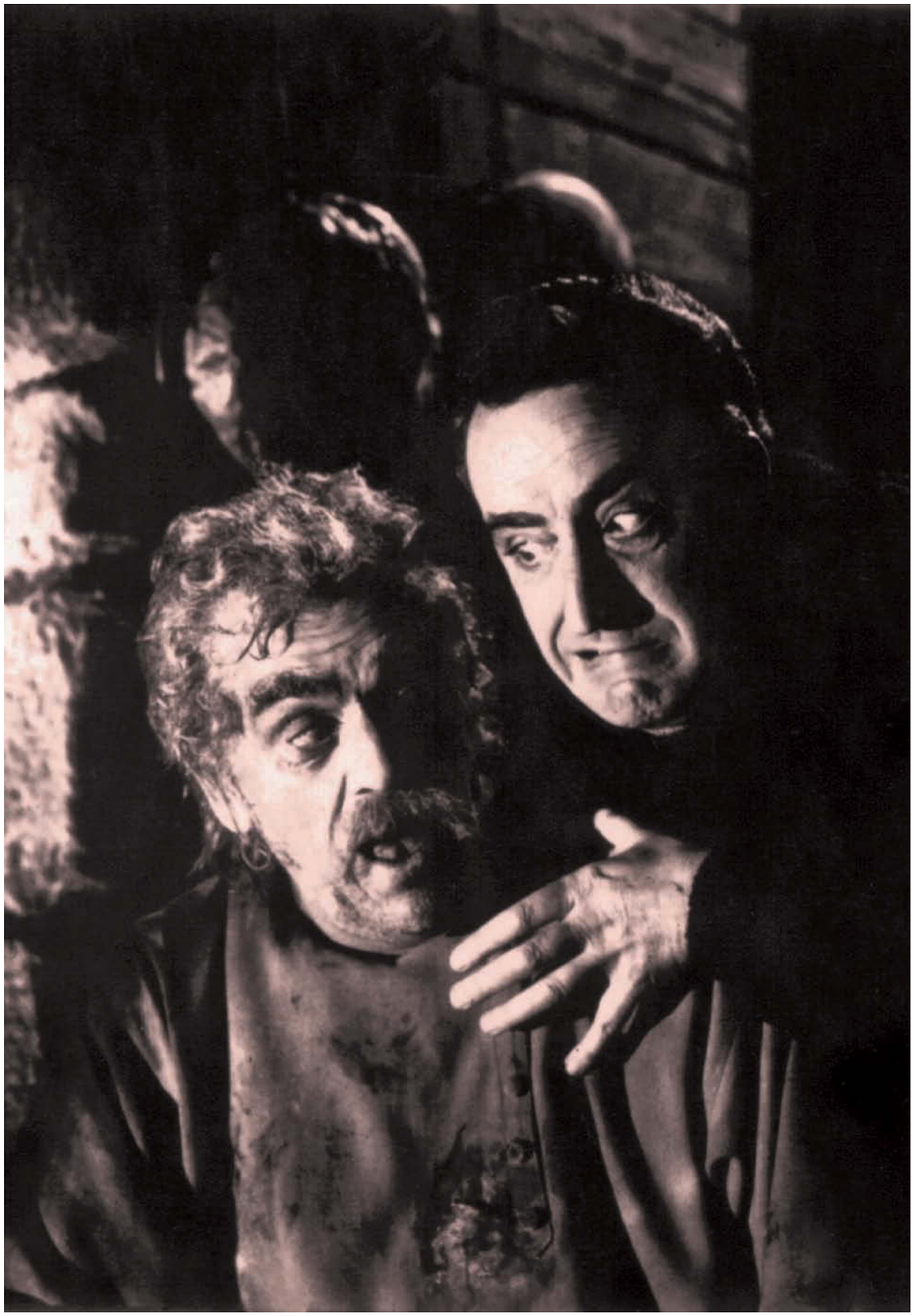
KARLOFF *at Cinecittà, studying his lines.*

17 When Lamberto Bava became a director in his own right, he revisited this location to shoot the "film-within-a-film" included in his hit movie *Demoni/Demons* (1985).

18 I expect some dissent over this statement, but I've given it every possible consideration. There were certainly downbeat endings before, as in the cases of Tod Browning's *Freaks* (1932) and Mark Robson's *The Seventh Victim* (1943), but it can't be said that Evil prevails in either film. *Freaks* ends horrifically, but on a note of poetic justice. *The Seventh Victim* ends with an act of suicide, but the woman in question (Jean Brooks) is not our assigned heroine, and she takes her life to reclaim her independence, as well as to deprive the film's villains of claiming *their* seventh victim. Of course, films like *Psycho* (1960) cannot be counted—Mother is incarcerated, not destroyed, victorious only over Norman—and *The Birds* (1963) ends on a draw. The AIP/Italian coproduction *L'ultimo uomo della terra/The Last Man on Earth* (1963) ends with the death of its protagonist and a bitter future in store for those who kill and survive him, but the victors are more mistaken than truly evil.

19 Ironically, in 1968, American International told George A. Romero that they couldn't distribute *Night of the Living Dead* unless a more upbeat ending was filmed. The same year, they released Reeves' *Witchfinder General* as *The Conqueror Worm* with its despairing finale intact.

20 Staring eyes are a recurring motif throughout the film. *"The Telephone"* begins with a voyeur's gaze tormenting Rosy, and ends with a long-shot view of the strangled Mary's death stare. Many of the most frightening moments in *"The Wurdalak"* involve people feeling the gazes of others, behind their sleeping backs or looking at them through windows. *"The Drop of Water"* features a staring corpse that won't close its eyes, and ends with a slow, inexorable zoom into the eyes of another corpse.



The Karloff Wrap-Arounds

Boris Karloff appears as a warmly menacing Master of Ceremonies in both *I tre volti della paura* and *Black Sabbath*, but the host footage is different in each, unique to each. In the Italian version, Karloff appears only twice as host—once at the beginning and again at the end. He does not introduce the stories individually; these are presented with their own main titles. In the AIP version, Karloff introduces *Black Sabbath* by name at the top, returns to introduce each subsequent episode individually—and then confounds audience expectations by not returning at the end to tie a bow around the whole package.

AIP was motivated to adopt individual story introductions partly by their desire to imitate *Thriller* and partly by their decision to resequence the stories. Arkoff and Nicholson realized the importance of giving their impatient young audiences a monster as soon as possible, so they reassigned *"The Telephone"* (a sleek thriller with neither monsters nor Karloff) to middle position, and moving *"The Drop of Water"* (with its blood-chilling dead medium) up front. Their strategy also involved withholding Karloff's *"The Wurdalak"* episode—the actor's showcase—till last, to keep the audiences in their seats and to send them out of the theater on a high note.

A sound plan in theory, but not in practice. Unfortunately, AIP's resequencing of the stories negated the transitions which Bava had so carefully woven into his film's tapestry. Bava had filmed the stories to dovetail into one another *visually*: *"The Telephone"* ends with a man being stabbed to death; *"The Wurdalak"* begins with Vladimir discovering the body of a man stabbed to death, and ends with faces gazing through a window; *"The Drop of Water"* ties all three together by opening with a woman gazing through a window, her reverie shattered by the ringing of her telephone. (The fact that this last episode commences with echoes of both of its preceding stories may indicate that

GAG PHOTO *of Mario Bava frightening the King of Horror, Boris Karloff.*

Bava was uncertain at the time of filming as to where this episode would finally be placed in order, and was playing it safe.) AIP's reshuffling of the stories, and the further barriers erected by the Karloff introductions, effectively concealed the fact that such a strategy ever existed.

Most of the Karloff host footage was shot by Bava himself, who brought to each intro further proof of his visual ingenuity, though he declined to use most of the footage himself—preferring his horrors to be met head-on and full-strength, without tongue-in-cheek. Thus, *Black Sabbath* contains three fragments of Bava/Karloff footage not found in *I tre volti della paura*. While introducing *"The Drop of Water,"* Karloff appears to be speaking directly to the camera, until—at the precise moment he mentions the title—a droplet of water ripples his image, revealing it as a reflection in a miniature pool. *"The Telephone"* is introduced with a tiny Karloff and an enormous telephone, an apparent forced perspective shot that reveals itself as a split-screen double exposure as Karloff's own giant hand reaches down into the foreground to lift the receiver. Prior to *"The Wurdalak,"* Karloff steps out from behind a tree in the story's mist-laden forest, resplendent in a well-tailored suit; after introducing the tale, he snaps his fingers twice and disappears in a puff of smoke. All of this footage performs the dual function of softening the film's horrors, keeping them light, as AIP intended. It also offers conflicting information, as in the first introduction, where Karloff says, "In this tale by Chekhov—*'The Drop of Water'*—we prove that a ghost doesn't have to be seen to be believed." In fact, the episode's "ghost" does make a very tangible climactic appearance, so the tale says no such thing.

I tre volti della paura, on the other hand, features only two instances of host footage—the first immediately following the main titles. Here Karloff appears atop an otherworldly, magenta promontory, while behind him an illusion of wind is created by light projected onto a cycloramic backdrop through a spinning cyclodrum (a zoetrope-like device). The camera responds to Karloff's bidding that we "Come closer!" and he proceeds to set the mood for the stories to come, talking about how wurdalaks only drink the blood of those whom they love the best, as Bava floods the actor's grim countenance with saturated red lighting—which immediately diffuses as he chuckles and says (if we read his lips), "There I go, talking shop again!" One wonders what Bava was up to, introducing a trilogy of horror stories with this blatant science fiction setting. Might he have been taking the opportunity to demonstrate to AIP that he could economically provide an alien landscape for a science fiction story? For whatever reason, AIP deemed this footage an inappropriate opening for a horror film and wanted something to replace it. Unfortunately, by the time AIP's judgment was handed down, Karloff had left Rome; it was too late for Bava to do anything about it. However, Arkoff and Nicholson were able to take advantage of Karloff's casting in another of their features to film an alternative opening narration, using much the same dialogue.



BAVA, *bundled up against winter weather, confers with Karloff in the makeup room.*

For this new footage, Karloff was seated in front of a black backdrop, his neck and shoulders covered with a black mantle, presenting the illusion of a floating severed head—a trick employed not long before, by William Castle, for Vincent Price and Elisha Cook Jr.'s opening narration of *House on Haunted Hill* (1958). Shot with direct sound (unlike the rest of the movie), Karloff emanates avuncular menace as colors strobe over his face—apparently projected from the same color wheel that played over the face of Vincent Price as he was being mesmerized by Basil Rathbone in the climactic segment of Roger Corman's *Tales of Terror*.

Bava didn't direct this introduction, so who did?

Sam Arkoff could not answer this question, but one would imagine the likeliest candidates to be those directors who worked on Karloff projects at AIP later in 1963 and '64. Reached by telephone, Daniel Haller—who directed *Die, Monster, Die!* in the autumn of 1964—told me that he had nothing to do with filming the introductions. The first film Karloff made for AIP upon returning to Los Angeles from Rome was a walk-on bit at the end of William Asher's "Beach Party" sequel *Bikini Beach* (1964). Knowing that my friend Tom Weaver had interviewed many AIP alumni, I asked his opinion about whether or not Asher might have be the director of this introduction. Tom suggested it was more likely that someone like Anthony Carras—an editor, associate producer and second-unit director at AIP who actually directed more of the highlights from the "Beach Party" movies than is commonly known—had done the deed. Again by telephone, Carras informed me that he did not direct the *Black Sabbath* intro himself, but he narrowed the field of choice to one outstanding suspect: Ronald Sinclair.



THE ABDUCTION *of little Ivan is depicted in this tinted British front-of-house card.*

"I directed a lot of second-unit and pick-up stuff for AIP in those days, and so did Ron," Carras said. "Whenever I couldn't do something, for whatever reason, they would get Ron. Ron's dead, so we can't ask him, but I never shot anything with Karloff. So if it was shot here [in Los Angeles], as you say, it was probably Ron."

Born Richard Arthur Hould in Dunedin, New Zealand, on January 21, 1924, Ronald Sinclair relocated with his family to Hollywood at a young age and entered motion pictures as a child actor. In a delightful coincidence, he first encountered Boris Karloff in 1939, while playing the young King Edward in Universal's *Tower of London*—he had the honor of being murdered by Karloff's bald, clubfooted executioner, Mord. He became affiliated with American International in the mid-1950s, editing most of Roger Corman's early work for the company, and graduated to associate producer on Corman's *The Haunted Palace* in 1963. Sinclair's duties at AIP were not only editorial; they occasionally extended to second unit direction and pickup shooting. Sinclair also would seem to be the best candidate for directing the *Black Sabbath* intro because he is known to have directed Karloff on one other occasion. According to actress Susan Hart, Sinclair directed all of Karloff's scenes for *The Ghost in the Invisible Bikini* (1966), added after director Don Weis had turned in his final cut of the picture, which AIP found to be incoherent. Sinclair was also the man responsible for taking the enormous amount of footage Bava had shot for *Le spie vengono dal semifreddo* (1966) and editing it down to the disaster known as *Dr. Goldfoot and the Girl Bombs*. He died in 1992 of respiratory failure.

The Happy Ending

With *"La goccia d'acqua,"* Mario Bava concluded *I tre volti della paura* with one of the most disturbing closing images in cinema: a slow, unflinching zoom into the cold, lifeless, cross-eyed stare of Miss Chester. When the film arrived at AIP, Sam Arkoff and Jim Nicholson were expecting anything but a movie that left audiences staring Death in the face.[21]

"On the last day of filming, a telegram arrived from America telling us to do something to tone the movie down because it was too frightening," Bava recalled. "What can you possibly do on the last day? Things like that usually take a month to figure out!"[22]

Bava ultimately responded to the cable with delicious irony. The last day of filming had been devoted, in part, to shots of Karloff (as Gorka) riding on horseback, carrying his little grandson away from the world of the living. The sets had been dismantled; only the prop horse remained. What to do?

Bava thought of something, purely out of desperation, but according to his son, the idea was not readily embraced by his co-workers. "His ideas came to him quickly, simply and clearly," Lamberto Bava recalls. "My father was usually able to obtain a desired response with no more than a smile or a simple request, but sometimes his crew would rebel, saying, 'No! What you ask is not possible—it's ridiculous!' He could be quite obstinate, though, and the end results usually proved him correct. In fact, it was often these 'ridiculous' moments which his audience liked best. It was in just this way that almost everyone objected to him putting Boris Karloff on a wooden horse at the end of *I tre volti della paura."*[23]

Bava's crew may have been put off by the illusion-puncturing aspects of Bava's brainstorm, but there was also the more practical matter of Boris Karloff's health to consider. Bava was aware of the actor's long-standing arthritic condition, which had bowed his right leg to the extent that a steel brace was compulsory, and he had organized the actor's daily schedule so that he never had to work longer than four hours per day. Then 76, Karloff had been put up in a freezing Roman hotel, and he had already spent more time than his health advised under the output of the studio fans, which ruffled his hood to lend his horseback ride the illusion of forward movement. When Bava hesitantly conveyed his idea for a new finale to Karloff, he was taken aback by the actor's enthusiasm.

"Karloff embraced me," Bava recalled, "and said that, in the midst of so many fans, he would surely catch pneumonia—perhaps even die—but that he didn't care, because it was the first time in his life he'd had so much fun!"

And so it came to be. *I tre volti della paura* ends—at least the Italian prints do—with a medium close shot of Gorka riding horseback, alone, through a forest of dead branches. The entire scene unfolds in a single take. Gorka slows the horse to a halt with a lusty "Whoa!" then speaks directly to the audience. What follows is a translation of the Italian dialogue heard in the film:

So there you have it! Did you see the end coming? You shouldn't fool around with ghosts, because they'll take revenge! Well, we've come to the end of our stories so, sadly, I must leave you now. [The horse begins to move away, as if taking Gorka at his word.] Whoa . . . [Double-take, smiles.] But be careful as you make your way home: Look around you! Look behind you! Be careful when you enter your home—and don't go in without turning on a light! [Blows a kiss.] Dream about me! [Horse begins to move, Karloff salutes, laughs.] We'll meet again!

This, however, is not exactly what Karloff said on-set as the camera rolled. By reading the actor's lips, we get this:

Well, now! Wasn't that a wonderful sight? Just one great big happy family! But alas, there are no more stories to tell, and I'm afraid I must leave you now. [Horse begins to move away, as if taking Karloff at his word.] Whoa! [Double-take, smiles.] But be careful as you make your way home! In the night, behind you, there may be more vampires . . . and death! [Blows a kiss.] Happy dreams! [Horse begins to move, Karloff salutes, laughs.] The End!

This coda was originally intended to appear only in the American version, to ameliorate the film's climactic horrors and to ensure that AIP's matinee audiences would not be overly traumatized. Bava was unaware at the time of AIP's intention to rearrange the sequencing of the episodes; Karloff's reference to "one big happy family" ventures direct, tongue-in-cheek comment on the closing shots of *"The Wurdalak,"* and indeed, the fact that he's wearing Gorka's makeup—and not appearing as himself, as he did at the beginning of the picture—implies a fluid continuation of the closing episode from horror into comedy.



GORKA *and Ivan gallop along astride the stuffed nag so memorably unveiled at the end of* I TRE VOLTI DELLA PAURA.

Karloff's words are reminiscent of the legendary "curtain call" speech delivered by Edward Van Sloan at the end of the original 1931 release prints of Tod Browning's *Dracula*:

"Just a moment, ladies and gentlemen! Just a word before you go. We hope the memories of Dracula and Renfield won't give you bad dreams, so just a word of reassurance. When you go home tonight and the lights have been turned out and you are afraid to look behind the curtains and you dread to see a face appear at the window—why, just pull yourself together and remember that, after all . . . there ***are*** *such things!"*

According to David J. Skal's book *Hollywood Gothic*, this coda disappeared from all subsequent release prints of *Dracula*, and the only known surviving copy (excerpted on Universal's 1999 DVD of the film) is badly deteriorated. It is possible that the *Dracula* coda may have survived a bit longer in Italy, and had been seen by Bava, but it is also possible—as the actor and director brainstormed together in the last hours of filming—that Karloff discussed with his director how his old studio Universal had once responded to the worry that they might have frightened their audience too much.

But the Karloff coda doesn't end here. As the actor waves his merry farewell, the camera dollies back from his galloping "steed," through the forest, to reveal the full range of ludicrous falsity that haunts the edges of every image ever captured by a motion picture camera. As the score swells with raucous, rinky-tink piano, we see that Karloff is bouncing astride a stuffed nag on springs, rocked by a technician squatting on the floor below its rump; that the wind is coming from a studio fan; that the passing clouds are projected from a rotating stencilled cyclodrum with an illuminated hub; that the "forest" is actually a group of middle-aged Italian men running in haggard circles around a small, primitive 35 mm camera, with pine branches held over their ducked heads! Fade to black.

This astounding coda is remarkable for several reasons. First of all, it has a distinctly Italian touch referring specifically to the 20th century dramatic innovations of Sicilian novelist and playwright Luigi Pirandello (1867–1936). Pirandello's 1921 play *Sei personaggi in cerca d'autore/Six*

21 The shot is retained in the AIP version, of course, but it fades to black much quicker than in the Italian cut.

22 Abruzzese.

23 Lamberto Bava interview, "Mario Bava, Mio Padre" in Luigi Cozzi, *Il Cinema Gotico e Fantastico Italiano Vol 1—Mario Bava, I Mille Volti Della Paura* (Rome, Italy: Mondo Ignoto/Profondo Rosso, 2001), 149–56.



BAVA *shatters the illusion of the wurdalak's ride through the forest in this frame enlargement from the film's finale.*

Characters in Search of an Author builds to a murder, followed by its characters drawing attention to their status as figures on stage, ordering the theater lights to be brought on and crossing the proscenium into the audience. One of the main themes of Pirandello's work as a whole is the ambiguous nature of art and reality. Bava's invocation of his work is especially momentous in this context because no film genre is quite as dependent on the suspension of disbelief as the horror film. Each of the film's preceding three stories has been wholly involving, despite their serial interruption, and remarkably, our suspension of disbelief continues unabated even as Karloff/Gorka breaks the "fourth wall" by addressing us, the audience, directly—as he also did at the beginning of the film. He taunts us with suggestions of things like ghosts and vampires, in which we naturally do not believe, yet he provokes a chill by speculating they might be walking a few steps behind us as we walk home from the movie theater. (Naturally, the scene loses some of its effectiveness on video, where there is no "walk home" involved.) Once this coda has planted its seeds of unease, it gallops on to its last laugh, merrily dismantling the fragile illusion in which we have placed our entire belief over the last 90 minutes—the illusion of cinema.

Thus, the coda is nothing less than Bava's unmasking of himself: a man who became a cameraman in order to be unobtrusive as an artist, a man who disliked being photographed, a man whose chosen field of endeavor was the once-invisible art of trick photography. A man of Bava's character could have conceived such a finale for only one reason: he had finally achieved something of which he could be proud, something warranting his full disclosure.

On a broader scale, the finale is also remarkable for the way it prefigures Karloff's later role in Peter Bogdanovich's *Targets* (1968). Usually acclaimed as the actor's last great performance, Karloff's role as horror star Byron Orlock offered his audience a similar glimpse of the man behind the screen's most legendary monsters. Given the Pirandello-like nature of the Italian ending, it is actually Mario Bava who deserves credit for being the first director to present Karloff on the screen as he really was.[24]

Needless to say, when they got a look at Bava's method of toning down the chills, Arkoff and Nicholson had kittens. They responded by concocting a finale of their own—using an outtake of Gorka's horse rearing, coming loose from its tether and galloping away, in concert with a new closing theme by Baxter, which replaced the rinky-tink piano of Nicolosi's original with pennywhistles and pratfalling trombones.

"It was a most amusing ending, really," Karloff told *Castle of Frankenstein* magazine in a diplomatic 1966 interview. "Sort of getting on this rocking horse and everything. The producers in Hollywood didn't like it, and they had a very valid point. If there had been any suggestion of comedy in any of the three stories, then this would have tied-in. But there was no suggestion whatsoever, and this would have come as such a shock that [they believed] it would have destroyed the film. I don't know if they were right . . . [but] they know their market, they know their field very well, and they've been extremely considerate to me. I'm grateful to them."[25]

It is obvious from his comments that Karloff loved the ending, and Bava did too—so when AIP decided to reject it, Bava and editor Mario Serandrei exercised their right to include it in the Italian version, rather than see it vanish into oblivion. For this version, Karloff's "one big happy family" reference was rewritten in the Italian

dubbing to make reference to vengeful ghosts, thus venturing direct comment on the Italian version's closing episode, "*La goccia d'acqua.*" [26]

True to Karloff's concerns, he did contract pneumonia before leaving Rome, after spending his last day on an already freezing set bombarded by the chill winds sent out from a large studio fan. For this reason, the Bava film was never a favorite topic of Karloff's widow, Evelyn. But, in fact, Karloff had arrived in Rome not in the best of health; he had just completed *The Terror* (1963) for Roger Corman, who had ordered the 75-year-old actor to spend most of his last day on that film performing his own stunts under a tumult of cold water in a flood sequence. Bava had been fond of Karloff and never stopped blaming himself—not only for Karloff's pneumonia but for his subsequent death from emphysema several years later, on February 2, 1969.

"I destroyed Karloff's health," Bava was still lamenting in 1980, the year of his own death. "I guess I wasn't a very good nursemaid." [27]

For his part, throughout the remaining six years of his life, Boris Karloff always spoke of Mario Bava and their collaboration with the highest regard.



According to Christopher Lee, "I remember Boris, who did not praise lightly or easily, saying, 'I would do anything for Mario Bava—I *love* him!'" [28] With Gorka, Bava provided Karloff with his last great horror characterization. A personality evenly shaded with the warmth of the man he once was and the icy horror of the thing he has become, the vulturish Gorka hobbles into the pantheon of Karloff classics.

Release

Though filmed under the working title of *La paura*, Bava changed the name of his movie during production to *I tre volti della paura*—which mocked the title of an anthology film that was being concurrently filmed at Cinecittà: *I tre volti* (1964), a Dino De Laurentiis production with episodes directed by Michelangelo Antonioni, Mauro Bolognini, and Franco Indovina. The film starred Soraya (Esfandiary, the former wife of the Shah of Iran, Mohammed Reza Pahlavi) in three different stories and three different roles, opposite Richard Harris, Alberto Sordi, and Ivano Davoli. Again, horror performed poorly at the Italian boxoffice, with *I tre volti della paura* earning only 103.5 million *lire* [$65,000] in its initial release. Business may have been affected by negative publicity, as Alberto Bevilacqua recalls that "some bad accident happened . . . someone had a miscarriage while watching it, or some other upsetting thing happened," though his recollection is that it was "a big hit." It certainly was in other countries around the world, particularly America, where AIP's retitling—*Black Sabbath*—underscored the movie's shared paternity with the earlier blockbuster, *Black Sunday*. Much moreso than its predecessor, *Black Sabbath* seemed to have everything going for it—it had the world's greatest horror star in one of his greatest horror roles, American star Mark Damon, some of Europe's loveliest actresses, and it was twice as scary in color—but

US *insert poster, art by Reynold Brown. AIP opted to make the image of Gorka's severed head less gruesome by re-painting the bloody stump of his neck a light shade of yellow.*

24 The first time on the screen, but not the first time ever. A 1962 episode of the CBS-TV series *Route 66* ("Lizard's Leg and Owlet's Wing") featured Karloff, Peter Lorre and Lon Chaney as three aging horror stars. Chaney appeared as the Hunchback, the Mummy, and the Wolf Man, and Karloff made the moment complete by donning the Frankenstein Monster makeup for the first time since 1939.

25 Mike Parry, Mike and Harry Nadler, "CoF Interviews Boris Karloff," *Castle of Frankenstein* 9, 1966, 16. As it happens, Karloff's remarks about the ending's greater relevance to a comedic setting were prophetic. One year later, Jerry Lewis would conclude his show-business comedy *The Patsy* (1964) with a similar, backtracking exposure shot. Coincidence? Or might Lewis have heard about the scrapped Karloff ending from *Patsy* cast member Peter Lorre, who had made *The Comedy of Terrors* with Karloff in the interim between the two productions and possibly told an anecdote about the situation?

26 Though it has yet to be shown in America, an alternate version of *I tre volti della paura* has been broadcast on French television, copyrighted 2002 by the Alfredo Leone Trust. This version features re-photographed main titles which shorten the name of the film to "*Tre volti della paura*" and credit no less than three musicians (Roberto Nicolosi, Les Baxter and Stelvio Cipriani) with its score, indicating some extreme monkeying with the soundtrack. Most damaging of all, the Karloff coda fades to black before the film's final illusions are shattered.

27 Louis Sabad, posthumously quoted in "Un cinéaste d'outre-tombe" in *Libération,* May 7, 1980.

28 Christopher Lee as quoted in Bill Kelley, "Mario Bava died without giving full rein to his talents," *Ft. Lauderdale Sun-Sentinel,* May 30, 1980, 4SS.



US *one-sheet, art by Reynold Brown.*

the film would earn only $419,000 in domestic rentals, an inexplicable drop in profit compared to the earlier film.

How a film of *Black Sabbath*'s unquestionable quality could have stumbled at the boxoffice is a mystery, but perhaps advertising was at fault. One of the more bewildering aspects of the film's release—all around the world—is that Boris Karloff himself was pictured in almost none of its paper advertising—an incredible omission, considering his then-current rise in popularity among the young, thanks to *Thriller* and *Shock Theatre* presentations of his classic Universal horror films. He did not even appear on AIP's one-sheet poster design, a magnificent Reynold Brown painting of four beautiful young women cowering from the apparition of a headless horseman. Brown's alternative campaign—which did feature Karloff, as a green-skinned severed head . . . sort of Gorka "as" Olibek—was apparently too graphic for AIP's tastes (or newspaper reproduction), although they did sanction its use as an insert-sized poster, with the bloody sliver at the base of the head's neck painted over with yellow! Elsewhere, only one of the Italian *due-foglia* designs featured Karloff, in a heavily cropped photographic shot of the actor as Gorka. The most beautiful of all the poster art that exists for the film accompanied its French release as *Les Trois Visages de la Peur*, a painting of the film's three lead actresses—Michèle Mercier, Susy Andersen, and Jacqueline Pierreux—framed by two silhouetted strangler's hands.

While the comments made by the unnamed critic at *Monthly Film Bulletin* are hardly worth repeating ("Leaving something to the audience's imagination is not an bad policy in this kind of film" [29]), the British release of *Black Sabbath* resulted in Bava finding a new champion in *Films & Filming*'s Peter Cowie. "Mario Bava's latest film . . . is a good deal better and more thoughtfully worked out than most horror films, and the final story of the three is the best thing of its type since *Black Sunday*," he enthused. "The serpentine convolutions of Bava's

camera are just right for the eerie, grotesque and always sensual nature of the stories. His apprenticeship under directors like Soldati, Emmer and Walsh has taught him the value of color and sound . . . See *Black Sabbath*, if only for the final story. Horror films are usually hideous, but Bava succeeds in making *'The Wurdalak'* beautiful!" [30]

Commentary

In its original form, *I tre volti della paura* ranks with Masaki Kobayashi's *Kaidan/Kwaidan* (1964, based on several stories by Lafcadio Hearn) as one of the finest examples of the horror anthology feature. Each segment is beautifully crafted in its own right, and carefully placed to contribute to the forward momentum and cumulative impact of the whole. Of the other acknowledged classics of anthology horror—*Flesh and Fantasy* (1943), *Dead of Night* (1945), *Three Cases of Murder* (1954), as well as Corman's *Tales of Terror* and the myriad Amicus Productions which adopted this format—each contains outstanding segments, but they collectively succumb to the gravity imposed on them by their weakest links, and their failure to gel into a singular statement. This failure is also apparent in AIP's *Black Sabbath*, but the original *I tre volti della paura* is a nearly perfect work. It is also the film that Mario Bava himself singled out most often as his personal favorite.

Visually, *I tre volti della paura* and *Kwaidan* have a great deal in common, which is remarkable considering that they were made at approximately the same time and sprang from two very different cultures. Both films conjure atmospheres of exquisite terror by exaggerating the beauty of their settings; Kobayashi's film does this by accentuating the theatrical unreality of his scenes and settings, some of which are staged before elaborate, impressionistically painted backdrops, whereas Bava's film achieves an atmosphere of otherness entirely through its inventive uses of color and light. Viewed in black-and-white, *I tre volti della paura* is almost stylistically indistinguishable from *La maschera del demonio* and *La ragazza che sapeva troppo,* but when viewed properly in an original Technicolor print, the film embodies a quantum leap of visual imagination by transferring the fantasmagorical color schemes of *Ercole al centro della terra* to otherwise realistic 18th, 19th, and 20th century settings. Consequently, color—applied luminously and often irrationally—suggests the flaring presence of madness or the supernatural. Unfortunately, some of this effect was lost in the AIP version, processed at Pathé Color; these prints were chalky and had a tendency to compromise the quality of the black levels and to translate flaring reds into harsh, noisy oranges.

The inspiration behind the approach taken by both films, color-wise, may have been Vincent van Gogh, in whose paintings color intensifies apace with the artist's own derangement. In *Kwaidan,* the sky can be a mass of stationary flame or a starry starry night with what appear to be eyes peering out from whorls of cloud. Bava does not go quite so far; instead, as Gorka ambles behind a wall of vines, there is a spot of intense red light on one of them—for which no plausible explanation exists in nature. Likewise, as his characters move through darkened rooms or under darkened skies, the light falling on their faces might be amber, lavender, green or a seething, incendiary red, depending not on natural light sources, but on the emotional tonality Bava wished to interject at that precise moment. *Ercole al centro della terra* had given Bava the opportunity to interpret Hell, but *I tre volti della paura* unleashed those colors on the surface world.

Despite the commercial success of Hammer's Dracula and Frankenstein films and American International's Poe films, which had been photographed in color, black-and-white was still the most common palate for horror films at the time *I tre volti della paura* was produced. In early 1963. Hammer's principal cameraman Jack Asher (1916–91) and Roger Corman's veteran D.P. Floyd Crosby (1899–1985) were both accomplished artists and technicians, and one would be tempted to say that Bava and Ubaldo Terzano had studied their work well, incorporating into their shared arsenal Asher's soft, velvety lighting and propensity for shocks of color, and also Crosby's psychological approach to color—if Bava had not "been there first" with earlier examples like *Mio figlio Nerone* or the embalming chamber scene of *Ercole e la regina di Lidia.* Furthermore, neither Asher nor Crosby ever allowed the visual element to dominate unless in the context of a dream, flashback or delirium sequence (as in Corman's Poe films, particularly). Like the contents of a Pandora's Box, Bava released a veritable rainbow of the unexpected—all the colors of the dark—into the waking lives of his characters, as they were made to grapple with the outward manifestations of their inner fears.

Therefore, *I tre volti della paura* is significant because it innovated a new approach to photographing horror films in color, a method of lighting that seemed to acknowledge in all scenes and situations the presence of the Unknown as well as the Known. It is this technique, moreso than the Gothic monochrome of *La maschera del demonio,* that is now most commonly recognized as the signature style of Mario Bava, who, with this film, achieved his childhood dream of becoming a great painter. And in so doing, he accomplished something far more prophetic in the grand scheme of things: he made one of the earliest *commercial* films to emphasize visual gratification over narrative, over logic, even over consecutive storytelling. Quentin Tarantino has credited the American version of the film, *Black Sabbath*, with inspiring his unorthodox structural approach to his contemporary classic *Pulp Fiction* (1994). "I decided to write an anthology of *film noir* stories," he said. "What Mario Bava did for horror films, I would do for *film noir*."

After *I tre volti della paura*, Mario Bava put in his bid to continue the H. P. Lovecraft franchise that AIP had begun with Roger Corman's *The Haunted Palace*, released in August of 1963. The story he was most interested in filming was *The Dunwich Horror*, which would have allowed him to reprise and improve upon some of the special effects he had devised earlier for *Caltiki il mostro immortale*. Later in the year, on October 18, *The Hollywood Reporter* filed a news story announcing that Italian International president Fulvio Lucisano had flown into Los Angeles to meet with Arkoff and Nicholson regarding two upcoming projects: a television biography that would star Vincent Price as Michelangelo, and *The Dunwich Horror*, which was set to begin filming in Rome in January 1964. A script had been commissioned from Ray Russell (who had written the pleasingly metaphysical *The Premature Burial* and *"X" The Man With X-Ray Eyes* for Roger Corman), but the result was not acceptable to its intended star, Boris Karloff—perhaps for reasons having more to do with the thought of spending another winter in Rome than with the script itself. The recuperating Karloff made certain that his next two pictures for AIP would be shot in sunny California: *The Comedy of Terrors* and *Bikini Beach* (1964). By the time the next winter rolled around, Karloff was no closer to being happy with the *Dunwich* script—now retitled *Scarlet Friday* to accentuate Bava's participation for the American market—but he was bound for Lovecraft's Arkham anyway. The following December would find him in and about Shepperton Studios in Surrey, filming an adaptation of *"The Colour Out of Space"* eventually titled *Die, Monster! Die!* (1965). As for Bava, he would make other films for AIP but his next few features would be for other producers.

I tre volti della paura proved to be Bava's last official assignment for Nello Santi's Galatea S.p.A., the company that launched his directorial career in 1960. Galatea had been funded by Santi's wife, Franca Invernizi, the heiress of the Bel Paese cheese fortune, who (according to the late Harriet Medin) divorced the producer of *Divorzio all'italiana* in the mid-1960s after learning of his affair with actress Daniela Rocca.

Before vanishing from the scene, Galatea produced one last genre film, which includes some special effects highlights that betray Bava's uncredited hand.

29 "I tre volti della paura (Black Sabbath)," *Monthly Film Bulletin* 31:371, December 1964, 179-80.

30 Peter Cowie, "Black Sabbath" reviewed in *Films & Filming*, 11:4, January 1965, 32–33.



ITALIAN *two-sheet, art by Dante Manno.*

Roma contro Roma

War of the Zombies

GALATEA'S FINAL two productions were both anachronistic gestures to the past glories of Italian cinema. Their final project, the French-Italian co-production *Allarme dal cielo/Sky Above Heaven* (1965, directed by Yves Ciampi) offered a very thin science fiction premise under cover of a documentary about life aboard an aircraft carrier—an imitation, and perhaps an *hommage*, to the films of Francesco De Robertis. The company's final thoroughly dramatic offering, Giuseppe Vari's *Roma contro Roma,* effectively represents the end of the *peplum* cycle—a victim of the burgeoning "Spaghetti Western" movement—while also celebrating its roots in Italy's historical silent cinema. Even the film's title recalls such early works as *Maciste contro Maciste* (1923) and *Galaor contro Galaor* (1924), which Vari saw as a boy.

An army of Roman soldiers are bringing a fabulous treasure, a spoil of battle, back to Rome from Asia Minor when they are attacked in the country of Salmatia by a pack of wild, subhuman creatures. The monsters overcome the soldiers, looting them of their treasure, their gold—everything of value—and branding their flesh with the likeness of a one-eyed divinity. In Rome, the senate (led by an unbilled Andrea Checchi) is outraged by what is apparently a vile breaking of the rules of war by the Salmatians. The centurion Gaius (Ettore Manni) is sent to Salmatia to meet with the consul Lutitius (Mino Doro) about a retaliation.

Truly responsible for the attack on the Romans is Aderbad (John Drew Barrymore), an evil sorcerer who rules over the subhuman creatures and insists upon virginal sacrifices to honor a great cyclopean sculpture representing the goddess Elektra, daughter of Osiris. He also exacts control over the generals of the Salmatian army by demanding offerings of their blood, which he drinks. Only one of the generals, Azer (Philippe Hersent), refuses to participate in the obscene ritual, returning to his encampment. There he meets Gaius and his comrade Satirus, whom have been captured by his soldiers. Now disgusted by the ways of war, he insists the Romans be freed. Continuing toward the palace of Lutitius through a forest, Gaius is smitten by the sight of a beautiful woman, Rhama (Ida Galli), with a face "like ice," walking through the woods as though under a spell. She seems to disappear into thin air, Gaius not noticing that she has passed through a portal secreted in the trunk of a vast oak tree.

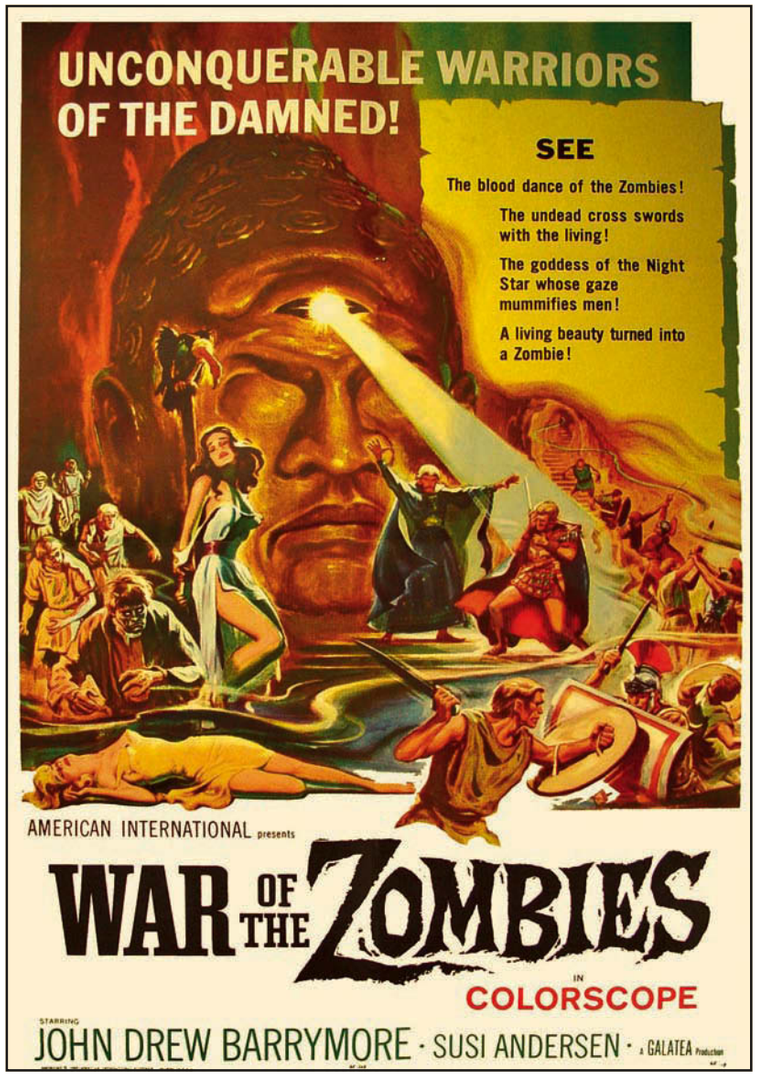
When Gaius arrives at the consul's palace, he finds Lutitius an ignoble man, exacting what tributes he can from the local poor and threatening to whip an old man for his insolence. Gaius puts a stop to this, a demonstration of greater power that inspires the consul's young and ambitious wife Tullia (Susy Andersen)—for whom Rhama serves as lady in waiting—to form a deadly infatuation for the centurion. Lutitius is concerned that Gaius will divest him of his power, but Tullia promises her husband that she will do her best to render the centurion docile.

Later, in the woods, Gaius sees Rhama a second time and dares to speak to her. She is under the hypnotic command of Aderbad and confesses to Gaius that her will is not her own; when Gaius admits to being attracted to her, Rhama responds strangely, slapping him and then kissing him, and then cutting an oracular design into his forearm. He pursues her as she leaves and, this time, sees her disappear into the trunk of an immense oak tree; he follows her into the subterranean lair of Aderbad—who anticipates his visit and drops a steel cage on him. Aderbad reveals that Rhama is a high priestess of the Goddess to whom he is High Priest. He boasts of having bought Lutitius with the Salmatian treasure, and demonstrates his unimaginable power by drinking blood and reviving the corpse of a dead Roman soldier. He summons a beam from the jeweled orb of the Goddess, which strips the flesh from the soldier and leaves him a skeleton. When the same ray is turned on Gaius, he finds himself impervious to its force—the symbol cut into his arm protects him!

Aderbad grants Tullia her wish for control by promising her Gaius, and he gives her a voodoo doll that she may use to gain the upper hand over the centurion, should she need it. Meanwhile, Rhama has freed Gaius and he takes her to Azer's camp and is given the Salmatian general's promise that he will look after her. Gaius then goes to Lutitius and strips him of his authority, demanding that he return to Rome and confess his crimes before the Senate. Suddenly, Lutitius' second-in-command Sirion (Ivano Staccioli) hurls a dagger into the consul's back . . . Tullia appears and smiles . . . and then calls for the guards, accusing Gaius of murder.

The Roman general Lucilius arrives to take charge. Gaius explains what is going on, but his story is so far-fetched that it is easier for him to accept the word of Tullia. He demands that Gaius disarm and submit to arrest. As Gaius is sent to prison in a Roman jail, Aderbad prepares his ultimate bid for power by weakening Rome's military strength with snow and turning things even colder by reviving Rome's own military dead to rise up from their burial places and fight against their homeland on behalf of the Goddess. As the living cross swords with the dead, Gaius is freed and rides out to Aderbad's lair for a final confrontation. Aderbad is ready and thwarts him with the protections of black magic, until Gaius remembers Rhama's instruction about the power of the Goddess residing in her jeweled eye. Gaius shatters the jewel and Aderbad is stricken blind. The sorcerer stabs Tullia to death in his confusion, soon perishing himself. The army of ghosts is likewise vanquished.

Gaius finds Rhama on the battlefield, caring for the wounded Satirus. As Lucilius arrives and commends Gaius for his great service to Rome, the centurion enfolds Rhama in his arms.



US *one-sheet, art by Reynold Brown.*

Roma contro Roma is a difficult film to gauge critically, at least from its English language versions. The original English export print, titled *Rome Against Rome*, was dubbed under the direction of actor Tony Russel (later the president of the English Language Dubbers Association [ELDA]), who dubbed the roles of Gaius and Aderbad. One of Russel's earliest jobs of this sort, the soundtrack is at times a chaotic mess, with the early Senate meeting (which explains the basic setup) a disorienting hodge-podge—not least of all because we find an uncredited Andrea Checchi presiding over it. To make matters worse, the film was cut for foreign release, with the original 110-minute film cut to 97 minutes for its British release as *Rome Against Rome* (which features the curious transition cut of a scene set in Rome followed by a scene preceded by the title card designation "Rome") and further cut to 86 minutes for its American AIP release as *War of the Zombies*.

For all its rough handling, the film collects some compelling ingredients, notably John Drew Barrymore's trippy performance as the wicked Aderbad and the even more psychedelic handling of the undead army sequences, which are awash in optical swirls and whorls of blue, red, white, black and

Roma contro Roma

"Rome Against Rome"
Filmed at Cinecittà and on location
Fall 1963
First released: February 13, 1964
Eastmancolor, Totalscope, 2.35:1, 110 minutes

Production: Galatea (Milan). Distributor: Cineriz

Canada: *War of the Zombies*, Astral Films, 1965
UK: *War of the Zombies*, Panton Film Distributors Ltd., 12/65, 96m 43s.
DVD: *Rome Against Rome*, 82m
US: *War of the Zombies*, American International Pictures, 3/65, "Colorscope," 93m. TV: *Night Star—Goddess of Elektra* (AIP-TV)



BAVA's glass matte of the enormous tree concealing the entrance to Aderbad's domain.

violet. The picture also benefits from the customarily superb art direction of Giorgio Giovannini, who brings a sense of Flavio Mogherini splendor to the lair of Aderbad, dominated as it is by the immense one-eyed visage of the Goddess. In its formal precision and compositional sense, Gábor Pogány's camerawork confirms his standing as the true visual artisan behind Freda's *Spartaco* and *Teodora*, though the film's sense of color is very much unlike him. In its engorged sense of color gel lighting, *Roma contro Roma* suggests that either Pogány was following the examples of Bava's work in the genre, or that Bava was present onset as an uncredited lighting director. Bava's influence doesn't end with the lighting; it can also be felt on the level of atmosphere, with low rolling fog often introduced (and sometimes treated with throbbing color) to imbue Pogány's static compositions with a sense of otherworldly life.

The film's special effects are credited to Ugo Amadoro, a former assistant director to Carlo Campogalliani and Vittorio De Sica, who was credited as an "artistic consultant" on the short omnibus film *Il cinema di meraviglie* (1945, directed in part by Pietro Francisci). That film featured some animation, so it is possible that Amadoro was responsible for the inventive clay animation transformation effects in Anton Giulio Majano's *Seddok (L'erede di Satana)/Atom Age Vampire* (1960)—his only prior special effects credit, and a film often mistaken for a work by Mario Bava. As usual, there are special effects in *Roma contro Roma* that would not been Bava's particular province (fire effects and pyrotechnics, for example), but the film also features some optical effects that don't quite look like his work (e.g., the skeletonizing of the soldier when the ray of the Goddess is turned on him). Bava's contributions to the film are, as always, distinctive. These include a magnificent glass matte painting of the ancient oak tree concealing the entrance to Aderbad's domain (shown in daylight and by night, it recalls the enormous tree trunk dominating the setting of the lovers' ceremonial sacrifice in *Gli invasori*); various hanging maquettes and glass paintings of ancient Roman skylines; a trick shot of dozens and dozens of soldiers galloping across an ancient Roman bridge; and, of course, the ghostly apparitions of the Roman dead. This last effect is particularly like Bava's work as the silently charging horses of the dead recall the spectral coach of *La maschera del demonio*, while the execution of the transparency effect itself looks forward to Bava's handling of the scene of Ulysses meeting the ghost of his dead mother in *Odissea/The Adventures of Ulysses* (1968).



IDA GALLI, *John Drew Barrymore, and Susy Andersen adorn a resplendently atmospheric set in ROMA CONTRO ROMA.*

With the dissolution of Galatea, an era came to an end, as Mario Bava had always warned the younger members of his crew would happen. Nello Santi stayed in the business, working for a while as an independent producer. His first endeavor was Giuseppe De Santis' memorable WWII drama *Italiani brava gente/Attack and Retreat* in 1965, but it stood alone until Santi briefly returned to producing with Mario Caiano's fine *giallo* thriller *L'occhio nel labirinto/Eye in the Labyrinth* (1971). He became the president of Cinecittà in 1972, a position he held until 1977. From 1982–89, he worked as an active partner at Cinefin, a television production company. After a long and undisclosed illness, Lionello "Nello" Santi—the man who made Mario Bava a director—passed away on December 10, 1995.



ORIGINAL *art by Mario Piovano used in the Italian poster campaign for LA FRUSTA E IL CORPO.*

La frusta e il corpo

The Whip and the Body

MARIO BAVA'S NEXT feature, *La frusta e il corpo*, was produced under circumstances quite different to those of *I tre volti della paura* or any other picture he had directed thus far. The project was conceived, scripted, and tentatively cast—long before Bava was approached to participate—by a consortium of friends that included producers Luciano Martino and Elio Scardamaglia, veteran screenwriter Ugo Guerra, and screenwriter Ernesto Gastaldi, who (like Martino) had been one of Guerra's former students from the Centro Sperimentale di Cinematografia. *La frusta e il corpo* is one of Bava's finest films, and certainly his most romantic, but before his specific contribution to the film can be discussed, it is essential to discuss in greater detail the background of Ernesto Gastaldi, who is in many ways the film's true *auteur*.

The first Italian screenwriter to specialize in horror films and thrillers, Ernesto Gastaldi was born on September 30, 1934, in Graglia, Vercelli. As mentioned earlier, his CSC graduate film, *La strada che portana lontano* ("The Road to a Distant Door," 1954)—shot without sound and dubbed "live" from behind the screen at each screening—was the first Italian film to be directly inspired by the Mondadori *giallo* paperback thrillers. At the age of 26, Gastaldi was hired to script *L'amante del vampiro/The Vampire and the Ballerina*, filmed at the end of 1959 under the direction of Renato Polselli. Released on May 23, 1960, it became the first Italian-made horror film to achieve boxoffice success. A quick and imaginative scenarist, Gastaldi proceeded to master all popular movie genres: horror, *pepla*, Western, *fantascienza*, espionage, and thrillers. In just a couple of years, he managed to rack up an impressive list of cult cinema credits, including Paolo Heusch's *Lycanthropus/Werewolf in a Girl's Dormitory* (1961), Renato Polselli's *Il mostro dell'opera/The Vampire of the Opera* (1961), Riccardo Freda's *L'orribile segreto del Dr. Hichcock/The Horrible Dr. Hichcock* (1962), and as previously discussed, Alberto de Martino's *Perseo l'invincibile* (1963).



SCREENWRITER *Ernesto Gastaldi photographed during a recent Hawaiian vacation.*

Gastaldi broke into the Italian film industry the way all screenwriters of the period did: by ghost-writing scripts for established, overextended screenwriters. In Gastaldi's case, his earliest scripts were signed by his mentor (and former CSC instructor), Ugo Guerra. This so-called "black" period lasted for a few years, after which he began to share screen credit with Guerra for scripts he had actually written in their entirety. *La frusta e il corpo* was written during this early period, and Gastaldi was obliged to share credit for his work with Guerra and Luciano Martino, neither of whom actually wrote anything.

"I was the sole author of the script," Gastaldi says of *La frusta e il corpo*, "but Luciano wanted his name to appear in the credits, as well. I wrote a lot of films for Luciano and many times he shared credit as co-writer. Actually, we would speak about the story for one or two days, after which I wrote the first draft. Then he would read it and make his observations. If I agreed with him, I would make the changes as needed."

La frusta e il corpo was conceived as a *faux* British horror film, a deliberate imitation of the English/American style, to be produced exclusively for the Italian and continental market. No overseas distribution was seriously considered in advance of production, because (in an inversion of the Italian reception of *I vampiri* in 1957), the producers felt that British and American audiences would laugh at a film of such brazenly falsified nationality.

"In those days," Gastaldi explains, "the American market wasn't so important for us. It was easy to earn back our investment with the Italian market only." This is quite understandable considering that (according to Gastaldi), the entire production budget of *La frusta e il corpo* amounted to less than 150 million *lire* (in today's terms, about 200 million *lire*)—which translates, incredibly, to roughly $94,000 American at the time, with a contemporary value of just under $125,000. It's a testament to Bava's genius that the final result suggests he had many times that amount at his disposal.

To effect a counterfeit British appearance, Martino decided that all of the Italians working on the picture would be credited with English pseudonyms. "Italian producers were absolutely sure that English names were the best way to ensure the success of this kind of movie," Gastaldi remembers. "I once wrote a very good thriller script located in Rome and all the producers said to me, 'In Rome, it's so unbelievable . . . we'll set it in London!'"

Consequently, the pseudonymous script of *La frusta e il corpo* (never mind the Italian title!) was credited to Robert Hugo (Guerra), Martin Hardy (Martino), and Julian (misspelled onscreen as "Julyan") Berry (Gastaldi). Gastaldi explains his choice of alias: "In 1957, I wrote my first science fiction novel and my publisher wanted an English name on the cover page. At the time, I was sharing a little apartment with an Anglo-Italian named Julian Birri, who worked as an advertising copywriter. As a joke, I used his name, because the book made some sly uses of some advertising slogans he had dreamed up. Well, it so happened that he almost lost his job, because his boss refused to believe that he wasn't the real author! 'Martin Hardy' was another joke, because Luciano Martino was fat and *robusto* [like Oliver Hardy], but that name wasn't my idea."

Although he wasn't permitted to use his own name, Gastaldi was otherwise granted free rein with his scenario. His producers made only one provisional request: "They showed me an Italian print of [Roger Corman's] *Pit and the Pendulum* before I started writing it. 'Give us something like this,' they said. In those happier days of the Italian cinema, it could happen that a producer called you and said, 'Look, my wife bought a wonderful bag made of crocodile skin . . . Why don't you write a nice script about crocodiles?'"

Released in Italy in early 1963, Corman's *Il pozzo e il pendolo* was an enormous hit—proving that there now existed an avid local market for the right kind of horror film. Its great success would inspire several attempts to recapture its winning formula among Italian producers, much as Hammer's *Dracula il vampiro* (*Horror of Dracula*) had done in 1960. The story of a sweet-natured Spanish nobleman

La frusta e il corpo

"The Whip and the Body"
Working titles: *La lama nel corpo, Spectral*
Filmed on location
May – July 1963
First released: August 29, 1963
Technicolor, 1.85:1, 92 minutes

Production: Francinor-PIP (Paris), Vox Film, Leone Film (Rome). Producer: John Oscar [Elio Scardamaglia]. Director: John M. Old [Mario Bava]. Assistant director: Julyan Berry [Ernesto Gastaldi]. Screenplay: Julyan Berry, Robert Hugo [Ugo Guerra], and Martin Hardy [Luciano Martino]. Director of photography: David Hamilton [Ubaldo Terzano]. Art direction: Dick Grey [Ottavio Scotti]. Set decoration: Gus Marrow [Riccardo Dominici]. Wardrobe: Peg Fax [Anna-Maria Palleri]. Makeup: Frank Field [Franco Freda]. Editor: Bob King [Roberto Cinquini]. Music: Jim Murphy [Carlo Rustichelli]. Distributor: Titanus.

Daliah Lavi (Nevenka), Christopher Lee (Kurt Menliff), Tony Kendall [Luciano Stella] (Christian Menliff), Isli Oberon [Ida Galli] (Katia), Harriet White Medin (Georgia), Dean Ardow [Gustavo De Nardo] (Count Vladimir Menliff), Alan Collins [Luciano Pigozzi] (Losat), Jacques Herlin (priest).

Additional credits: English version directed by Mel Welles. Dubbing cast: Dan Sturkie (Kurt), Carolyn De Fonseca (Nevenka), Ted Rusoff (Christian), Mel Welles (Count Vladimir).

Belgium: *Het Gegeseld Lichaam,* Cosmopolis Films
Canada: *The Whip and the Flesh,* Cinépix Film Properties Inc., 1967
Denmark: *Pisken og Kroppen,* 11/26/64
France: *Le Corps et le Fouet,* Les Films Marbeauf, 1/26/66, 85m
Germany: *Der Dämon und die Jungfrau,* "The Demon and the Virgin," Constantin Film, 6/9/67, 86m; *Der Mörder von Schloss Menliff,* "The Murderer of Castle Menliff," TV
UK: *Night Is the Phantom,* Regal International Films, 2/65, 77m 35s, Certificate "X," passed with cuts [originally 78m 5s]
US: *What,* Futuramic Releasing, 4/65, 86m. TV: Thunderbird Films, 5/65, 78m

(Vincent Price) whose sanity is undone by ghostly hauntings staged by a duplicitous wife (Barbara Steele) who has faked her own death, prompting him to assume the twisted personality of his own dead father, the chief torturer of the Spanish Inquisition, *Pit and the Pendulum* was not an Italian film—not in nationality, nor in terms of its fictional setting. Nevertheless, many aspects of the Richard Matheson-scripted film—its stormy seaside setting, its historic dislocation from the present and recent past, its marital intrigue, the presence of Barbara Steele in her first horror film since *La maschera del demonio*—seem archetypally Italian in retrospect. The film resonated with Italian audiences, and its influence on the Italian horror film, particularly in terms of linking deranged adult behavior to specific childhood traumas, would be profound. Alfred Hitchcock may have been the first to open this door in *Spellbound* (1945), with Gregory Peck's flashback to an accidental childhood murder, but Corman's film became the catalyst behind decades of similarly haunted characters in Italian horror, including John Harrington (Stephen Forsyth) in Bava's *Il rosso segno della follia/Hatchet for the Honeymoon* (1970) and the killer of Dario Argento's *Profondo rosso/Deep Red* (1975), whose trauma is shown as a pre-credits sequence and left unexplained until late in the picture, giving the viewer only time enough to be shocked by it, and to examine it incompletely, before the continuing narrative pushes it into the viewer's subconscious, where it belongs. Even Steele's spectral calling of "Nicholas . . . Nicholas" would demonstrate its lasting grip by being reprised, decades later, by Piper Laurie in Argento's 1993 film *Trauma*.

That the Italian horror film was so deeply influenced by Corman's movie is fascinating because, in some ways, *Pit and the Pendulum* was America's response to the Italian horror film: Barbara Steele was cast in the picture owing to AIP's great success with Bava's *Black Sunday*.

After screening *Il pozzo e il pendolo*, Ernesto Gastaldi proceeded to work.



ITALIAN *fotobusta for Roger Corman's influential PIT AND THE PENDULUM.*

He signed his contract to write the picture on December 13, 1962, and delivered the finished script—entitled *La lama nel corpo* ("The Knife in the Body")—five weeks later, on January 31, 1963.

Synopsis

Nineteenth century, Russia.[1] *Shadows of guilt and remorse hang over the seaside manor of Count Vladimir Menliff. The family maid, Georgia, weeps over an enshrined ancestral dagger used by her daughter Tania, years before, to commit suicide after being seduced and abandoned by the Count's eldest son, Kurt. Georgia swears that she will not rest until she sees the dagger plunged in his throat. Under pressure from the Count, his youngest son Christian has agreed to marry Nevenka—another young woman formerly abused by Kurt—despite his avowed love for Katia, a jealous cousin residing in the manor.*

Banished from the manor since Tania's suicide, Kurt returns unannounced to insincerely congratulate the betrothed couple and ask forgiveness. Finding his relatives hostile to his return, Kurt follows Nevenka to the beach, where they resume their sado-masochistic affair with a lusty flogging. Kurt returns alone to the manor. While his family is searching for Nevenka, who has not come back, Kurt is beckoned by a female voice—Nevenka's? Tania's? Georgia's?—to a room, where he is stabbed to death by an unseen assailant hiding behind a curtain. The comatose Nevenka is later found outdoors by the family domestic Losat, not far from the beach, her clothing whipped to shreds. After seeing her safely back to the castle, the others find Kurt dead on the floor of his room, a knife sunk deep in his throat. Georgia breaks down, praying to God in gratitude for His avenging of her daughter's mistreatment.

After Kurt's burial, Christian admits to his father that he suspects him of the murder, an accusation that angers the ailing Count. That night, Nevenka is haunted by whipping sounds that lure her to Kurt's room, where she discovers sheeted furniture and an open window, where storm winds are causing a vine to lash in and out of the room. Overheard stories of lights in the windows of the family crypt excite Nevenka's imagination and, one night at the piano, she sees an apparition of Kurt at the window, his throat swathed in a bloody bandage. He comes to her room that night in muddy boots and rips her nightgown in prelude to another flogging, but Christian finds Nevenka alone when he races to her bedside in answer to her cries.

Nevenka later overhears Christian and Katia professing their love for one another and feels jealousy and anger, provoking another visitation from Kurt. She threatens to call Christian and Kurt dares her: "Call him—and tell him you've always been mine!" The next

1 This according to Ernesto Gastaldi: the film itself specifies neither the time nor place of the story it tells.



CHRISTOPHER LEE *and Daliah Lavi await direction from Mario Bava as he plans the flogging scene on the beach at Tor Caldara. This was the first photograph of Bava to appear in genre film magazines, first in MIDI-MINUIT FANTASTIQUE and then in CASTLE OF FRANKENSTEIN.*

morning, Count Vladimir is found stabbed to death in his bed, an act which Nevenka balefully describes as Kurt's "revenge." The dagger is missing from the place where Losat concealed it, but Georgia finds it hidden under Katia's mattress. Katia denies killing the Count so that she and Christian might marry. Nevenka overhears this exchange, and notifies her fiance, who refuses to believe it and accuses her of having been in love with Kurt. She insists that she felt only hate for him, and runs away.

That night, a scream leads Christian and Losat to the family crypt, where Nevenka is found inside Kurt's tomb, unconscious, her clothing once again in tatters. Given this evidence, Christian begins to believe that—somehow—Kurt must still be alive and hiding somewhere in the manor house. To put their suspicions to rest, Christian decides to open Kurt's coffin, which is found to contain his brother's decomposing body. Noticing a caped silhouette observing the exhumation from a distance, Christian pursues the phantom figure, who laughs like his dead brother and leads him to Kurt's old room. There he finds a pair of empty muddied boots and is attacked in the dark by a maddened, dagger-wielding Nevenka. After stabbing Christian, Nevenka races back to the crypt through a secret passageway and sees Kurt's burning corpse. His ghost reappears to her and extends an invitation to "come away with me." Hysterical, she finally breaks down and confesses her love while poising the dagger behind his neck to join them in death once and for all. With Losat, a wounded Christian returns in time to see Nevenka embrace the empty air where she perceives Kurt and plunge the dagger one last time—into herself. As she breathes her last, Christian weeps, "Let's hope she's free of him forever."

Preproduction & Cast

The title of the film remained *La lama nel corpo* until June 13, when according to a dated contract, it was changed to the "more English-sounding" *Spectral.*[2] Gastaldi borrowed the new title from a ghost story published by Mondadori, which producer Luigi Carpentieri had given him as inspiration while he was scripting *L'orribile segreto del Dr. Hichcock* in 1962. *Spectral* was later changed, presumably to avoid confusion with Riccardo Freda's *Lo spettro/The Ghost*, which was released in February 1963—and produced by none other than Luigi Carpentieri!

Mario Bava joined the production shortly after the completion of *I tre volti della paura*, in March or April of 1963. "Bava was chosen as director well after the script was finished," Gastaldi confirms. "He was invited to direct by Ugo Guerra; they were good friends. I remember Ugo saying, 'Mario can be both photographer and director. That will be convenient for us.'" As a visitor to the location shooting of *La battaglia di Maratona* in the summer of 1959, Gastaldi had been impressed by Bava's facility with in-camera effects, and he was delighted by the news of his hiring; he looked forward to collaborating with Italy's greatest horror director on another draft of the script. Unfortunately, Bava would disappoint his screenwriter in this regard.

"In the horror genre, Bava was the best," appraises Gastaldi. "The second best was Freda, and the third was Antonio Margheriti. And all three of them were more concerned with images than with characters and stories! I had very few meetings with Bava, because, while Mario was a really good director—his images were wonderful, his special effects were the best of their time, and he also had a gift for suspense—he wasn't at all interested in writing."

Despite the lack of a formalized collaboration on the script, Bava had sufficient respect for Gastaldi's writing to film his script almost exactly as it was written. "Bava didn't make any changes to the dialogue, the plot, or the characters," notes Gastaldi. "He changed some special effects described in the script, but he didn't require my approval for this, nor anyone else's, because he was a master of such things."

Though Bava had experienced worldwide success and acclaim as the director of *La maschera del demonio*, and had worked with such international stars of horror as Boris Karloff and Christopher Lee, he was well aware that he had been hired to work incognito on a film aimed squarely at the Italian market. In order to perpetuate the illusion of a British production for a limited, provincial audience, even he was obliged to work pseudonymously. "Bava had to play along like the rest of us," Gastaldi says. "His real name was unacceptable to the Italian distributors." He

selected the unlikely alias John M. Old, which (according to Lamberto Bava) Mario dreamed up when Luciano Martino asked him to choose "an old American name." (Bava himself later claimed to have settled on this moniker "because I already felt old when I was 40" but he was, in fact, nearing 50.) The beard might have passed muster with Italian matinee crowds of the day, but in America, even John Del Vecchio would have been a more convincing "old American name."

Regardless of his official anonymity, the hiring of Mario Bava helped to raise *La frusta e il corpo* above and beyond its producers' initial humble plans. Immediately, he attracted a better class of talent to the picture. According to a surviving production contract between Francinor and Vox, Gianni Garko and Giulia Rubini were originally cast in the supporting roles of Christian and Katia, but when Bava signed on as director, they were promptly replaced by Luciano Stella and Ida Galli (Persephone in *Ercole al centro della terra*), who would be credited, respectively, as "Tony Kendall" and "Isli Oberon." After completing *La frusta*, Galli began to work in Spain, where she would make many pictures during the next two decades. For these productions, she often adopted the *nom d'ecran* "Evelyn Stewart." She appeared mostly in Spaghetti (and Paella) Westerns during the remainder of the 1960s, before becoming the sacrificial lamb of such post-Argento *gialli* as Michele Lupo's *Concerto per pistola solista/The Weekend Murders* (1970) and Lucio Fulci's *Sette notti in nero/The Psychic* (1977).

Tony Kendall was born Luciano Stella in Rome on August 22, 1936. He came to acting through a career in modelling and made his first movies in 1957. The highlights of his career include the interesting horror thriller *La jena di Londra/The Hyena of London* (1964), several "Kommissar X" spy thrillers, *El Ataque de los Muertos sin Ojos/Return of the Evil Dead* (1973, the second of Amando de Ossorio's "Blind Dead" series), the apocalyptic Paul Naschy thriller *Planeto Ciego/People That Own the Dark* (1975), and another horror film for Ossorio, *Las Garras de Lorelei/Grasp of the Lorelei* a.k.a. *When the Screaming Starts!* (1976). He continues to work in films today, a recent example being Damiano Damiani's *Alex l'ariete* (2000), scripted by *Reazione a catena* screenwriter Dardano Sacchetti.



MARIO BAVA, *Ida Galli, and Daliah Lavi waiting to film Kurt's funeral scene.*

Harriet White Medin, cast as the housekeeper Georgia, had won Bava over with her brief performance in *I tre volti della paura*, and had also made an impression as sinister housekeepers in Riccardo Freda's *L'orribile segreto del Dr. Hichcock* and *Lo spettro*, which had since premiered on Italian screens. Medin recalls that the movie was still being called *La lama nel corpo* ("Oh! Dreadful title!") at the time she joined the company. (She would also appear in the 1966 movie of that name.) As an American-born actress fluent in Italian, who was also an experienced dialogue coach, Medin was worth her weight in gold to any Italian production trying to fake its nationality, as the two Freda films had also done. "I got the role because I was an English-speaking actress," she explained unaffectedly. "I was often told by the Italians that my Boston accent made my brand of spoken English sound more English than American."

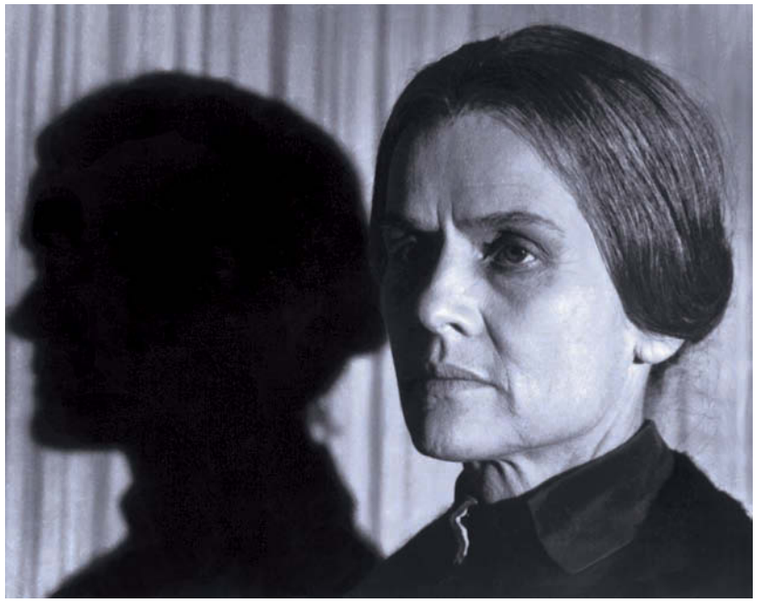
Bava was also likely responsible for the casting of Gustavo De Nardo (as Count Menliff), who had made a small, unbilled appearance in *La ragazza che sapeva troppo*, and who would eventually appear in more Bava films than any other actor. Apparently determined to have his participation known one way or another, De Nardo was billed in *La frusta e il corpo* as Dean Ardow.

Christopher Lee—a vital ingredient in creating the illusion of a British

2 In 1966, Gastaldi would use the rejected title on another script for producer Elio Scardamaglia; in this later incarnation, *La lama nel corpo* became a turn-of-the-century giallo, directed by "Michael Hamilton" (Lionello De Felice) and known in English-speaking countries as *The Murder Clinic*.



CHRISTIAN *("Tony Kendall" a.k.a. Luciano Stella) comforts his true love Katia ("Isli Oberon" a.k.a. Ida Galli).*



HARRIET WHITE MEDIN *as she appeared in L'ORRIBILE SEGRETO DEL DR. HICHCOCK, the first of her many "sinister housekeeper" roles.*

horror picture—had initially turned down the role of Kurt Menliff when first approached by Martino's company, but changed his tune when Bava came aboard. "He wasn't free when the project started," recalls Gastaldi, "but afterwards, he became free. His name helped the producers to secure a good minimum guarantee from the distributors. Maybe Bava helped [the producers] to contact him." Lee had greatly enjoyed working with Bava on *Ercole al centro della terra*, and he looked forward to their second collaboration with a sense of excitement. He grew even more excited when he found out who his leading lady would be.

The casting of the lead role of Nevenka would be critical to the film's success, and the producers' first choice for the role was almost certainly Barbara Steele—not because of the international success she had with Bava's *La maschera del demonio,* but because she was British, had been prominently featured in *Pit and the Pendulum,* and was currently living and working in Rome. However, if the producers approached Steele through her agency, they would have been informed that the actress—who had just played a memorable, if marginal, role in Federico Fellini's *Otto e mezzo/8½*—was no longer accepting roles in horror movies.

Years later, Bava voiced an opinion that may support this speculation: "Barbara Steele had the perfect face for my films, but Fellini destroyed her. As a result of her role in *Otto e mezzo,* she got it into her head that she would appear only in intellectual films, but no one offered them to her."[3] In a subsequent interview, he allowed still more bitterness to show when he characterized the actress as he had observed her on the Via Veneto, "always sitting there, with her glasses and intellectual book, side by side with [Alberto] Moravia." After *Otto e mezzo*, Steele did not make another horror film until Mario Caiano's *L'Amante d'oltre-tomba/Nightmare Castle* (1965).

Fortunately, Steele was not the only option. Some months before *La frusta e il corpo* entered preproduction, Luciano Martino's Vox Film had coproduced (with Titanus) the directorial debut of Fellini's longtime assistant director, Brunello Rondi. Entitled *Il demonio* (filmed 1962, released 1964), it was based on the true story of a young Italian peasant girl whose unruly behavior, aggravated by her abandonment by a man (Frank Wolff) who took sexual advantage of her, was interpreted by superstitious locals as signs of demonic possession.[4] Giving an extraordinary, feral performance in the lead role of this pseudo-documentary, black-and-white film was Israeli actress Daliah Lavi, who first came to Rome in 1962 to play a supporting role in Vincente Minnelli's *Two Weeks in Another Town.*

Lavi (the name is accented on its second syllable) was born Daliah Lewinbook (not "Levenbuch," as reported in many sources) in the kibbutz-like community of Shavei Zion, Israel, on October 12, 1942. A self-described "wild child," Daliah (and other neighborhood children) spent the summer of 1953 stealing swims in the pool at The Dolphin House, a local hotel, where the cast of the Hollywood film *The Juggler* happened to be staying. When the hotel staff was on the point of having the children thrown out, the film's cast and crew—including actors Kirk Douglas, John Banner, and Alf Kjellin—interceded on their behalf, and Daliah was adopted by the production as a kind of mascot. As the filming ended, the crew learned of Daliah's wish to become a dancer and arranged for her a scholarship to study dance at the Royal Opera in Stockholm. When high blood pressure forced her to surrender her dream of becoming a ballerina, she began modelling and married her first husband, a French clothier, who had acquaintances in the French film community. After making several films in France for the likes of Abel Gance and Michel Boisrond, she divorced her husband and went to Rome, where she was discovered on the Via Veneto and invited to appear in *Two Weeks in Another Town,* in which she was cast as the lover of her former mentor, Kirk

Douglas. She kept her true identity a secret from the actor until the wrap party for the Italian unit, where Douglas was staggered by the revelation of how much that 1953 scholarship had made possible in the life of little Daliah Lewinbook.

Lavi accompanied the production back to Hollywood for additional studio photography, but despite the urgings of her co-stars, she chose not to stay. "I hated Hollywood," she says. "I was very unhappy there. No one walks in the streets in Hollywood; everyone sits in their own houses, stays in their own cliques. There's no life! So I went back to Italy—it was the height of Rome in those days. Everyone was coming there to make movies—*Cleopatra*, all those Westerns with Clint Eastwood—the studios were always packed! Rome was bustling with life. No one ever went to sleep there! The Via Veneto was the center of everything; it later moved away from there, but at the time, you could see people sitting there with a cup of coffee—*for seven hours!* For a young person, it was Heaven."

After making *Il demonio*, Lavi was cast opposite Peter O'Toole in Richard Brooks' *Lord Jim*, which would finally be released in 1965, after more than two years in the making. For her part, Lavi spent seven months in Cambodia playing the role of "The Girl" (which would later land her the cover of *The Saturday Evening Post*), after which she followed the crew back to London and fell in love with the film's assistant director, John Sullivan. It was in London that she received a call from Vox Film inviting her to play Nevenka in *La frusta e il corpo*. Luciano Martino, who had co-produced *Il demonio*, may have been persuaded to use Lavi again by the attention she was receiving from *Lord Jim*, but consciously or unconsciously, he may have also understood that Nevenka and the girl in *Il demonio* were essentially the same character—women who inflict pain on themselves to sustain the pain inflicted on them by lost loves.



DALIAH LAVI *sees nearly eye-to-eye with 6' 6" leading man, Christopher Lee.*

Lavi accepted Martino's invitation, attracted to the character of Nevenka and also to the opportunity to act opposite Christopher Lee, whom she and Sullivan had met at some film circle parties in London.

"We were not great friends, but we had met him and his wife at some parties," Lavi recalls. "He was a very nice man, very well-educated, very well-read. He spoke beautifully. I could never understand why he didn't play more leading roles as a lover; he was a very handsome man and had the look of a real aristocrat—the way he walks and talks and uses his hands. He was like *a real lord*, which really impressed *me*, coming from a *kibbutz!"* Lavi underestimates her own noble bearing, instilled in her by ballet training, which makes the co-stars look very well-paired onscreen.

Lee was equally delighted with Lavi's casting and clearly relished this rare opportunity to play a romantic role opposite one of the world's most glamorous actresses. At the time of filming, his wife Gitte was pregnant with their first and only child, Christina, and reportedly a little nervous about the erotically charged love scenes in which her husband would be participating. "She had nothing to worry about," chuckles Lavi, who remembers the production today mostly as a series of flights (and waits for flights) in and out of Rome, back to London, where she spent every weekend with her fiance.

Another important addition to the cast was Luciano Pigozzi—"the Italian Peter Lorre"—who, for the first time ever, was credited as "Alan Collins," a screen name he would use for the rest of his career. Born in Rome on January 10, 1927, Pigozzi made his acting debut in Alberto Lattuada's *Scuola elementare* ("Elementary School," 1954), in which he played a minor supporting role as a teacher. After an intermediary role in Roberto Rossellini's *Il Generale della Rovere* (1959), he received his first major supporting role as the Nazi soldier whom Sophia Loren calls *"Scimmioto"* ("Monkeyface") in Vittorio De Sica's Oscar-winning adaptation of Alberto Moravia's *La ciociara/Two Women* (1960). Pigozzi's striking resemblance to Hungarian actor Peter Lorre was first exploited in the film *Lycanthropus/Werewolf in a Girl's Dormitory* (1961), also written by Ernesto Gastaldi and directed by *La morte viene dallo spazio*'s Paolo Heusch under the name "Richard Benson." In this film, Pigozzi played Walter, the groundskeeper at a correctional institution for young women who spies on the student body and blackmails them into sexual assignations. Pigozzi's large eyes often got him cast as a Peeping Tom, but his character of the lame and innocent Losat in *La frusta e il corpo* is one of his best and most sympathetic portrayals.

"Bava contacted me through my agent," Pigozzi explains. "He found me in a directory of character actors, called up and said, 'I want this guy.' When we spoke, he asked me which was the first film I made that was important, I told him, and he went away to watch it. After he saw it, he called again and told me, 'I like you very much, so now you're going to come and work with us. Go to the tailor, go to the makeup . . .' In time, we became friends. Every day after lunch we would sit together and play cards—*bazzica scopa!*—but I always let Bava win . . . If he didn't win, I thought maybe he wouldn't hire me again!"

Cast as the bearded priest presiding over the funeral of Kurt Menliff was French actor Jacques Herlin. Born in Toulon in 1927, Herlin was discovered by the comedian Pierre Fresnay and played his first roles on

3 Ornella Volta, "Conversation avec Mario Bava," *Positif* 138, May 1972, 44–48.

4 Though it was filmed before *La frusta e il corpo* in the early winter months of 1962, *Il demonio* encountered censorship problems that held it back from release in Italy until January 1964.



KATIA *is startled by the surprise appearance of Losat (Luciano Pigozzi).*

the French stage. In the early 1960s, he travelled to Italy with a touring company of Eugene Ionesco's *Tueurs sans gages*, and while in Rome, caught the eye of some casting directors. In addition *to La frusta e il corpo*, he appeared in another Leone Film co-production of 1963: Michele Lupo's *Maciste l'eroe piu grande del mondo/Goliath and the Sins of Babylon*. Herlin's most visible roles occur in Elio Petri's *La decima vittima* (1966, in which he addresses the audience at the beginning of the film, explaining the rules of "The Big Hunt") and in Roberto Montero's *Le due facce del dollaro/Two Sides of the Dollar* (1967, in which he is billed directly below star "Monty Greenwood" [Maurice Poli] and cast as a gold-crazed mathematics professor). His late '60s/early '70s work was primarily in Westerns, his name appearing near the bottom of the cast lists of Giorgio Ferroni's *Per pochi dollari ancora/Fort Yuma Gold* (1966), Mario Caiano's *Adios, hombre* (1966), Tinto Brass' *Yankee, l'Americano/Yankee* (1967), and others. After playing the Pharaoh's magician in the miniseries *Moses the Lawgiver* (1975, for which Mario Bava designed the special effects), Herlin left Rome when the Italian cinema crisis of the 1980s compelled him to relocate to Paris in 1982. When interviewed in 1997 by French writer Pascal Françaix, Herlin had no recollection of his day's work for Mario Bava in *La frusta e il corpo.*

Production & Special Effects

Filmed during an unseasonably cool Roman summer, *La frusta e il corpo* had a shooting schedule of exactly seven weeks—six for production, and the final week devoted to special effects photography. Most of the interior scenes were filmed in an actual *castello,* a disused property which—with different wallpaper and furnishings—had also provided the interiors for the Gastaldi-scripted *Lycanthropus,* two years earlier. [5]

"The castle was a ruins that was not nearly so beautiful or as comfortable as it looks in the movie," recalls Daliah Lavi. "The furniture that you see was only put in for the scenes we did; I don't remember the castle having any furniture of its own, at all. Everything there was a prop, and the building itself was very cold."

Some interior scenes were filmed on sets in a studio, notably those in the father's bedroom with its trick fireplace, and in the family crypt. Given the unseasonably cool weather, the cast did not object at all to wearing heavy period clothing, none of which was made expressly for the picture. Instead, everything was culled from various Italian wardrobe departments and had seen service before in dozens of other movies set in different countries and historical eras. One of the fascinating aspects of the film is its ambiguity of time and place; it might all exist in a dream. Gastaldi wrote the film with a 19th century setting in mind, but as he says, "Bava (or maybe it was one of the producers, I can't remember) preferred to be unspecific. Someone said, 'No time, no place means no problems about what kind of castle, dresses, etc.'" Indeed, while Nevenka's name conveys the flavor of Russia, the funereal garb she wears to Kurt's funeral looks Spanish, yet more than one critic has commented on the film's visual debt to the paintings of Thomas Gainsborough and the writings of Emily Brönte. The family name of Menliff is also difficult to assign a place in reality; an Internet search for the name yields only assorted references to *La frusta e il corpo.*

The beach exteriors were filmed at Bava's beloved Tor Caldara. The Menliff castle was added to the hillside overlooking the beach by affixing to a large sheet of glass a castle clipped from a postcard. Luciano Pigozzi was particularly impressed as he watched Bava bring this illusion to life: "He had a special glass with one postcard on the corner . . . You see this at the beginning, this castle on the beach, and you say, 'Where is this location? It's *beautiful!*'" For a later night shot requiring the flame of Losat's torch to be visible in the distance as it is carried uphill toward the castle, a moving light source was reflected off the glass from a vantage beside the camera. Bava's use of Tor Caldara in *La frusta e il corpo* is appropriately romantic and haunting. Whenever the location reappears in later Bava films, such as *I coltelli del vendicatore/Knives of the Avenger* or *5 bambole per la luna d'agosto/5 Dolls for an August Moon*, the scenery always echoes Nevenka's first private meeting with Kurt after his return. These lovers left their mark on Bava's filmography: henceforth, Tor Caldara became to Mario Bava what Monument Valley was to John Ford.

Harriet White Medin shared her impressions of her colleagues on the picture: "I liked Daliah Lavi very much; I found her beautiful and mercurial and very intense. My memories of Christopher Lee are vague; he was pleasant but formal, aloof. His role was also short, and he wasn't with us for the entire production. Bava was very pleasant, very easy to work with. He didn't say anything to his actors, as long as what they were doing was okay. He was very patient with those of us who needed help, who needed to have the

context explained or something like that."

Luciano Pigozzi agrees: "He was a very, very good director on that film. All he needed was good actors; if the actors were good, he didn't need to give them any instructions, how to move, how to smile, how to be mad, how to do anything. Once he believed that you understood your role, he didn't disturb you any more. He wasn't like Vittorio De Sica, who always wanted to *teach* you. Every time I worked with De Sica, he had to show me exactly what he wanted, and then I had to do exactly what he did. But he was also an actor! For Bava, it wasn't possible for him to do that. He wasn't as self-important as De Sica."

Also working on the picture—as a production assistant—was the producer's younger brother Sergio Martino, who was destined to become one of Italy's most accomplished thriller directors of the 1970s. Martino has his own memories of the director: "Bava was a charming person. Since he was quite ambitious with what he did, and was used to working on very small productions with limited budgets, he didn't bother to worry about possible problems caused by others, but simply took care of everything himself. I remember him being almost in the position of a producer, always involved in organizational and financial problems and discussions. Bava had a remarkable charisma. He was a very elegant man who always had a big dog with him on the set."

The film's lead actress remembers Bava rather as Barbara Steele did—as a remote, though creative presence. "He was not very much into the directing of the actors," Daliah Lavi says. "He was more into setting up the angles of the camera. I don't think he directed me at all; I mean, he *must* have directed me, but he never said, '[Nevenka] is going through here and she is going to do this.' I remember him being very much behind the camera at all times, always trying to get the scenes to look right. And he was very good at that, at getting an atmosphere. I don't remember any bad things; the atmosphere on the set was good for everybody. But Bava was more of a technical guy than an emotional guy."

Being newly in love at the time and mostly looking forward to her weekend liberties, Lavi's other recollections of the filming are mostly vague. Christopher Lee, on the other hand, having worked with Bava before, came to the production with a sense of great anticipation, and spent his time on the set very much in the moment. After the experience of working with Bava on *Ercole al centro della terra,* which had a tighter schedule and found Bava occasionally short-tempered with his actors, Lee noticed that his director was, this time, in a more manic than depressive state of mind.

"When we were shooting *The Whip and the Body* . . . with the gorgeous Daliah Lavi and I indulging in the most torrid love scenes on the beach near Rome, Bava would invariably leap into the shot and mug away like crazy before crying 'Cut!' You can imagine what the rushes looked like!" [6]

LA FRUSTA E IL CORPO *offered Christopher Lee a rare opportunity to play a romantic lead, as well as a monster, opposite Daliah Lavi.*

In personal correspondence, Lee elaborated further: "[Bava] was a natural clown, and reminded me a great deal of the famous Italian comic, Totò. He frequently used to jump into the end of a scene, no matter what had gone before, and convulsed the cast and crew by performing directly at the camera, rather in the style of Groucho Marx! In some cases, I felt the film would have been better if some of Bava's 'material' had been left in!"

Years later, in 1996, when Lee was starring in Lamberto Bava's TV film *Sorellina e il principe del sogno,* Mario's grandson Roy had the opportunity to hear some of the actor's stories about working with his grandfather: "He had a lot of nice memories of him. He told me that while they were shooting *La frusta e il corpo*, there was a love scene and he was in bed with Daliah Lavi, and Mario didn't call 'Cut!' They were waiting and waiting till, all of a sudden, they found him crawling toward them from the foot of the bed, saying, 'Mind if I join you?'"

Despite the almost palpable passion and sophistication of Daliah Lavi's performance during the flogging scenes, the actress confesses to playing them in a state of complete naïveté. "I was probably too young to know what I was doing," she laughs. "While we were doing *La frusta* I don't remember having a sense that we were doing anything daring or provocative. I can see it now—a woman getting pleasure from being hit by this whip—but when I filmed it, I really didn't give it a second thought. I did the movie and I was gone!"

Bava himself did everything possible to subdue the sense of shooting an intimate scene, according to Sergio Martino. "The film had a touch of sadomasochism," he allows. "If you shot this screenplay nowadays, hardly anyone would raise an eyebrow, but at that time it was quite scandalous and daring. I remember the amusing image of Bava [filming this flogging scene and] looking nervously at his watch. The film was shot on such a shoestring budget that it was impossible to shoot additional, improvised material or to repeat takes very often. Bava clocked the length of each take with painful accuracy, to ensure that he would not exceed a running time of about 90 minutes with the completed picture. He gave us the impression that to run one minute, over or under, would result in dire consequences."



5 The year after *La frusta e il corpo*, the same *castello* location was used as the principal interior location for Antonio Margheriti's *Danza macabra/Castle of Blood* (1964).

6 *American Cinematheque* retrospective notes, 1993.



THE FILM*'s controversial flogging scenes were cleverly and painlessly achieved by filming them in reverse.*

To preserve the illusion of participating in a British production, the actors spoke their lines in English. To her surprise, Harriet White Medin discovered that speaking lines in English no longer came so easily after nearly twenty years of living in Rome: "I remember there was a particularly difficult scene for me. I had this long speech, ending with '*. . . but not the old man!*' Every time I did the scene, I kept finishing my lines in Italian: '*. . . ma il vecchio, no!*' There are times when Italian gets to the point very succinctly, moreso than English, which is ridiculous because English is my native tongue, but I knew Italian so well by this point . . . I had learned it, lived it, even married in it. We had to shoot that scene several times, and we never did get it right. Finally, Bava said, 'Let's go on; we can fix it in the dubbing.'" Once it was decided to "fix it in the dubbing," Bava allowed Tony Kendall—who alone was acting phonetically in the midst of a bilingual cast—to give the remainder of his performance in Italian.

Ernesto Gastaldi, busy working on his next script, never visited the set and therefore has no production anecdotes to share. Luciano Pigozzi, however, remembers an occasion when Bava had to summon his father, Eugenio, to the set. "Bava was a great director and a great director of photography," he praises. "But he had a very good teacher, his father. His father was *fabulous.* Everybody called on him. Whenever a director needed a certain kind of shot, they would always contact the father, who was a great teacher and had worked on many important pictures. During the shooting of a film, if the director needed a certain kind of shot, they would contact the father of Bava. He made a lot of money by doing that. On *La frusta e il corpo*, Bava found himself in this same situation, so he contacted his father, who brought an old camera."

Pigozzi was unable to elaborate on the nature of Eugenio's miracle work ("I knew the father . . . I saw him and spoke with him, but I didn't see him shooting"), but his reference to an "old camera" suggests that he brought his vintage Mitchell camera to the location, a 1919 handcranked model which Bava admired for its unsurpassed steadiness, which allowed father and son to photograph split screen and other trick shots involving manipulated film speeds, double exposures, and reverse photography.

Pigozzi remembers a surprising example of the latter kind of trick: "When Christopher Lee whipped [Daliah Lavi], Bava cranked the camera in reverse. He put the whip across her back, or around her wrist, and then Christopher pulled the whip *away*, do you see?"

Daliah Lavi's own most lingering memory of the filming is olfactory. "The one thing I remember about making the movie is the scene of setting the skeleton on fire at the end," she says. "I remember Bava looking down at this very clean skeleton in the coffin and saying, 'We can do better than this.' Right away, he sent some men out to the butcher's to bring back whatever spoiled meat, bones, and grit they could find! When they came back, everyone stood around the coffin for a long time, while Bava very carefully arranged this rancid meat on the skeleton—until it looked just right!" She laughs at the memory. "It was disgusting! Oh, how it smelled . . . like a barbecue, but not a very well-seasoned barbecue! It smelled *rotten!*"

The production designer, credited as "Dick Grey," was in reality Ottavio Scotti. An inspired choice, Scotti had previously designed such classic period films as Gregory Ratoff's *Black Magic,* Luchino Visconti's *Senso,* and John Brahm's *The Thief of Venice.* Born in 1904 and active in his profession since the 1930s, Scotti was nearing the end of his professional life in 1963, a time when he was working on less distinguished features like *Nel segno di Roma* and *Colossus and the Amazon Queen.* As this film shows, he was still capable of tapping into the sumptuous look that characterized his greatest achievements. The crypt set, also, is wonderfully atmospheric and highly evocative of the Gothic, webby, color-splashed crypts designed by Daniel Haller for Roger Corman's Poe pictures.

Daliah Lavi's previous film for producer Luciano Martino, *Il demonio,* had been edited by Bava's usual collaborator, Mario Serandrei, so there is every indication that he would have been the first choice for this film too, had he been available. However, at the time of filming, Serandrei had embarked on the last great adventure of his career: the editing of Luchino Visconti's epic film *Il gattopardo/The Leopard* (1963). Hired in his stead was editor Roberto Cinquini—credited as "Bob King"—who was certainly no pinch-hitter. Cinquini had been the editor of *I vampiri,* and his work on *La frusta* was also preceded by such major assignments as Rossellini's *Viva l'italia!,* Germi's *Divorzio all'italiana/Divorce Italian Style,* and Edgar G. Ulmer's *Annibale/Hannibal.* One year



COMPOSER *Carlo Rustichelli.*

after cutting this picture, Cinquini would edit the biggest picture of his career: Sergio Leone's *Per un pugno di dollari/A Fistful of Dollars.*

Music

La frusta e il corpo is graced by what is arguably the finest score ever written for a Mario Bava film. It is certainly the only Bava score capable of standing on its own as a masterpiece of classical music.

Though the film's veil of pseudonymity caused this splendid music to be credited to "Jim Murphy," the composer was in fact Carlo Rustichelli, who had previously scored Bava's *La morte viene dallo spazio* in 1958, and also the Bava-related *Il ladro di Bagdad* in 1961. In this stirring yet elegiac score, the listener can hear echoes of almost everything the film has to offer visually: the turbulent waters rushing into the beach, the hammering of horses' hooves along the shore, the air of loss and lamentation, the eerie washes of suspense, danger, fear, and death, but above all, the tearful undertows of fervid romantic obsession. Rustichelli's score must be paid the ultimate compliment that *La frusta e il corpo* is unimaginable without it.

"Bava was a good director, very thorough, and he was also very interested in music," Rustichelli said. "As a person, he was always cheerful, very talkative, and told a lot of jokes—but he could get away with it, because he was very good at what he did."

Rustichelli remembered his music for *La frusta e il corpo* very fondly, and he was able to play the film's main theme from memory almost forty years after writing it. "I composed that music almost as a concerto for piano and orchestra," he explained. "Since I had already done many important films, Bava respected my ideas. I've always been very open about my music. If I was composing at home, working on very important themes, if the housemaid was around, I would play it for her and ask if she liked it. I'm very open-minded, because it's not necessary that *I* like my music, but it *is* necessary that *people* like it. The subject of *La frusta e il corpo* was very romantic and tragic, so maybe this is why my music turned out that way.

"Generally, Bava and I worked this way: I read the script, and then I began to develop my themes. As the scenes were shot, we would look at them on a Movieola. Bava would come to my house and listen while I wrote at the piano. I had found a way—it wasn't usual at the time—to put a piano and a Movieola together, and as we watched the scenes, I would adapt my themes to the rhythms of the images. The music was always recorded after the film was finished, unless it had to be contemporary with the shooting, as when there are *romanzas*, ballets, songs. These have to be recorded first and filmed to playback. For me, it's almost a physiological phenomenon, what happens between my music and what's happening on the screen, and that's the reason one can get the impression that the music was recorded first and played on the set during the shooting."

HARRIET WHITE MEDIN *screams "Oh! Il vecchio, no!" on discovering the murdered Count Vladimir ("Dean Ardow" a.k.a. Gustavo De Nardo).*





At the time of the film's release in Italy, CAM released a 45 rpm single of the film's main theme, with a picture sleeve properly crediting the music to Carlo Rustichelli, in a very limited edition of 1,000 copies or less. Inexplicably titled "The Winsor Concerto," the record consisted of a single piece of music for piano and orchestra, 8:40 in length, which faded out at the end of Side 1 and faded in at the beginning of Side 2. It is such a rare item today that Rustichelli himself did not own a copy at the time he was interviewed for this book. He was also aware of other merchandise related to the score.

"As for *La frusta e il corpo*, I have nothing of it," he lamented. "I know that, in England, someone once printed a score with all my music for piano, with a drawing and a title on the cover. I would love to have a copy."

In 2001, CAM released *Ritrato di un Autore*, a single-disc overview of Rustichelli's career in film music, which included the entire "Winsor Concerto" recording—presented for the first time without fades. The disc was programmed by the composer himself from pieces written for the cinema over more than half a century, so the inclusion of this music is indicative of Rustichelli's exceptionally high regard for it.

"Of course, I am very proud of it," he enthused, "because I think it is very beautiful. Until then, I had never

KURT*'s remains are incinerated in a sickening studio barbecue forever burned into Daliah Lavi's memory.*



written music so successful as it was in *La frusta e il corpo*—music of such lyricism, such romanticism, pushed to the extreme."[7]

Bava never spoke on the record about his working relationship with Rustichelli, but there is no doubt that "the Italian Hitchcock" had finally found his Bernard Herrmann. After this film, he never looked back, never worked with Roberto Nicolosi again. Bava's regard for this score was so great that he actually recycled some specific, non-romantic cues in other movies, also scored by Rustichelli, because he felt they were so perfectly evocative of the uncanny moods he wished to create—and continually create.

"We used a lot of the music from *La frusta e il corpo* in two other movies [*Sei donne per l'assassino* and *Operazione paura*] we did together," Rustichelli confirmed. "He actually asked for that music because . . . well, because he was very happy with the music I had written."[8]

A snippet of "The Winsor Concerto" later found its way into the soundtrack of Carlos Aured's Spanish horror film *La Venganza de la Momia/The Mummy's Revenge* (1973), starring Paul Naschy. The entire *La frusta e il corpo* soundtrack was issued on CD by Digitmovies in 2005.

Commentary

La frusta e il corpo differs from the other films Bava had directed up to this point, because it was approached purely as a work-for-hire proposition. The script was completed by the time he signed on, and he did very little to change it, even as the production wore on, though he usually tinkered with scripts to keep himself spontaneous and interested. Bava's own name does not appear in the credits and yet, despite its seeming impersonality, *La frusta e il corpo* stands out as an unusually passionate and heart-felt statement by its director, who was perhaps emboldened by his anonymity to put aside his usual defenses of humor and irony and wear his heart on his sleeve.

THIS STUNNING *portrait shot of Daliah Lavi provided the basis for the film's Italian poster art.*

For anyone familiar with Ernesto Gastaldi's other work, it is obvious that he must be acknowledged as the film's true *auteur*. The story is well-stocked with archetypes found in his other pictures, as well as recurring themes and situations. Like his later *gialli* for Sergio Martino—notably *Lo strano vizio della signora Wardh/Next!* and *Tutti i colori del buio/They're Coming to Get You*, both of which starred Edwige Fenech—*La frusta* is built around the erotic hallucinations of a central female character haunted by her past relationship with a menacing male, presumed dead, and the question of whether or not her encounters are real. The element of sadomasochism is another Gastaldi signature point, as many of his thrillers involve romantic relationships involving some element of sexual kink: necrophilia (*L'orribile segreto del Dr. Hichcock*), blood fetishism (*Lo strano vizio della signora Wardh*), Satanism (*Tutti i colori del buio*). Even the werewolf of his *Lycanthropus* is revealed to be the shackled sex slave of a school mistress.

La frusta also contains some reprises of scenes and variations on themes found in Gastaldi's other movies. One of the film's dramatic highlights—the moment when Nevenka overhears Georgia's comment to the Count that Losat has observed lights and movements in the chapel, indicating that Kurt may still be alive—reprises the moment in Riccardo Freda's *L'orribile segreto del Dr. Hichcock* when the good doctor (played by Robert Flemyng) discovers that his supposedly dead, overdosed wife may still be alive and available for their own particular brand of kinky sex (in this case, a form of narcotically faked necrophilia); the scenes also share in common a sudden thunderstorm, as well as the image of a man's face distorted by rain against a window pane.

The character of Georgia is a perpetuation of *Hichcock*'s sinister housekeeper character, based on the character of Mrs. Danvers as played by Judith Anderson in Alfred Hitchcock's *Rebecca* (1940); indeed, both roles were played by Harriet White Medin, who would reprise the archetype once again in the Gastaldi-scripted *La lama nel corpo/The Murder Clinic* (1966). Even the name "Nevenka" had its origin in an earlier Gastaldi script. "Four months before I wrote this film, I wrote a very good treatment with Ugo Guerra entitled *La Spia* ["The Spies"]," he recalls. "It was probably the best-constructed thriller machine I ever devised, but it was never filmed. It was set in Eastern Europe and the lead character was named Nevenka; I liked this name, and decided to reuse it."

Although Bava refrained from making any significant changes to Gastaldi's script, *La frusta* contains many elements suggestive of his creative input. The most obvious cases are the talismanic use of the beach at Tor Caldara and the reprise of the secret passage within the fireplace from *La maschera del demonio*, which allows the murderer of Count Vladimir to make a getaway undetected. Most significantly, the finale—in which Nevenka is first shown subjectively (in the reality she inhabits) kissing Kurt, then shown objectively (in the reality inhabited by two onlookers) embracing emptiness and driving the knife into her own heart—reprises the finale of *"La goccia d'acqua"* in *I tre volti della paura*, in which Jacqueline Pierreux strangles herself as she is approached (she believes) by a ghost.

La frusta e il corpo can also be viewed as a reprise of, or thematic sequel-of-sorts to *I tre volti della paura*'s*"I wurdalak."* The character names and associations in the two films are curiously similar: each story has its own Vladimir, one young and strong, the other old and infirm; Sdenka, the heroine who succumbs to the loving pull of the dead, becomes *Nev*enka; and Giorgio, the husband slain by his wife's dagger, is reflected in the housemaid Georgi*a*, who has literally enshrined the dagger used by her daughter to commit suicide. The houses of Gorka and Menliff are both overshadowed, as we first enter them, by the oppressive absence of a larger-than-life personality (Gorka and, here, Kurt) and both films chronicle the fulfillment of fears based on the respective returns of these dreaded wanderers. Though extensive, these similarities must be coincidental as Gastaldi could not have seen *I tre volti della paura* at the time he scripted *La frusta.*

Bava once said that he accepted every script he was ever offered, but certainly he accepted this one because it provided him with a creative arena in which to further explore topics that were already of keen interest to him. The nature of Nevenka's haunting gave him the opportunity to play with subjective camera, hallucination, and ambiguity, all touchstones of his earlier work. These themes had first blossomed in *Ercole al centro della terra,* in which Hercules had to navigate a



AS NEVENKA *fondles herself in solitude, her pleasure evokes the ghostly presence of Kurt.*

7 Carlo Rustichelli, *Mario Bava Maestro of the Macabre* interview transcript, unused, 2000.

8 Ibid.



KURT *flogs Nevenka in the sequence most heavily censored around the world.*

path through Hades while disregarding the information processed by his senses, but had evolved to such an extent that *"La goccia d'acqua"* could pass for a rough draft of Nevenka's plight.

A tragedy in the classical sense, *La frusta e il corpo* shows what Mario Bava was capable of achieving when presented with a script that didn't encourage his nervous meddling. Here, Bava was not only anchored by the quality of Gastaldi's writing, but also by a resourceful acting ensemble headed by Christopher Lee—clearly aiming for, and deserving, a more substantial career as a leading man—and the stunning Daliah Lavi. These dependable ingredients gave Bava the freedom to lavish his attentions almost entirely on matters of lighting, camera movement, and atmosphere. If *I tre volti della paura* is the cinematic equivalent of a sketchpad—a series of short experiments in which Bava divined how to photograph a variety of horror stories in color without forfeiting the expressionistic values of black-and-white—*La frusta e il corpo* is his first attempt to adapt his newfound signature style to a full-sized canvas.

Working again in Technicolor, Bava created a film whose color is rich and confectionary as a Douglas Sirk melodrama of the 1950s—which is appropriate because, like Sirk's *All That Heaven Allows* (for instance), *La frusta e il corpo* is a highly romantic story that explores the internal conflicts of a woman torn between a love that validates her existence and the social customs that forbids her to embrace it. The film also has much in common, visually, with Bava's 1954 assignment *Graziella* (directed by Giorgio Bianchi)—another period romance with tragic consequences, set near the sea.

Using the style he had formalized in *I tre volti della paura,* Bava uses Technicolor here to heighten the beauty of his images from the outset. Initially, he limits its applications to enhancing sources of natural beauty—the sunset on the beach, the robust health of skin tones, the colors and textures of fabrics and furnishings. But whereas other directors of photography used Technicolor to exaggerate the values of natural color, Bava goes further, adapting Technicolor to delirious ends by using irrational color accents, in an expressionistic, painterly way, to suggest the presence of the supernatural—or in this case, an outward projection of disturbed human emotions.

Perhaps even more daring than its use of color is the film's all-enveloping use of black, which at times gives the film the uncanny texture of a velvet painting and—especially when viewed on a big screen in a darkened theater—a palpable sense of intimate contact with the veil separating life from death. Interviewed in 2001, another cameraman-turned-director—Ernest Dickerson—singled out *La frusta e il corpo* for particular praise in this regard: "One of my heroes is Mario Bava . . . *The Whip and the Body* really *uses* darkness. I mean, there are scenes which are beautifully lit and it's all black with just a little highlight—which, photographically, is a pretty ballsy thing to do."[9]

Just as Ernesto Gastaldi's script for Freda's *L'orribile segreto del Dr. Hichcock* paid *hommage* to its namesake with various references to the likes of *Rebecca* and *Under Capricorn, La frusta e il corpo* shows not only the influence of Corman's *Pit and the Pendulum* but that of Alfred Hitchcock's *Psycho,* as well. The first *Psycho*-inspired concept is the unexpected murder of Kurt Menliff, played by the apparent male lead: Christopher Lee. On a stormy night, while readying himself for bed, Kurt is fatally stabbed in the throat by the same knife used by Tania to commit suicide. (Note again the importance of backstory to the story's construction.) In Gastaldi's script, Kurt was stabbed by someone behind a curtain in his room; Bava filmed the scene in a deliberately ambiguous manner, so that it is not apparent whether or not the murder was committed by Nevenka, by one of the other residents, by the ghost of Tania, or indeed by the curtain itself.

Gastaldi (or perhaps Bava, in blocking the scene) may have modelled the murder's *mise-en-scène* on a sequence in Fritz Lang's little-seen thriller *House By the River* (1950). Lotte H. Eisner's book *Fritz Lang* quotes the relevant paragraphs of Mel Dinelli's script:

> *Stephen seems to witness—an apparition. John appears dripping wet and matted with blood on one side of his head, he is haggard, muddy to his knees.*
>
> *Stephen's grip slackens—full of horror he believes to see his brother's ghost. He lets Marjorie drop, dashes into the corridor, runs toward the staircase. The bathroom door opens slowly and the draught blows the long white curtains out. Viewed by the single dim gaslight, it is ghostly and weird.*

> *With an expression of extreme horror, he stares in the direction of the bathroom door. The billowing curtains stream out with the draught, Stephen thinks he can see a white body—Emily with floating hair.*
>
> *With this second apparition, his brain cracks completely, he rushes toward the staircase, but now the heavy curtains from the balcony are blown out towards him, they appear to entangle him . . . There is an agonized scream.* [10]

In *La frusta e il corpo,* the bearing of Lang's film is borne out not only by the way the curtains seem to reach out to entangle Kurt, but also by the later recurring shots of muddy boots, which herald John's and Kurt's respective returns from the grave. But whereas Stephen (Louis Hayward) is clearly the victim of his own conscience, in the manner of Miss Chester and some future Bava heroines, Kurt is depicted as a man without a conscience. Therefore, the question becomes: Who (or what) was behind the curtain when Kurt was killed?

The mystery is compounded by a healthy assortment of red herrings introduced prior to Kurt's death. It occurs almost immediately following the scene on the beach, giving Nevenka excellent reason to want Kurt dead—but alone of all the suspects, only Nevenka is given an excuse, as her beaten, comatose body is later discovered by Losat on the beach, where she has presumably been since her violent tryst. Just prior to the murder, Kurt's supposedly infirm father is shown rising furtively from his sickbed and passing through the secret panel in his fireplace, previously established as the entrance to a hidden passage communicating with Kurt's room; his earlier argument with Kurt also designates him as a suspect. Georgia, the housekeeper, has already stated her desire to see Kurt die eactly as her daughter did, making her culpability equally likely. After Kurt's murder, the dagger is found hidden in the bedroom of Katia, whom Kurt has taunted since his return with his awareness of her secret love for Christian—perhaps she has committed the murder to keep her love a secret? Or, to take the inquiry to another level, might the blade have been wielded by the vengeful spirit of Tania?

Because *La frusta e il corpo* encountered censorship problems in so many different countries upon its release, it was often shown in heavily cut versions that left the viewer pondering the question of "Who killed Kurt?" well after Bava and Gastaldi had answered it. Today, with the uncut version now dominant in circulation, the movie's bottom-line is unmistakable: *Nevenka* used the dagger to kill Kurt in a schizophrenic rage. Hateful of Kurt for seducing and abandoning her, and causing her to enter into an unloving marriage (pregnancy with Kurt's child is never mentioned, but it is certainly one plausible reason behind these forced nuptials), Nevenka is also fundamentally unable to admit her very real love for her lover/abuser, the only man to discover the secret of how to satisfy her sexually. After the hateful side of Nevenka slays Kurt, the loving side is left with no recourse but to "reinvent" Kurt, a ghost that deals pleasure to her and vengeance to the Count who has sold her into marital bondage. As we ultimately learn, Nevenka does this by imagining his nightly visitations (presumably, while masturbating), and by donning his clothes, speaking in his voice, and settling his accounts—giving half of herself over to him, much in the manner that Norman Bates kept his dead mother "alive" in Hitchcock's *Psycho.*

The scene of Kurt's murder is one of Bava's finest set pieces, yet according to the actor at the center of it, it was filmed in such a way that it was not *made* to happen, but *allowed* to happen. "As I recall, there was virtually no blocking or specific coaching by the director with regard to this scene," explains Christopher Lee. "Bava told me what he intended to do, and more or less left it to me to produce the required result. It was not an easy scene to play, for obvious reasons. I played the scene in a straightforward manner, to give the impression that there was indeed someone behind the curtain besides myself."

The impression is wholly illusory. On the set, there was no one else behind the curtain; the dagger was sheathed on the reverse side of the curtain, and the illusion relied entirely on Lee's pantomimic ability to be engulfed by the curtain, find the bloodied knife and suggest that it had been embedded in his neck.

Lee acknowledges that the true identity of the killer was never in doubt during the filming. "Clearly, we had to rely on as many red herrings as possible, but the solution in the script was quite clear: Nevenka was responsible for the death of Kurt." [11]

With Kurt's murder, the cinematography takes a turn toward the unreal; the scene is bathed in ultra-blue light, a color that will haunt Nevenka for the rest of the film—memorably, it bathes the wall behind her at the piano just before her first sighting of Kurt's



AFTER *the pain comes pleasure as Kurt touches the punished flesh of Nevenka.*

9 Ernest Dickerson, interviewed in the documentary short "Urban Gothic: *Bones* and Its Influences," on the New Line Cinema DVD of *Bones* (2001).

10 Lotte H. Eisner, *Fritz Lang* (New York NY: Da Capo Press, 1976), 291–93.

11 Michael Parry, "*CoF* Interviews Christopher Lee, Part 3" in *Castle of Frankenstein* 12, 1968, 30-31.



KURT*'s death scene, a remarkable piece of pantomime on the part of Christopher Lee.*

ghost. After this initial confirmation of her greatest hopes and fears, Bava allows the wonder and strangeness of color to seep into the ambient lighting, so that the long corridor separating Nevenka's and Kurt's respective rooms becomes a passage through—literally—all the colors of the dark. Later, as the spirit of Kurt is summoned to her room by the force of her desire, Bava shows his face descending toward hers (i.e., the camera) in a kiss, passing through similar stratas of green, blue, and finally red—which, in Bava's chromatic vocabulary, suggests a progression from fear to longing to the full blush of passion.

Of the various characters in the film, Nevenka is the most quiet, yet she is the central protagonist—and, as we later learn, antagonist. In the opening scene of Kurt's homecoming, she is consigned to the background as emotions flare between the returning son and his family, though the scene makes it quite clear that an unspoken bond exists between Kurt and his brother's fiancee. Our first clue to the nature of their relationship occurs soon after, as Nevenka rides to the beach to trace her thoughts in solitude. She uses her riding crop to muse in the sand, and as her thoughts drift away, the limp lash of the crop grows taut—held in place under Kurt's boot. Like Nevenka, we neither see nor hear Kurt's approach; we can almost believe that she has conjured him up, just by thinking about him. Their subsequent actions are also telling: Kurt does not approach Nevenka as a menace; indeed, she is the first to use her whip as a weapon, presumably in retaliation for his earlier abandonment of her, which forced her to enter into an arranged marriage with his brother. Nevenka says almost nothing during the encounter, and a casual observer might well mistake her as Kurt's victim. However, on closer examination, Nevenka appears to be in passive control of Kurt's actions, and this may well be a familiar ritual for them, as she denies her interest until Kurt forces her responses to the surface in a tried-and-true manner. "You always loved violence," he says—and he deals it out to her (thirteen lashes, incidentally), not as an end in itself, but as a prelude to impassioned lovemaking.

Such a complex role as Nevenka requires the performance of an actress capable of revealing a spectrum of emotion as the film's principal character, under close scrutiny, without prematurely revealing the whole truth of that character. Bava's films are not often noted for their emotional content but, as Nevenka, Daliah Lavi gives possibly the most absorbing and feeling performance found in any of his movies. Much of the very human impression she makes is due to her unusual ability to abstract herself and act in perfect concert with Bava's lighting and camera movements. A production photo exists that shows Bava directing Lavi and Lee prior to the filming of the encounter on the beach, and their respective poses are revealing: Bava, holding the whip, is rubbing his jaw thoughtfully as though trying to visualize the scene; Lee, more than a head taller than his co-workers, stands off to the side, squinting in determination to understand and comply with his director's vision; and Lavi stands between the two men, hands folded before her, her face beaming with girlish delight and anticipation, as she looks forward to playing the scene.

Nevenka is given very little dialogue, requiring Lavi to restrict much of her performance to the visual plane, with Bava's lighting and *mise-en-scène* carrying an equal share of responsibility for conveying her innermost thoughts. Their collaboration is best illustrated by the sequence that begins as Georgia reports to Count Vladimir that lights have been observed at night in the family chapel where Kurt is buried. Prior to this announcement, Nevenka has been seated at the piano, playing the romantic theme first heard during her scene with Kurt on the beach, as the Count sits off at a distance, pondering the flames in the fireplace—a setting that essentially reprises the introduction of Prince Vajda in *La maschera del demonio*, with Princess Katia at the piano. As Nevenka overhears Georgia's words, her secret yearnings are finally given the hope they need to be galvanized into flesh, or at least into illusion—her blank expression turns thunderstruck as she leans forward on the piano, sounding an appropriately thunderous chord. (Had Nevenka been established as a more verbal character, had the mood of the establishing footage been more realistic, had the chord been sounded with less subtlety, her response might have seemed almost comic, but Lavi's actions are perfectly measured.) The Count shrugs off Georgia's gossip, explaining that it was probably nothing but moonlight reflected on a window of the chapel. (How like Bava to explain such a phenomenon as an optical illusion!) A whipcrack of thunder then draws Nevenka's attention to a rain-streaked window, where she sees the grim visage of Kurt—blue-skinned,

his neck swathed in a bloody bandage; as she screams from the shock, she grabs her own throat in a sympathetic response. (Here is the first indication of Nevenka "sharing" Kurt's feelings, giving a portion of her life in compensation for the one she has taken.)

In the next scene, Bava follows Nevenka's train of thought by showing her, later that night, reassuring herself by tracing the light at play on the chapel window back to the movements of dark clouds across the face of a full moon. To a sane mind, this would resolve the matter, but Bava executes a match-dissolve from the cloud-swept moon to a rhyming shot of Nevenka's black hair swept across the face of a pillow. The camera then moves laterally to a tight-shot of Nevenka's eyes, open in the dark, sleepless and troubled. After this, the shots become fragmented, mosaical, their framing remarking on a literal breakdown. As the sequence plays out, Kurt materializes from the shadows of her room, but he disappears at the moment she shows fear—but worse than being haunted is being without this man she loves, and her immediate regret brings him back. As Kurt's looming hand tears the back of her nightgown for a taste of his whip, Nevenka's terror once again overwhelms her receptive feelings and she cries out to Christian for help. It may seem odd that she would turn to Christian in this instance, but while theirs is a loveless marriage, Nevenka has yet to admit her love for Kurt even to herself; indeed, her haunting may well be predicated on her inability to admit her true feelings for the man she has killed, just as she has repressed the memory of killing him. At this point, Nevenka is still dependent on her husband to see her through this nightmare; he is her last tie to reality—which also explains her strangely jealous response to overhearing his declaration of love to Katia, later in the picture.

The character of Nevenka—and the nature of her story—anticipates Catherine Deneuve's role of Severine in Luís Buñuel's celebrated film *Belle de Jour* (1967) and actually goes much



ITALIAN *manifesto featuring Losat's discovery of the dead Kurt.*

further. *Belle de Jour* allows its audience to eavesdrop on the sadomasochistic fantasies of its *bourgeois* housewife heroine, but it promptly confirms her fantasies as what they are, so that the boundaries of reality and fantasy are always clearly drawn. Also, given the cool reserve of Deneuve's performance, we never quite get under the skin of her character as an audience, the way Lavi's warm-blooded acting allows us to do. In retrospect, *Belle de Jour* may have seemed groundbreaking at the time of its release only because *La frusta e il corpo* had been ghettoized as a horror film, of which the "serious" press took no notice.

Lavi herself (a vivacious, humorous and down-to-earth woman in real life) is very critical of her performance in *La frusta e il corpo*, which she somehow managed to avoid seeing until November 2000, when I provided her with a videotape in advance of our interview. "I thought I could have been much better," she told me. "I kept catching myself repeating the same facial expressions, and when I was supposed to look like I was seeing a ghost, I didn't look the way I would look if I was really seeing a ghost, you know? Bava was very focused on the camera and the lighting, and in that regard, there are some very good scenes. I liked the scene where he introduces me at the piano. I look outside the action, abstract, from the beginning; I liked that. But other parts of the movie I found very slow and, well, melodramatic at times." When I said something in defense of the film's elegiac pacing, this spirited woman laughed and said, "Well, that's what makes horse races!"

Lavi later elaborated on her criticism: "I didn't really like myself because I thought I was being very melodramatic. I was acting . . . quite the opposite of what I had done in *Il demonio.* I was acting scared, like they do in silent movies, with everything exaggerated. That's how I see myself in it. I was telling this to my son, and he said, 'But that's the way it's *supposed* to be! In horror movies, you're *supposed* to act like that!' My acting in this movie is like an actress in a silent movie—that's what I think. But maybe it's just me!"



NEVENKA *cries out to Christian for help after the ghost of Kurt pays a visit to her room.*

Theoretically, Bava was using Lavi less to obtain a realistic performance than to present a *tableau vivant*; the very stillness of her performance works to emphasize the fact that she has made the adjustment to living internally, after the death of Kurt, rather than internally—and the exaggeration of her performance in other scenes works to support how deranged she truly has become.

As Lavi's comments reveal, her personal response to *La frusta e il corpo* is colored by her greater enthusiasm for her work in *Il demonio,* which she rightly considers to be the best performance she gave in the course of her generally disappointing film career. ("Most of the movies I made were *garbage*," she says candidly.) As mentioned above, the two characters have a great deal in common. In *Il demonio,* Lavi's character has a history of inflicting wounds upon herself; in *La frusta,* if we subtract the imagined element of Kurt, Nevenka is abusing herself the same way. In both movies,



CHRISTIAN *steadies the old Count as Kurt makes his unexpected return.*



LOSAT *finds the inert body of Nevenka in tattered clothes near the beach after nightfall.*

the woman is rejected by her lover with violent results that may or may not qualify as a form of possession. When Bava's film was released in Germany, the distributors underlined the similarity between the two pictures by retitling the film *Der Dämon und die Jungfrau* ("The Demon and the Virgin").

"The difference between *Il demonio* and *La frusta e il corpo*," explains Lavi, "is that the girl in *Il demonio* was superstitious to begin with, and her relationship with this man intensified it, so that she became even more crazy when she couldn't have him. At the time, my interpretation was that he was the first man she ever had; that's why she couldn't let go of him—because, in her mind, he belonged to her. Nevenka was the same, a schizophrenic—maybe she went in and out of it. She was in love with Kurt and they had an affair; maybe he took advantage of her too, because she was susceptible to different personalities. There is no other way to explain women who are beaten by ghosts. They do it to themselves."

The character of Nevenka is so central, and Lavi's performance is so intense, that it is perhaps too easy to overlook the artistry that Christopher Lee brings to his performance as Kurt. As in Fisher's *Horror of Dracula,* in which he actually appears for less than eight minutes, Lee makes such an impression in his scant onscreen time that his presence is felt throughout the picture, kept alive by Nevenka's yearnings. Of all his early screen roles, this one hints most persuasively at the kind of career he might have had, had he not made his initial success in horror pictures.

Throughout the picture, Bava uses red roses to symbolize the commingling pain and pleasure of romantic love. In the opening scene, we see roses adorning the base of the display case that enshrines Tania's tragic dagger; we see them next as Katia arranges a vase of roses while Kurt taunts her in regard to her secret, thwarted love for his brother; and after Kurt's death, Nevenka is shown taking a single rose to his crypt as a tribute, as the thrashing sounds of their sadomasochistic encounters resonate through her consciousness. When Kurt's ghost first appears to Nevenka, his neck is swathed in a bandage blotted with blood where he was stabbed, the stain very much in the configuration of a rose. In a later dialogue scene between Katia and Christian, Bava returns to the vase of roses to illustrate how the presence of absent people can be felt through the objects we associate with them. As the chaste lovers comfort one another, Bava uses the vase as the fulcrum of an elegant camera movement, so that the gliding of the camera reinterprets this background object as a foreground element. Just as Nevenka associated these flowers with Kurt, we now associate it with her, and she inhabits the scene as palpably as if she stood there.

The artist responsible for the film's Italian poster brilliantly rendered the significance of the rose in the film, though in a way never specifically portrayed in the film itself. In the foreground, Nevenka holds a rose to her nose as its thorns prick her fingers, its fragrance summoning a green-faced vision of Kurt, a hellion poised behind her with his whip ready to crash down.

Flora is also at the center of the film's most inexplicable moment, which nevertheless gives Bava an opportunity to do something only he could do so well. Shortly after Christian and Losat descend into the family crypt to disinter Kurt and convince themselves of his death, they pause for a moment to peer through a barred partition at a massive tangle of vines. Bava's camera prowls grimly over their unholy profusion, while a strobing red light seems to suffuse them with horrible life and bristling anger. There is no logical meaning for the shot or its content, nor any consequence to explain why the shot is held for so long, but the way Bava and Terzano photograph this jungling, subterranean overgrowth gives it an aura of Lovecraftian evil; these leafy, sinewy cords may be nothing more than an untended effusion of nature running riot, but they might also be the sum of this family's sins, buried out of sight for generations and quietly taking shape in the dark as something hideous, unspeakable, and throbbing with imminent consciousness.

For all its beauty and macabre splendor, *La frusta e il corpo* is not without fault. It plays so many of its cards subtly that its occasional resorts to cheap shock effects suggest a self-conscious filmmaker wary of straying too far from conventional horror into a brave new world. Bava's direction succumbs more than a couple of times to unworthy, vulgarian tactics: Isli Oberon cannot enter a scene without her hand first reaching ominously into frame to tap the shoulder of some poor, startled person, and the card of the boots "covered with the mud of the grave" is similarly overplayed. When Nevenka follows a lashing sound to



Kurt's room (inhabited after his death only by sheeted furniture, one of Bava's tongue-in-cheek means of suggesting a ghostly element), the sudden appearance of a long vine, bursting through a window to snap and recoil like a literal whip, seems much too contrived an explanation. Furthermore, the film's second murder (of Count Vladimir) is not sufficiently supported by the events prior to its commission; it is also revealed as a *fait accompli*, so that Bava seems to thwart generic convention by denying his audience a second murder scene. Another curious omission is the central event of Nevenka and Christian's wedding. As the story unfolds, we only learn that the marriage has taken place when Nevenka overhears Katia discouraging Christian's declarations of love ("You're married now"). It could be argued that, by excusing these scenes of marriage and murder, Bava was underlining Nevenka's own emotional denial of them. As it is, the film's true wedding occurs in the final reel, as Nevenka weds herself to Kurt by pinning the ghost of him to her heart—with a dagger.

Another problem is that Nevenka's original place within the Menliff family is never explained. True, she is the fiancee and later the wife of Christian, but why was she living at the castle, to be seduced and abandoned by Kurt, prior to their engagement? Is she a ward of the castle, perhaps orphaned and adopted from the lower classes? A family cousin like Katia? Some print sources, dating back to the time of the film's original release, suggest that Nevenka is the mistress of Count Vladimir, but Ernesto Gastaldi denies that such intrigue was ever a part of his original screenplay.

Distribution & Censorship

La frusta e il corpo was a film so ahead of its time, in terms of its sadoerotic frankness and psychological ambiguities, that on November 13, 1963, *Variety* reported that it was to be "shown in a Roman court to answer charges of 'immorality' against producer Natale Magnaghi, brought by a Roman who had seen pic." (Curiously, Magnaghi's name appears nowhere in the credits, not even pseudonymously.) By February 12 of the following year, the same journal reported that "Producer of *The Whip and the Body* judged not guilty of obscenity charges on pic by local court."

What was Bava's reaction to the lawsuit?

"He laughed," Gastaldi says, jubilantly. "We *all* laughed! Two years later, I directed my first film—*Libido*—and the censor declared it 'Forbidden to Teenagers' because in one scene, my wife Mara Maryl stood in front of a Rubens painting and said, '*Però che culoni dipingevano una volta!*' ('What big asses people used to paint!') That's what the times were like!" About the specific censorship problems encountered by *La frusta*, Gastaldi allows that "there were some problems with the censors, but no cuts were made, with the exception of maybe 8–12 frames in one of the whipping scenes. In Italy, the movie was prohibited to teenagers."

Sergio Martino remembers more specifically that cuts were made to "a whipping sequence on the beach, which was a bit too strong for Italian

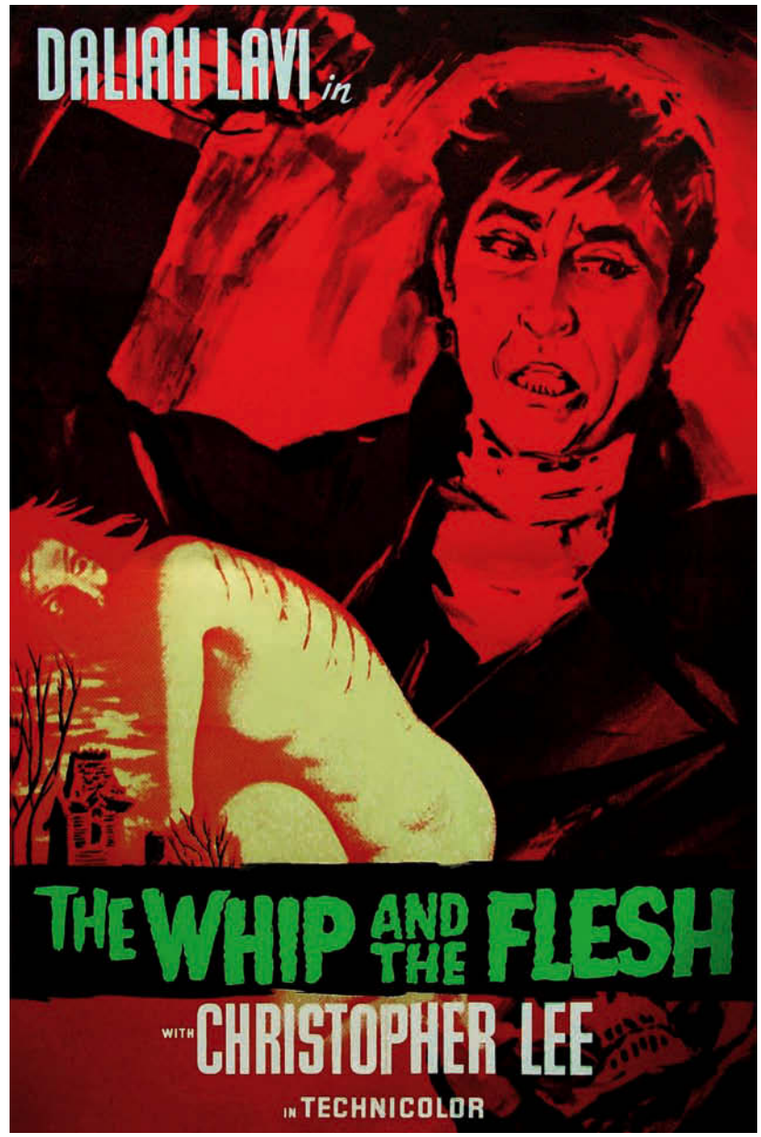
BEAUTIFUL *Belgian poster with an unfortunate misspelled credit for the lead actor.*

tastes at that time. However, I am not quite sure whether this scene was only removed for the Italian release, or also for the export version. Bava had some problems, because the final version—after the removal of this 'obscene' material—was too short."

The charges forced upon the film by law may have been laughable, but they had serious consequences. When *La frusta e il corpo* was released in Italy in late 1963, it collected only 72 million *lire* [$45,000] at the boxoffice—less than half of its already modest production cost. Thus, the film that many Bava fans consider to be his very best became his second biggest boxoffice disaster in his home country. Though the film had been produced with only a continental release in mind, its producers were understandably delighted when they began to receive signs of interest from English-speaking countries. From the resulting deals, *La frusta e il corpo* moved quickly from the red into the black.

An English-language version of the picture was prepared by American expatriate actor–director Mel Welles, without any input from the original cast—though most of them, everyone but Christopher Lee and Harriet Medin, had dubbed their own performances for the Italian soundtrack. If there is one sore spot felt about this production by the actors, it is in regard to the English dubbing. Though most of the actors would have been well up to the task, no one was invited to dub their own English performance. Watching the film, one cannot help but imagine what a richer experience it would be with Lee's rich baritone, Lavi's exotically husky voice, and Medin's prim Bostonian accent commingling on the track.

Lee has said on numerous occasions that he would love the opportunity to redub his performance in this picture, so much does the redubbing interfere with his enjoyment of it. "I was rather displeased," he admitted to Michel Parry. "They got an American, I think, by the sound of it, to dub my voice. It was fairly near to my voice, but occasionally he slipped and said, 'maaaaaster' instead of 'master.' Recently, I've had it put in my contract that, if I make a foreign picture and they have an English version, then it is me who does the voice." [12] There was at least some continuity involved, as Lee's performance was dubbed by Dan Sturkie—who had previously dubbed his performance as Lico in *Ercole al centro della terra*.



CANADIAN *one-sheet.*

The English-language track also diminishes the film to a degree, in terms of making blatant some aspects that Bava worked hard to keep ambiguous. The classic example of this vulgarization occurs prior to Kurt's murder: in the original version, Kurt is made uneasy by a series of purely natural sounds, kicked-up by the storm raging outside; in the English version, those sounds are downplayed in favor of a voice (clearly Nevenka's, dubbed by Carolyn De Fonseca) calling "Kurrrrrt! Kurrrrrrrrt!" So much for mystery!

The English version received its first release in Great Britain under the senseless title *Night Is the Phantom*, distributed by Regal International. Perhaps tipped off by the well-publicized obscenity suit, the film was subjected to extensive cuts by John Trevelyan of the British Board of Film Censors. Deleted were Kurt's floggings of Nevenka, her ecstatic knuckle-chewing reactions, and a shot of the heroine standing before a full-length mirror, summoning her lover's ghost from the darkness by caressing her own body. Whereas the uncut version was an exploration of the darkest corners of a woman's heart, libido and subconscious, the 77-minute *Night Is the Phantom* confronted bewildered audiences with what Christopher Lee described as "a picture of opening and closing doors and shadows and funny footfalls and people spinning around and nobody being there." [13]

"I thought [the British censorship cuts] were ridiculous," the actor railed. "To me, what they cut and what they don't cut these days is absolutely paradoxical. I can't understand the reasons for half the cuts they make. When they talk about sadism and brutality and you see some of the Bond pictures and the things they leave in, it doesn't make sense at all . . . Of course, it was rather a vicious story. But the acting by Daliah Lavi in those sequences was so good—where she was flogged and where she had to imagine things that weren't there—I felt it a great shame that any of it was cut at all . . . They missed so much by cutting it out that it no longer made an intelligible picture. Originally, it was a good one, full of suspense and full of atmosphere." [14]

In the pages of *Monthly Film Bulletin*, an uncredited reviewer said of *Night Is the Phantom*: "Another of Italy's prankish simulations of a British horror movie, the film is slow, repetitive, verging on parody. Censor or distributor cuts have rendered much of the plot incomprehensible, though one doubts if it ever made sense entirely. And yet it grows on one in retrospect. Its weird and doom-laden claustrophobia is unfailingly compulsive, mainly because of the redolent Freudian associations . . . The Victorian-Gothic paraphernalia comes equally from Gainsborough (*The Man in Grey*) and Riccardo Freda. Though Bava copies Freda almost slavishly, he still pulls off some arresting pictorial compositions, notably of Daliah Lavi (outstanding as Nevenka) at the piano in a vast castle hall."

12 Ibid.
13 Ibid.
14 Ibid.



GERMAN *two-sheet poster, remarkable for selling images from this black velvet-like film against a bright white background.*

In the United States, American International Pictures showed no interest in the picture—perhaps as a result of the obscenity charges filed against it, but even without this, it would have been considered too romantic, too adult, or too slow by their standards. The film was eventually acquired for US distribution in April 1965 by Futuramic Releasing as "A Richard G. Yates Presentation," and retitled *What* (no exclamation point, as is sometimes mistakenly added). Futuramic rejected the original florid-script-on-red silk main titles and replaced them with footage of Count Vladimir in bed, surprised by the unbidden opening of the secret passage in his fireplace. Emerging from the hearth, instead of his son, is the film's title in odd, ghostly letters that surge forth as they are gasped in voice-over by someone who extends the vowel almost to the breaking point.

Initially, Futuramic prints were virtually intact—running a couple of minutes shorter than the original export version, due to its abbreviated credits sequences—and processed in Technicolor. However, the incoherent US title aptly prophesied the heavily cut television prints that replaced it in circulation almost immediately (in May 1965) from another company, Thunderbird Films. This version was basically identical to the British abortion, and prints were cheaply processed so that the film's all-important color faded quickly.

Although Bava had begun to attain near-celebrity status in France, *Le Corps et le Fouet* was not acquired for release there until the summer of 1966, and was withheld from release in Germany and Austria until the following year. The French distributor Films Marbeauf had the good sense to inform the contributors to *Positif* and *Midi-Minuit Fantastique* that "John M. Old" was in fact Mario Bava, and some of the resulting reviews appearing there offered translations of the English pseudonyms—though "Julyan Berry" was incorrectly unmasked as Franco Prosperi.

As late as the early 1980s, Bava's film was only available for viewing in America in the form of badly truncated (and more badly color-faded) prints bearing the title *What*. For many years, the picture was considered to be lost until director Joe Dante provided an uncut 35 mm Technicolor print from his personal collection to the 1993 "Haunted Worlds of Mario Bava" retrospective held by the American Cinematheque in Los Angeles. The film is currently in the public domain in

America, and in the year 2000, Dante allowed his print to be used in the preparation of a definitive DVD release undertaken by Tulsa-based VCI Home Entertainment, who digitally combined its cleanest portions with those of an Italian-language print owned by another private collector. When the disc was released late that year as *The Whip and the Body*, it was gratefully received by a new generation of viewers—and by older fans who had never had the opportunity to see the film uncut—who collectively hailed it as one of Bava's finest works, and perhaps his most transcendent of genre.



UK *quad poster.*

Unfortunately, after this remarkable sole collaboration, Mario Bava would never work again from an Ernesto Gastaldi script. Gastaldi credits this disappointment to Bava's general lack of interest in writing. In the years following *La frusta e il corpo*, Gastaldi continued to script more important Italian horror and fantasy films than any other Italian screenwriter. Among his many achievements are *La cripta e l'incubo/Terror in the Crypt* (1964), *I lunghi capelli della morte/The Long Hair of Death* (1964), *La lama nel corpo/The Murder Clinic* (1966), *La decima vittima/The 10th Victim* (1966), and numerous *gialli* for director Sergio Martino, including *Lo strano vizio della signora Wardh/Next!* (1971), *Il tuo vizio è una stanza chiusa e solo io ne ho la chiave/Gently Before She Dies* (1972), *Tutti i colori del buio/They're Coming to Get You! a.k.a. Day of the Maniac* (1972), and *I corpi presentano tracce di violenza carnale/Torso* (1973).

To the mutual regret of Mario Bava and Christopher Lee, *La frusta e il corpo* also marked their final collaboration. Lee considers it his best Italian film—and he made a great many of them, working not only for Bava, but also for Steno, Antonio Margheriti, Camillo Mastrocinque, and others. He offers his estimations of these gentlemen: "The only major difference I noticed in these films was that Bava used a great deal of highly imaginative lighting, as befitted a great cameraman. Steno was more precise and disciplined, and had very definite ideas which were almost always right. [Antonio] Margheriti seemed to have more money to spend and was much more flexible, and certainly used several cameras to cover one shot. Mastrocinque was perhaps more a director of the old school. He told you what he wanted and left you to get on with it. If it was wrong, he was expert at adjusting it correctly. All these directors were delightful, courteous, and very intelligent men, and I had the impression that they spent a great deal of their careers improving material that was not worthy of them." Lee's film for Mastrocinque, incidentally, was *La cripta e l'incubo/Terror in the Crypt* (1964), a loose adaptation of J. Sheridan Le Fanu's *Carmilla,* also scripted by Ernesto Gastaldi.

"Whenever I came to Rome I used to talk to Bava on the telephone," Lee says. "We were always going to get together, but somehow it never happened. It is, of course, possible that when the appropriate time arrived, he was under some form of restraint," he adds, alluding to the persistent rumors that Bava divided his time between Cinecittà and a padded cell. "For many years, I heard stories that he was in and out of mental homes, but I had no idea if there was any truth in this. It could have been an invention."

A few years after making *La frusta e il corpo,* Lee was cast in the lead of *Theatre of Death* (1966), a British horror thriller which contains a curious allusion to Bava's film. Lee plays Philippe Darvas, a writer and director at Le Theâtre de Mort in Paris, where sadistic plays in the tradition of the Grand Guignol are staged. Dominating the background of this film is a handsome oil portrait of Lee, in character as Kurt Menliff in *La frusta e il corpo,* which is identified as a portrait of Darvas' father, who also wrote and directed plays on the same stage twenty-five years earlier. In a couple of scenes, Lee is shown hiding behind the wall on which the portrait hangs, spying on the actions of others through the hollow orbs of the painting's eyes.

Lee remained interested in Bava's work and made a point of seeing his films whenever they happened to be screened at one of the fantastic film festivals he frequently attended as a guest of honor, but he grew increasingly disenchanted with their heightened levels of violence. Faced with a film like 1971's *Ecologia del delitto/Twitch of the Death Nerve,* Lee was at once appalled and again concerned for the state of his old friend's mental health.

Mario Bava's next film could only fan the flames of such rumor—a murder mystery, violent and erotic, splashed with all the incendiary qualities of a Van Gogh canvas, so brilliant, so scalding with color that, in the words of one rhapsodizing critic, ". . . it becomes a marvelous Sabbath, this Black Mass, this demonic ceremony that is *Sei donne per l'assassino.*" [15]

15 Alain Doremieux, "Six Femmes pour l'Assassin: Un Rève Fou," *Midi-Minuit Fantastique* 12, May 1965, 58.





MARY ARDEN *as Peggy, the girl with the stolen diary in* SEI DONNE PER L'ASSASSINO.

SEI DONNE PER L'ASSASSINO

Blood and Black Lace

"**TECHNICOLOR IS INTERESTING**," Ernst Lubitsch once told an actor visiting the set of his 1943 film *Heaven Can Wait.* "[It's] perfect for this kind of picture, wonderful for musicals and comedy. But . . . never shoot a drama or mystery in Technicolor."[1] Mario Bava had disproved this dictum with *I tre volti della paura*'s *"Il telefono"* and *La frusta e il corpo*, but with his next picture—*Sei donne per l'assassino*—he would disprove it with panache.

Before Bava, other directors had also successfully challenged the accepted wisdom that Technicolor was inappropriate for the somber realms of melodrama, mystery, and suspense. In 1945, John M. Stahl made an excellent melodrama in Technicolor, starring one of the leads from Lubitsch's own film: *Leave Her to Heaven*, which starred Gene Tierney as a beautiful but unbalanced and eventually homicidal young woman. Beginning with *Rope* in 1948, Alfred Hitchcock embarked on a series of extraordinary color thrillers. Initially, Hitchcock's use of color seemed to serve none but a commercial purpose, with the director deliberately toning-down the garish process to just a few steps removed from monochrome, but by thetime of *Vertigo* (1958), he had begun to use color to inform his films thematically and psychologically. The conscious or subconscious thoughts of characters could be revealed through the colors they wore, creating associations within the viewer—again, consciously or subconsciously—by selectively using color as shared points of reference within different scenes. Kim Novak didn't have to be present in a scene in order to inhabit it; we could see her reflected in the color of James Stewart's suit or necktie, which happened to match the color of the walls in the restaurant where he first laid eyes on her.

While *Sei donne per l'assassino* wasn't the first successful—or even the first innovative—color thriller, it did revolutionize the way thrillers were made, and ultimately, it would be remembered as the definitive example of an entirely new kind of thriller: the *giallo*.

As explained in the chapter on *La ragazza che sapeva troppo*, Italians use the word *giallo* (and its plural form *gialli*) to describe all mystery and thriller fiction; therefore, they also use it to categorize *all* films of such a nature, not exclusively those made in Italy. The *giallo*, in its broadest definition, can be traced back to the silent days. In English-speaking countries, however, we already have the words for "mysteries" and "thrillers" and we view these as distinct and somewhat mutually exclusive cinematic archetypes. As the films of Mario Bava, Dario Argento, and Sergio Martino became more familiar to us, we adopted the term *"giallo"* to mean something quite specific, and somewhat contrary to the Italian definition. To us, a *giallo* is an unusually decorate and vicious type of thriller viewed, at least in part, through the eyes of a killer; it is a murder mystery that revels in the details of murder rather than the details of deduction and police procedure.

With the arrival of authors like Mickey Spillane and Frederic Brown in the 1950s, detective fiction became more violent and erotic in nature, and these qualities became even more exaggerated when pseudonymous Italian writers began to ape their style of writing in the pages of Mondadori's yellow-jacketed pulp magazines. As with the American paperback market, the covers of these publications also became more lurid and fetishistic, picturing women in provocative poses while being threatened by a terrible weapon—a knife, a gun, or a straight razor—in the grip of a gloved hand, presented in a red circle against a trademark yellow background.

The literary *giallo* was not merely a brand of escapism, but also a reflection of unpleasant realities that were known to occur in the course of daily Roman life. In his acclaimed non-fiction study *The Italians,* author Luigi Barzini dissects the Italian psyche in terms that convey the particular atmosphere Bava achieved with *Sei donne per l'assassino*: "Italians . . . fear sudden and violent death. The vigorous passions of a turbulent and restless people are always ready to flare up unexpectedly like hot coals under the ashes. Italy is a blood-stained country. Almost every day of the year jealous husbands kill their adulterous wives and their lovers; about as many wives kill their adulterous husbands and their mistresses . . . The world of vice also demands its daily victims. Streetwalkers are found dead with silk stockings wound tight round their necks or knives stuck in their ribs, on their unmade beds or in country lanes; fatherly homosexuals are found in public parks with their heads smashed in and their pockets turned out; on deserted beaches, naked call-girls are found at dawn drowned in a few inches of water. Prostitutes kill their pimps, whom they usually primly call '*il mio fidanzato*,' my *fiance*; pimps and dope-peddlers kill each other over territorial disputes . . . Even when violent death is not lurking in the shadows, . . . an Italian must remain on the alert and move with circumspection."[2]

Barzini's words help us to understand why traces of the *giallo* can be seen in Bava's work as early as *I vampiri* (with its black-gloved killer of young women found in the River Seine), and indeed even farther back, in the operatically exaggerated murders staged in *I pagliacci* (*amore tragico*) and *La donna più bella del mondo*. Bava began formalizing his interest in such material in *La ragazza che sapeva troppo* and *"Il telefono,"* the former a tongue-in-cheek tribute to the *giallo* and its impressionable readership, the second an actual *giallo* story rendered in perfect miniature. After the work-for-hire detour of *La frusta e il corpo*, Bava was now ready to tackle a fullscale model.

Working along similar lines—and beating Bava to the punch in a manner of speaking—was director Antonio Margheriti. Born in Rome on September 19, 1930, Margheriti's career had followed a path almost identical to Bava's own. In the 1940s and '50s, Margheriti had learned his first trade—as a special effects technician, specializing in miniatures—at the side of Mario's father Eugenio, at the Istituto LUCE. In 1960, when Bava was filming his own directorial debut *La maschera del demonio* on a sound stage at Scalera Film, the

Sei donne per l'assassino

"Six Women for the Murderer"
Working title: *L'atelier della morte,* "The Fashion House of Death"
Filmed at ATC Studios, Villa Sciarra (exteriors), and on location in Rome
November 1963 – January 1964
First released: March 14, 1964
Eastmancolor, 1.66:1, 88 minutes

Production: Emmepi Cinematografici (Rome), George de Beauregard (Paris), Top Film (Munich) and Monachia Film (Monaco). Producers: Massimo Patrizi and Alfredo Mirabile. Director: Mario Bava. Assistant director: Priscilla Contardi. Assistant to the director: Cristina Grieco. Screenplay: Marcello Fondato, with the collaboration of Giuseppe Barilla and Mario Bava. Dialogue coach: Vittorio Trentino. Director of photography: Ubaldo Terzano. Art direction: Arrigo Breschi. Wardrobe: Tina Grani. Costume design for Miss Bartok: Eleanora Garrett. Makeup: Emilio Trani. Hairdresser: Marisa Laganga. Production manager: Armando Govoni. Production administrator: Pietro Speziale. Production inspector: Franco Grifeo. Production secretary: Benito Carifi. Key grip: Mario Mancini. Editor: Mario Serandrei. Assistant editor: Lina Caterini. Music: Carlo Rustichelli. Distributor: Unidis.

Eva Bartok (Countess Cristiana Cuomo/Countess Christina Como), Cameron Mitchell (Massimo Morlacchi/Max Morlan), Thomas Reiner (Ispettore Silvestri/Inspector Sylvester), Ariana Gorini (Nicole), Mary Arden (Peggy), Lea Krugher (Greta), Claude Dantes (Tao-Li), Dante Di Paolo (Franco/Frank), Massimo Righi (Marco/Mark), Franco Ressel (Marquis Riccardo Morelli/Richard Morrell), Alan Collins [Luciano Pigozzi] (Cesare/Caesar), Giuliano Raffaelli (Inspector Zanchin), Francesca Ungaro (Isabella), Harriet White Medin (Clarissa/Clarice), Enzo Cerusico (gas station attendant), Nadia Anty (model).

Additional US credits: English-language version directed by Lou Moss. Title design: Filmation Associates. Dubbing actors include Paul Frees and Dante Di Paolo. Screen adaptation: Kelly Leon. Recording: Pat Somerset.

Austria: *Der Würger mit der Maske,* "The Strangler with the Mask"
Belgium: *6 Vrouwen voor de Moordenaar*, Stellar Film, 1964
Denmark: *Jernhanden i Raedselsnatten,* "The Iron Hand in the Night of Horror," Trans American Film Corporation, 10/5/73
France: *6 Femmes pour l'Assassin,* Les Films Marbeuf, 12/30/64, 87m
Germany: *Blutige Seide,* "Bloody Velvet," Gloria Film, Technicolor, 11/27/64
Japan: *Six Women for the Murdere* [*sic*]
Mexico: *6 Mujeres para el Asesino*, Mario J. Dada, 1965
Spain: *Seis Mujeres para el Asesino*, Seleciónes Capitolino S. Huguet, 1965, 88m
UK: *Blood and Black Lace*, Gala Film Distributors Ltd., 1/6/66, 84m 1s, Certificate "X," passed with cuts [original length: 88m 11s]
US: *Blood and Black Lace,* Woolner Brothers via Allied Artists Pictures Corporation, Technicolor, 4/7/65, 88m

much-younger Margheriti was filming his directorial debut—*Space Men/Assignment Outer Space* (1960)—on the stage next door. For years to come, the few critics who cared would refer to *Space Men* as "the first Italian science fiction film," a distinction that correctly belonged to *La morte viene dallo spazio*, which Bava had directed with Paolo Heusch in 1958. In August 1963, as Bava was in preproduction on *Sei donne per l'assassino*, Margheriti released *La vergine di Norimberga/Horror Castle*, starring Rosanna Podestà and Christopher Lee, which was based on an original novella by "Frank Bogart"[3] that appeared in the December 6, 1960 issue of *K.K.K. I classici dell'orrore*. Though not derived from a Mondadori publication, *La vergine di Norimberga* was nevertheless a *giallo*—the first full-length Italian color thriller to reflect the growing influence of the nation's pulp paperback culture, and it packed all the sleaze and sadism one expected from a *gialli*. Whether or not Bava felt trumped by Margheriti's film we'll never know, but an enmity between the two men was observed by people in their mutual orbit. As actor Luciano Pigozzi—who worked for both of them—confirms, "They were very jealous of one another."

Besides the growing Italian appetite for pulp fiction, two other major influences on the development of the cinematic *giallo* must be noted. The first was Alfred Hitchcock's *Psycho*—arguably the first film to devote as much creative skill to the staging of murders as earlier "whodunits" had devoted to the process of deduction. The second was West Germany's own peculiar brand of cinematic thriller, the *krimi*. Primarily, these were produced by Artur Brauner's CCC production house—enjoyable black-and-white thrillers based on the works of prodigious English novelist Edgar Wallace (1875–1932), with titles like *Der Frosch mit der Maske/The Fellowship of the Frog* (1960), *Das Gasthaus an der Themse/The Inn by the River* (1962), and *Der Würger von Schloß Blackmoor/The Strangler of Blackmoor Castle* (1963). Initially straightforward thrillers with an accentuated sense of humor and caricature, the *Wallace-krimis*—under the direction of such flamboyant stylists as Harald Reinl, Alfred Vohrer, and Franz Josef Gottlieb—rapidly evolved into something much like the *gialli*, featuring outrageous acts of murder (often viewed from the killer's perspective) and an increasingly audacious use of camera and music. The *krimis*, which enjoyed a certain popularity in Italy, would continue to be photographed in traditional black-and-white until 1966, the year after Bava's *Sei donne per l'assassino* was released in West Germany as *Blutige Seide*. It took Bava's fantastic leap of visual imagination to show the Germans how a thriller could be made in color without forfeiting essential menace and atmosphere.



THE COVER *of this Italian publicity brochure confirms the film's giallo status by incorporating the yellow-cover, crimson-circle format of the Mondadori paperback covers.*

Bava may have learned this lesson himself from an obscure Swedish thriller that predated even the West German *krimis*. *Mannekäng i rött* ("Mannequin in Red," 1958) was the second in a series of five films starring Karl-Arne Holmsten and Annalisa Ericson as the husband-and-wife detective team of John and Kajsa Hillman. Based on a series of pulp novels by Folke Mellvig (1913–94), the series began with *Damen i svart* ("The Lady in Black," also 1958), photographed in black-and-white by Sven Nykvist, in which the Hillmans investigated a series of murders allegedly committed by a ghost. All of Mellvig's novels had the gimmick of including a color in the title, and as director Arne Mattsson (1919–95) prepared to make his second *Hillmanthriller* (as they are known in Sweden), he took a lead from the title and decided to film *Mannekäng i rött* in color. Replacing Nykvist as cinematographer was Hilding Bladh (1907–82), whose own biggest prior success had been Ingmar Bergman's *Gycklarnas afton/Sawdust and Tinsel* (1953). Bladh approached color cinematography very much as Mario Bava did when he photographed *Le avventure di Giacomo Casanova*: he lit the sets and actors as he would have done were he filming in black-and-white. This, combined with diffused lighting filters and intricate cross-lighting, helped to give *Mannekäng i rött* a distinctively velvety texture which added greatly to its overall ambiance of luxuriant criminality and sin.

Since Mattsson's film was never widely distributed to other countries, and remains unavailable in English, a thorough account is necessary to this discussion. Like *Sei donne per l'assassino*, *Mannekäng i rött* is set in a fashion salon where a series of murders is taking place. The salon, La Femme, is owned and operated by the wheelchair-bound Madame Irina Thyra Lennberg (Lillebil Ibsen, always with a white cat on her lap) and comes to the attention of John Hillman after he uncovers a blackmailing scheme involving Lennberg's troubled foster son Bobby (Bengt Brunskog). When Katja (Elsa Prawitz), one of La Femme's star models, is found dead with a dagger in her back in the salon's picture window, Hillman's wife Kajsa agrees to go undercover, working as a freelance model to keep an eye on things from the inside. The behind-the-scenes atmosphere of the salon is quite the opposite of the image it projects, Kajsa finds, with a great deal of less literal back-stabbing going on as the business prepares for its annual fashion show. Mme. Lennberg's second-in-command, Birgitte "Gitte" Lindell (Anita Björk), plans to model her own original wedding gown design at the show, but she is replaced when the doting Rickard von Hook (Lennart Lindberg) persuades Mme. Lennberg to headline his wife Gabriella (Gio Petré), a local nightclub singer, instead. In time, Mme. Lennberg is seemingly killed when someone disables her elevator and sets her house ablaze, and

1 Ernst Lubitsch, as quoted by Dickie Moore in Scott Eyman, *Ernst Lubitsch: Laughter in Paradise* (New York NY: Simon & Schuster, 1993), 314.

2 Luigi Barzini, *The Italians* (New York NY: Bantam Books, 1965), 112–13.

3 The true author is presumed to be Maddelena Guy.



SCENES *from Arne Mattsson's influential, pre-giallo thriller* MANNEKÄNG I RÖTT.

a mock gallows near the salon that displays a hanging mannequin (in Sweden, an age-old gesture to celebrate the completion of a new building or roof) is found to be hanging Gabriella by the neck. Gitte assumes her position as La Femme's new administrator, but strange occurrences indicate that Mme. Lennberg may yet be alive; one night, the old woman's chauffeur fetches her empty wheelchair and takes it downstairs to her limousine, but only her white cat emerges from the back seat. She is also unsettled by the unexplained appearances of a woman in black (Eivor Landström), who seems to have inherited Mme. Lennberg's cat. Meanwhile, John Hillman's investigation, accompanied by the comic shenanigans of his partner Freddy (Nils Hallberg), leads him to suspect Bobby of the crimes, but they continue even after Bobby is found dead on the stage where the fashion show is to take place, shot by his own hand. One night, as Gitte works late, she hears the unmistakable squeak of Mme. Lennberg's wheelchair and sees her slowly approaching through the darkness. She was not killed in the fire that Gitte set, only badly burned. When Gitte asks how she managed to escape, Mme. Lennberg stands up in her wheelchair and walks toward her, gripping her would-be murderess by the throat. Gitte's lifeless body topples over the edge of the mezzanine and falls at the feet of the Hillmans and Freddy, just as they arrive. To their amazement, Mme. Lennberg descends the stairs, walks past them and phones for the police.

The murders in *Mannekäng i rött* are not at all graphic, and this fact—combined with the humorous content related to Freddy and his silly girlfriend Sonya (Lena Granhagen)—places Mattsson's film far more in the realm of the West German *krimi* than the Italian *giallo*. But the look of the film captures—rather, anticipates—the look of Bava's *gialli* on a level that even deliberate imitations never have. Even so, Hilding Bladh and art director Bibi Lindström make choices that Bava and Giorgio Giovannini would never have made; for example, although the Mattsson film was shot in Eastmancolor (and presumably developed at Technicolor, as per Bava's preference, judging from the look of it), the basic color template is disappointingly monochromatic. The walls and carpets and furniture at La Femme are cream-colored, and much of the wardrobe worn by the cast is similarly muted in hue—grays, moss greens, and mustards—in order to accentuate its calculated uses of red; Bladh would use much the same approach in the next *Hillmanthriller* for Mattsson, 1959's *Ryttare i blatt* ("Horseman in Blue"), which reserved emphasis for the color blue. The heavy use of whites and creams depletes too many shots in *Mannekäng i rött* of the riper beauty it might have had with a more daring palette, but with its beautiful women, velvet lighting, and prowling, low-angle camera movements through the darkened salon, Mattsson's film remains the most striking approximation of the classic Bava style in the earlier work of another cameraman.

Hilding Bladh may well have been influenced by Bava's earlier color cinematography, but anyone who sees *Mannekäng i rött* will agree that, somehow, Bava saw the picture and the influence became mutual. But Bava took the concept further, as he also did with the elements he would incorporate into his next film from the West German *krimis* and Hitchcock's *Psycho*. As screenwriter Joseph Stefano noted in a recent television interview, "The slasher movie came along because, if *Psycho* had two of these scenes, think what it will do at the boxoffice if it has three! And then, the next time, you say four . . ."

The Italian title *Sei donne per l'assassino* ("Six Women for the Murderer") provides the viewer with a literal scorecard for the mayhem ahead, thus qualifying it as the first authentic "body count" movie. Although the title was changed to *Blood and Black Lace* for the American market, the US sales campaign added to the promise of the original title by trumpeting "The 8 Greatest Shocks Ever Filmed!"[4]

Synopsis

A storm rages outside Cristiana Haute Couture, upsetting the fashion salon's shingle. One of the resident models, Nicole, sneaks outside to confer with her boyfriend, Frank—an antiques dealer, hooked on cocaine, who is angry with another model, Isabella, for taking the last of his supply. Later, as Isabella leaves the salon, she is intercepted by a white-masked marauder in the park, who bashes her to death against a tree trunk, and drags her into the woods. The next day, Isabella's defiled corpse is discovered inside an armoire by the salon's director, Countess Christina





THE KILLER *(Freddy Unger) drags the battered body of Isabella (Francesca Ungaro) into the woods outside the salon.*

Como, who inherited the business after the death of her husband. Max Morlan, Christina's partner, offers a description of Isabella's carefree lifestyle to Inspector Sylvester, who deduces from her corpse that the killer must be a sex maniac.

The unveiling of the new season's fashions must proceed as planned despite the negative publicity of the murder and the superstitions of the surviving models. It is during the fashion show that Nicole—the only model "cynical" enough to wear the black dress intended for Isabella—discovers a red-leather book . . . Isabella's diary! It is immediately obvious, from her co-workers' reaction to this discovery, that everyone at the salon has reason to fear the secret revelations contained in this book. When Christina makes the gesture of taking possession of it, to turn it over to the police, Nicole insists on doing this herself—as is her right, as the person who found it. Christina agrees. While Nicole is on stage modelling Isabella's dress, her purse—containing the diary—is stolen by unseen hands.

Nearly all of the salon's habitués have reason to want the diary destroyed. Nicole is supplying her lover Frank with drugs; Peggy, another model, is desperate to conceal the fact of an old abortion; Mark, who pops pills on the sly, is suffering from unrequited love for Peggy; another model, Greta, is living out of wedlock with the Marquis Riccardo Morelli, whose title masks his true financial destitution; and the house dresser Caesar is an insatiable eavesdropper, perhaps compiling a diary of his own for fun and profit.

Coming offstage, Nicole finds her purse and breaks away from the fashion show to deliver some cocaine to Frank at his antiques shop, where she is trapped, teased, and brutally murdered by the masked assassin, who slams a medieval spiked glove from a suit of armor onto her face. The killer rifles through her purse, but doesn't find

4 This hyperbole was previously used on Allied Artists' campaign for William Castle's 1958 release, *House on Haunted Hill*.

the diary. The diary was actually stolen by Peggy, who tears the abortion-related pages from the diary and, after burning them in her fireplace, decides to commit the entire book to the flames. She is soon visited by the killer, who writes his demand "Where is the diary?" in a pocket notebook, rather than speak in a possibly familiar voice. Refusing to believe that Peggy has destroyed it, the assassin carries her off to a secret lair where he attempts to torture the truth out of her, by pressing her hand—and finally and fatally, her face—against a red-hot stove.

When Nicole's body is discovered, the police take the salon's male staff into 24-hour custody. During this period, Greta discovers Peggy's cadaver stuffed in the trunk of her sportscar. While hiding the body, she too is attacked by the faceless killer and smothered by a pillow. This incident leaves the police with no choice but to release the men, including Mark, whose dependency on pills is revealed as treatment for his epilepsy. As the men collect their appropriated belongings, the killer's notebook is revealed as the personal property of Max Morlan.

In fact, Max murdered Isabella, Nicole, and Peggy, while his lover Christina provided the alibi necessary for his release by murdering Greta. The secret couple's campaign of murder began with the killing of Christina's husband, necessary for her unencumbered inheritance of the salon and his wealth. Isabella knew the truth of what had happened, and threatened to blackmail Max and Christina. The revelation of Isabella's diary forced them to kill and kill again until the incriminating document was recovered. Max persuades Christina that, although the diary has been destroyed, it would benefit them to commit one last murder, to cement Sylvester's "sex-killer" theory.



PEGGY *loans Nicole (Ariana Gorini) the keys to her car so that she can take drugs to her boyfriend.*



ISABELLA*'s mutilated corpse is found stuffed inside a closet at the salon.*

Reluctantly, Christina (disguised in Max's white-masked costume) surprises the last of the salon's models—the exotic Tao-Li—in her bathroom, drowning her and slashing her wrists with a straight razor to simulate a suicide. The murderess is then surprised by a sudden "police arrival," faked by Max pounding on the door, which forces her to escape through a window onto a drain pipe, which her lover has taken care to disconnect from its brace. Christina's weight causes the pipe to come loose, and she falls three stories to the ground. Max returns to the salon, happy at the prospect of inheriting his partner's wealth and business, when a bruised and bloodied Christina appears to embrace him, pulling him against a concealed revolver. Together they bleed to death amid the shambles of their plan, as the red receiver of an upset telephone swings in the background.[5]

Production & Cast

Sei donne per l'assassino was written by *I tre volti della paura*'s Marcello Fondato (later a director of Italian A-pictures, including 1969's *Certo, certissimo, anzi . . . probabile* with Claudia Cardinale) with the collaboration of Bava and (perhaps, as credited) one of the film's producers, Giuseppe Barilla. In addition to the apparent influence of *Mannekäng i rött*, the plotline about the missing diary owes a debt to Henri-Georges Clouzot's earlier, controversial thriller *Le Corbeau*



("The Raven," 1943), about a small community terrorized by someone whose eponymously signed letters threaten various citizens with the exposure of their various adulteries, abortions, and crimes.

The original Italian credits list *Sei donne per l'assassino* as an Italian-French-Monagascan production, while the American credits—which rename almost the entire production crew, with the exception of Bava himself—drop the French partner (Georges de Beauregard) in favor of Top Film, a German company based in Munich.[6]

Top Film, attracted to the marketability of the film as a *krimi,* is known to have been a partner in the production and was responsible for securing the participation of such German talent as Thomas Reiner, Lea Krugher, and Heidi Stroh.

The movie was shot under the working title *L'atelier della morte* ("The Fashion House of Death") over a six-week period. Shooting commenced in late November 1963 and continued through the first weeks of January 1964. According to the work diary of Armando Govoni, working for the first time in the capacity of production manager, shooting commenced in late November 1963—a mere three days after the assassination of US President John F. Kennedy in Dallas, Texas—and continued through January 1964. However, this starting date is challenged by the recollections of cast member Mary Arden, who (like all her contemporaries) remembers where she was that fateful day. "I know I had finished my shooting of *Blood and Black Lace* at the time of the assassination," she insists. "I was in New York City to meet with people on that day, that had been arranged by a director friend of Cameron Mitchell I met when we were shooting."

Nevertheless, the film was certainly in production in the wake of the assassination. It was the first national tragedy to be televised internationally, and for weeks, all around the world, the sting of sudden death and a dark cloud of mourning hung palpably in the air. Bava was perhaps affected by this occasion, and motivated to invest more feeling than usual in his handling of violent scenes, to convey the sense of loss and defilement so seldom acknowledged in movies constructed around acts of murder.

The budget was roughly $100,000–$125,000 in American dollars. The exteriors were filmed at the historic Villa Sciarra on Via Caladrelli, atop Gianicolo—one of the seven hills of Rome. It was there, under the groining arbors of its botanical gardens, that the murder of Isabella was filmed on a cold winter's night. The interiors, according to actress Lea Krugher, were filmed in a separate villa located on Via Pertica.

Bava was not overly fond of actors, but in *Sei donne per l'assassino,* he makes a point of acknowledging his cast in a remarkable main title sequence, which presents each of the *dramatis personæ* individually, posed in the manner of a store window mannequin, as



TWO SHOTS *of Cameron Mitchell as Max Morlan. The second finds him clowning for the stills photographer with guest corpse Mario Bava.*

5 Though *Sei donne per l'assassino* was a European co-production, it was filmed with the majority of the cast speaking their lines in English, as rewritten on the set by actress Mary Arden. Therefore, although the salon's sign presents Christina's name as Cristiana, as it is given in the dubbed Italian soundtrack, I will refer to the film's characters with their English names, which, apart from this one case, have greater authenticity.

6 The American credits of *Blood and Black Lace* include the following absurd Americanisms: Herman Tarzana (Ubaldo Terzano), Mark Suran (Mario Serandrei), Harry Brest (Arrigo Breschi), Joe Barilla (Giuseppe Barilla), and Carl Rustic (Carlo Rustichelli).



their name wipes across the screen. (*Mannekäng i rött* opens with a similar conceit, as a svelte model in a red evening gown, scarves flowing in an ethereal breeze, stands to the left of a proscenium box, which opens to reveal a scrolling list of the film's credits.) In a business where actors never receive 100% screen credit unless they have reached the summit of their profession, Bava rewards nearly every actor with a speaking part by giving them the entire screen, all to themselves, for a few seconds at the very beginning.

Top-billed (in most countries, anyway) was Cameron Mitchell, who was delighted to be working with Bava again. "I had remained in touch with Bava, hoping that we would find another project to do together," he reported. In the intervening years between 1961 and 1963, much of Mitchell's screen work had been for lesser Italian directors such as Pino Mercanti and Sergio Bergonzelli, so when Bava wanted him for *Sei donne*, Mitchell eagerly accepted his invitation, though the role of Max Morlan didn't ask too much more of him than to sit at a desk and smoke cigarettes. "There was a special chemistry between us," Mitchell reasoned. "Bava was one of my favorite people on the planet." Mitchell found Bava to be in a genial mood during the filming, though he too had heard rumors about the nervous breakdown he was alleged to have suffered. "We never talked about it because, in this business, frankly, everybody breaks down. I think it was fairly serious with Mario, however."

Mitchell's co-stars seem to remember him favorably. German actor Thomas Reiner, who played the hardboiled Inspector Sylvester, shared Mitchell's daily taxi ride from the hotel to the villa where they were shooting. "The taxi picked us up at the hotel, and in the car, he always brought up something to talk about," Reiner smiles. "But I never understood him properly because he spoke with such heavy slang. I could never figure out what he was

ITALIAN *due-foglia, art by M. Colizzi. Note that this poster places "A Film by Mario Bava" above the title and above the stars' names—a first in Bava's career.*

saying, even though my English wasn't bad! I think Bava may have had the same problem, even though his English wasn't bad either, for an Italian." [7]

Mitchell also won the respect of "the Italian Peter Lorre," Luciano Pigozzi, especially after he had the experience of working with other American stars. "Mitchell was a very good actor; I saw him in many films—even in a horror film I saw two days ago!—[he was] always good. Everything was very happy, nothing bad. There were no drunk people, you understand. When I made *Berlino—appuntamento per le spie/Spy in Your Eye* [1966], we had another American actor, Dana Andrews. He would start drinking whiskey in the early morning. Very bad."

Max is eventually unmasked as the film's assassin, but Cameron Mitchell did not play the masked scenes himself. The killer—a faceless brute in a trenchcoat and slouch hat with antecedents in "The Blank" (a.k.a. Frank Redrum), a villain who enlivened Chester Gould's *Dick Tracy* comic strip in 1937, and also in the white-masked gunman of Edgar Wallace's 1930 novel *White Face*—was actually played by Italian stuntman Goffredo "Freddy" Unger, a close friend and associate of Bava's since the early 1960s. The son of a travelling circus family, Unger was born to a Spanish father and an Italian mother in Oslo, Norway, on June 6, 1933. In addition to being one of Italy's most in-demand stunt professionals, Unger is well-known within the Italian film industry as the most accomplished student of Italy's postwar *Maestro d'armi*, Musumuri-Greco.

Supporting Mitchell in *Sei donne per l'assassino* were several excellent character actors carried over from earlier Bava films, *carratteristi* for whose faces Mario had a particular *simpatia*. Harriet White Medin, back for her third Bava film in a row, was cast in the thankless (but amusing) red herring role of Clarice—yet another housekeeper, this one introduced from behind while wearing the same black trenchcoat worn earlier by the killer. Walked from one room of the villa (Peggy's apartment) to another (police headquarters) on a one-day schedule, Medin remembered nothing of the filming and was repelled by the picture's sadistic cruelty.

"I think it's absolutely horrible," she once groaned in my ear after a screening of the picture. We later discussed her response to the movie at length, and she expanded on her thoughts: "When you get to be my age and you begin to accept the fact that you're not going to be around forever, violence on the screen loses whatever entertainment value it may have had when you were younger and thought of yourself as immortal and indestructible. Perhaps I take the film more personally than you do!" When I praised the film's style and technique, she responded, "Technique? Well, I worked in films for over forty years and still don't know the first thing about film technique."

Sei donne would be Medin's last collaboration with Bava. Her marriage to art director Gastone Medin had turned sour and she was looking for a way out. After working as the continuity girl and dialogue coach on John Huston's *Reflections in a Golden Eye* in 1967, Medin was invited by the film's second unit director Andrew "Bundy" Marton—famous for directing the second unit, and most of the chariot race, of William Wyler's *Ben-Hur* (1959)—to return to the States with his family and live in the guest house on their Beverly Hills property. On impulse, she accepted at the last minute, leaving behind her husband, most of her possessions, and a sink full of unwashed dishes. In America, she worked primarily on the Los Angeles stage and on television, but she also appeared in bit parts in such films as *Schlock!* (1972, a non-SAG role that she played under the alias "Enrica Blankey"), *Death Race 2000* (1975, in which she played the President of the United States), *The Witches of Eastwick* (1987), and *Things To Do in Denver When You're Dead* (1995). She can briefly be seen in James Cameron's *The Terminator* (1984) as a restaurant customer served by waitress Linda Hamilton, and as a shocked grocery store shopper in *The Witches of Eastwick* (1987).

Medin's later work was limited to rare series television guest appearances on programs such as *Who's the Boss?* and *The A Team*. The most notable examples are her recurring role as Jessie on the science fiction themed *My Life and Times* (1991), and her performance as Nedra Larkin, an elderly woman willing herself to die, in the 1993 *Northern Exposure* episode "First Snow." A longtime cancer survivor, Medin suffered from memory loss and senility for much of her last decade and died in Los Angeles of natural causes on May 20, 2005, at the age of 91.

Appearing at a 1993 screening of *Blood and Black Lace* at the Directors Guild Theater in Los Angeles, Medin told host Joe Dante: "I don't know what Bava saw in me . . . but I'm very grateful to him for thinking of me and giving me all those funny little jobs to do."

Another of Bava's "funny little jobbers" was Franco Ressel, who had previously lent his imperious presence to *Le meraviglie di Aladino* and *Gli invasori*, and in *Sei donne per l'assassino* found his definitive role as the penniless Marquis Richard Morell. It would also be Ressel's final role for Bava, though he continued to appear in miscellaneous Spaghetti Westerns, *gialli*, and other exploitation fare over the next twenty years, notably Antonio Margheriti's *I criminali della galassia/Wild, Wild Planet* (1965) and *L'inafferabile, invincibile Mr. Invisibile/Mr. Superinvisible* (1970), Mario Caiano's *L'occhio nel labirinto/Eye of the Labyrinth* (1971), and Tonino Ricci's *I vivi invidierianno i morti/Panic*



CAMERON MITCHELL, *Luciano Pigazzi, Giuliano Raffaelli, and Thomas Reiner await Harriet White Medin's opinion on "whodunit."*

7 Thomas Reiner interviewed by Uwe Huber, September 2000.



PORTRAIT *shot of Mary Arden, a VOGUE cover girl and former June Taylor Dancer who has a date with a red hot stove.*

(1976). After completing a role in Federico Fellini's *Et la nave va/And the Ship Sails On* (1984), Ressel died in 1985 at the age of 60.

Dante Di Paolo, so effective as the mysterious journalist Landini in *La ragazza che sapeva troppo*, gives another memorable performance as the cocaine-addicted mooch, Frank. "I didn't have any experience being around narcotics to draw on or anything," Di Paolo says, "but, like the other character I played for Bava, this guy was kind of a lone wolf and he was desperate, and that I could understand. I just did my best to become the character, and the makeup person would come around and spritz me once in awhile so I would look sweaty on camera."

Di Paolo disappeared from Italian films after this, divorcing his wife (then known as Nadia Sanders) and returning to Los Angeles. It was there that he noticed an item in the trades announcing that *Sei donne per l'assassino* was being dubbed into English at a local recording studio to be released by the Woolner Brothers. Di Paolo placed a call to the studio and, having introduced himself as one of the film's stars, was hired for the first and only time to dub one of his own performances.

Some time in the late 1960s, a chance meeting at a red traffic light brought Di Paolo back together with his old flame, Rosemary Clooney, who had divorced José Ferrer in 1967. "I followed her and waited till she got out of her car, then I wrote my name and number in the dust on her windshield," he laughs. "She called me, and we were never apart after that." The couple lived and worked together for a quarter century—Di Paolo functioning as Clooney's tour manager and master of ceremonies at her concerts—before marrying in Clooney's hometown of Augusta, Kentucky, in November 1997. He was widowed when Clooney died of lung cancer on June 30, 2002. Today, Dante Di Paolo lives in Hollywood—an 80-year-old caregiver to his 97-year-old mother, who lives next door—in an apartment

that he now shares with his ex-wife, Nadine. "Life is such an amazing adventure, she's become my best friend again," he marvels, "and, at this very moment, she's calling me in to dinner!"

Massimo Righi—who had previously played Pietro, one of Gorka's ill-fated sons in *"The Wurdalak"*—is also impressive as the pitiful, lovesick epileptic Mark. Righi would work with Bava once again, playing one of the zombified astronauts in *Terrore nello spazio/Planet of the Vampires* (1965).

Thomas Reiner was a newcomer to Bava's films. Born in Stuttgart, Germany, on October 29, 1926, Reiner reckons that Inspector Sylvester was the biggest part he ever had in a movie; though classically trained, he would spend most of his career as a television and dubbing actor. Reiner's voice is instantly recognizable to the German public from its use in countless cartoon shows and imported movies and TV series; for example, he dubbed the voice of Hayden Rorke's Maj. Bellows in the series *I Dream of Jeannie*, and because his own speaking voice is very similar to that of Vincent Price, he dubbed Price's performances in a number of German imported features. In the period immediately following *Sei donne per l'assassino*, Reiner starred in the West German science fiction series *Raumpatroille—Die phantastischen Abenteuer des Raumschiffs Orion* ("The Fantastic Adventures of the Starship Orion"), which was essentially *Star Trek* years before there was a *Star Trek*. He is still active in German dubbing today.

Reiner remembers two things "vividly" about the production: "The first . . . I came from Germany doing television and was used to, let's say, dull camerawork. It was fascinating for me to see the imaginative ways in which a camera could be used. I especially remember the scene in the antiques store. I wasn't in that scene, but I attended the shooting. I think the secret was that there was no direct sound. In Germany, they always spent a lot of time arranging the microphones. Bava didn't have to bother about that, because everything was dubbed in later."

To interrupt for a moment: although *Sei donne per l'assassino* is one of the most sumptuous-looking Italian films of the 1960s, Cameron Mitchell remembered that the equipment at Bava's disposal was at times preposterously primitive. "Do you remember that wonderful dolly shot through the fashion house? Well, our dolly on that shot was *a kid's red wagon*! And when we had to do a crane type of shot, we didn't have a crane. They literally took something like a seesaw and counterbalanced the camera by sitting crew people on the other end! But wasn't that elegant? Didn't that film have style?"

Back to Thomas Reiner's other vivid recollection: "Secondly, while shooting this movie, I developed my love for basset hounds. Bava had one, and I loved it. Mario was very happy that he had somebody (me!) who would walk his dog during breaks in the shooting. When I returned to Germany, I immediately bought a basset hound, and my wife and I have always had bassets to this very day!"[8]

Bava liked Reiner's performance and also responded warmly to his obvious affection for his dog, Centi. "Bava said I should stay in Rome, that there would be work for me," Reiner remembers. "But I didn't know anybody there, so I didn't risk it. I returned to Germany, where I had a lot of work in television and the dubbing industry. I have no regrets." Reiner did go back to Italy once again, in 1967, to play a small role in Gianfranco Parolini's wacky superhero fantasy, *I fantastici tre supermen/The Three Fantastic Supermen*.

Giuliano Raffaelli, who plays Silvestri's burly, trenchcoated partner Inspector Zanchin, was occasionally billed in other movies under the name Jean Rafferty. He isn't given much of an opportunity to shine in *Sei donne per l'assassino*, but he went on to become a favorite of director Antonio Margheriti, who cast him in four pictures: *I lunghi capelli della morte/The Long Hair of Death* (1964), the aforementioned *I criminali della galassia* (1965), *Contronatura/The Unnaturals* (1968), and the atmospheric Western . . . *E Dio disse a Caino/. . . And God Said to Cain* (1970).

Seen briefly as a gas station attendant is Enzo Cerusico, who made a stab at American stardom with the short-lived TV series *My Friend Tony* in 1969. Born in 1937, Cerusico started out as a child actor and graduated to adult roles in Fellini's *La dolce vita*, in which he played a *papparazzo*. His other film work includes *Romolo e Remo/Duel of the Titans* (1961) with Steve Reeves and Gordon Scott, *Ercole sfida Sansone/Hercules, Samson and Ulysses* (1963), *L'Etrusco uccide ancora/The Dead Are Alive!* (1972), and two projects for Dario Argento: the historical dramody *Le cinque giornate/The Five Days of Milan* and the TV thriller *Un tram*. He died in 1991.



NICOLE *falls victim to a lethal spiked glove from a suit of armor.*

8 Ibid.

When asked what he remembers best about this production, Luciano Pigozzi laughs, "I remember . . . *many women!*" All these years later, his voice still conveys a sense of the delight he felt at being surrounded daily by so much feminine beauty—which brings us to the *"sei donne."*

In the order of their deaths, the first is Francesca Ungaro, who plays the short-lived role of Isabella—whose red-bound diary is the motivation behind the film's mayhem. Ungaro doesn't seem to have had a film career before or after this movie, so there's not much that can be said about her. Although stuntman Freddy Unger is sometimes billed as "Goffredo Ungaro" in Italian films, this actress/model was no relation to him. In fact, considering that a "Via Francesca Ongaro" exists in Rome, the name of this apparent one-time performer may be pseudonymous.

Similarly, little is known about Ariana Gorini, who gets a remarkable amount of screen time as Nicole, the antiques shop murder victim—a strong contender for Bava's greatest setpiece of horror and suspense. She was originally known as Adriana Gorini in the early 1960s, when she was frequently seen on the covers of fashion magazines, and subsequently graduated to television commercials for Pocket Coffee (a brand of chocolate), in which she appeared with Ugo Tognazzi. Gorini appears to have made only one other picture—Alberto Lattuada's *L'imprevisto* (1961), starring Anouk Aimée and Tomas Milian. Ms. Gorini was recently discovered living in Milan, where she works as a medium. [9]

Fortunately, there is a bounty of information to report about Mary Arden, the cool blonde who plays the role of Peggy. Born Dawne Hoffman on July 30 in St. Louis, Missouri, she was the daughter of a Russian-born concert pianist who was killed in a traffic accident while she was still very young, and raised by her mother with the Arden surname. A working dancer since the age of 9, Arden settled with her widowed mother in Florida, where she found her first international success as one of the legendary June Taylor Dancers, best remembered for their appearances on *The Jackie Gleason Show*. Once in Europe, she decided to focus on modelling with an eye on furthering her acting career. She was a highly successful fashion model in France and Italy, doing *couture* collection shows for Yves St. Laurent, Christian Dior, and Karl Lagerfeld, and appearing on the covers of numerous magazines, including *Harper's Bazaar, Madamoiselle,* and Italian *Vogue*. Feeling a greater affinity for the Italian people, she relocated from Paris to Rome and began appearing in films, including Gianni Puccini's *L'attico* (1962), written by *La maschera del demonio*'s Ennio De Concini. Gifted with a natural facility for languages. Arden came to Europe monolingual but quickly added French and Italian to her repertoire. Once she was cast in *Sei donne per l'assassino,* this talent worked to the advantage of Bava's film.



THIS SHOT *of the killer dragging Peggy away from her apartment clearly shows that Mary Arden was not involved in this stunt.*

"The Italian guy who wrote the script had no great knowledge of American or English conversation, so the script was full of mistakes," Arden recalls. "Being fluent in three languages, I offered to rewrite the dialogue for Mario while we were filming, so it would make better sense. He was very grateful."

Arden remembers performing the majority of her own stunts in the picture. "When we were doing the fight scene in my apartment, the stagehands were supposed to whip a mattress under me to break my fall every time I got knocked down during the fight—which, you can be sure, was repeated many times. They never got the mattress in the right spot to cushion my fall. They meant well, but I always hit the hard ground. I can assure you I was very bruised in this film!" Though Arden was filmed participating in these stunts, she does not appear in all of the stunts as they are seen in the final cut.

Freddy Unger, who also worked as the film's stunt coordinator, explains that Bava always took a set approach to the filming of important action scenes, because he knew that actors usually fought for the right to do their own stunts, but very few of them were able to really sell a fight (for example) on camera. "Mario had learned a very important lesson from working with Riccardo Freda," Unger explains. "He would shoot his action scenes in their entirety with the stunt men, like me, so that he was completely covered—and then he would bring in the actors to film as much or as little as they liked. If the actors gave him any trouble, he would say, 'That's okay, I have all I need!'" [10]

Therefore, before the violent scenes between Peggy and the killer were filmed with Mary Arden, the same scenes had already been filmed—without the actress' knowledge—using a stuntman in drag. A production still exists that shows Peggy's limp body being dragged upstairs by the masked assassin, and the body certainly does not belong to the glamorous Arden, with its swarthy arms, skinny legs, and ratty blonde wig.

Arden states emphatically that "the most difficult part of my performance was the five days I spent playing a dead

9 Some years ago, I was responsible for spreading the rumor that Gorini was in fact a German actress named Diana Koerner, whom I had seen in the West German Edgar Wallace *krimi Die Blaue Hand/Creature With the Blue Hand* (1967). Not only did Ms. Koerner greatly resemble Gorini, she was also terrorized in this film by a spiked metal glove, much like the one that brings such a swift and merciless end to Nicole in *Sei donne per l'assassino*. However, as I was preparing to record my audio commentary for VCI Home Entertainment's *Blood and Black Lace* DVD, my correspondent Uwe Huber succeeded in speaking to Ms. Koerner, now an actress on a German TV soap opera. She assured him that she had never worked under the name Ariana Gorini, and though she was familiar with Mario Bava by name and reputation, she never had the pleasure of working with him.

10 Freddy Unger interviewed by the author, January 5, 2001.

body." She tells a particularly harrowing story about the filming of the scene in which Peggy's disfigured corpse had to tumble halfway out the boot of Greta's car. According to Arden, Bava rehearsed this scene in advance with Lea Krugher many times, because it was essential to Arden's safety that Krugher flip the trunk lid completely open—that she hear it click—before leaping back in recoil. The reason for this is that the trunk lid was on a very strong spring which caused it to fall back down very rapidly if it was not fully raised and secured. Unfortunately, in her nervousness, Krugher failed to follow Bava's precautions during the actual take and recoiled before ascertaining that the trunk door was fully opened.



GRETA *(Lea Krugher) discovers Peggy's mutilated corpse in the boot of her sports car . . . a night of filming that Mary Arden will never forget.*

"She jumped back, I rolled out, and the trunk lid hit my face—especially my nose—with tremendous force," Arden describes. "I cannot tell you the pain and agony of that experience! I thought my nose was broken (I still bear a small scar where the lid hit my nose). You have to imagine: we're in the middle of nowhere, in the early hours of the morning, it's freezing cold and there's no medical person on the set. The lock on the car was very sharp and protruded almost four inches downward. It just missed my eye. I was hysterical. I could have lost an eye and been crippled for life. It is a miracle I was not more seriously injured. Mario stopped shooting, packed me in ice, and held me for a long time until I began to regain control. He was very kind to me—but I had also risked my life for him making this film! It was the most dangerous experience I ever had."

Arden's burned features took four hours for makeup artist Emilio Trani to apply on each morning of her five days as a corpse. One night, her day's work left her so exhausted that she couldn't bear the idea of spending another hour or two in the makeup chair having it all removed, so—having an early call the next day—Arden decided to wear it home for the night, covered by a scarf. "My mother happened to be visiting me in Rome at the time, and when came through the door and took off my scarf, it gave her the fright of her life. It really was an excellent makeup."

Shortly after the production of *Sei donne per l'assassino*, *Variety* reported that Mario Bava was planning another collaboration with Mary Arden, but this never happened. Instead, Arden moved on—and up—into Fellini's *Giulietta degli spiriti/Juliet of the Spirits* (1965), in which she played the role of a TV "self-improvement" hostess. Unfortunately, her two-month shooting engagement with Fellini was eventually whittled down to no more than two brief appearances in the final cut. In 1965, Arden married American actor Arthur Hansel, who would star in



two minor Italian films, *Missione apocalisse* and *Le dolci signore* in 1966–67. It was in 1966 that Arden spent her busiest year in movies, appearing in *Master Stroke* (a spy picture which reunited her with Luciano Pigozzi), *A . . . come Assassino* (a screen adaptation of Ernesto Gastaldi's seminal *giallo* stageplay), and a brief but critical role in Umberto Lenzi's *La maschera di Kriminal*, based on the violent *fumetti* strip by Max Bunker.

In the early 1970s, Arden and her husband relocated to Mexico City, where she co-hosted public television programs with Juan Lopez Moctezuma—who began directing a series of his own horror films around this same time, including *La mansión de la locura/Dr. Tarr's Torture Dungeon* (1972), *Alucarda la hija de la tinieblas/Alucarda* (1975), and *Mary Mary Bloody Mary* (1976); Arthur Hansel, whom Arden amicably divorced in 1972, had small roles in the first and third of these. It was also in Mexico City that Arden founded a school for acting, modelling, and self-improvement, where she also taught. Between 1975 and 1979, she worked in Latin America and the Caribbean as general manager of Helena Rubinstein International, and from there she moved to Tokyo, where in the 1990s she developed a business training program to help Japanese executives better communicate with their Western office managers. Today, as Mary Dawne Arden, she's the president of Arden Associates, a New York City marketing communications firm. She serves as a Communications expert for NBC News, in which capacity she has made several appearances on NBC's *Weekend Today Show*, and as a faculty member of New York University.

PORTRAIT *of Lea Krugher.*



Greta, the model who "lives in sin" with the impoverished Marquis Richard Morrell, was played by Lea Krugher, who today goes by the name Lea Lander. Born September 5, 1937, in Kiev, Ukraine, Krugher studied acting for five years in Munich before making her first picture. At the time, she already had it in mind to change her name. "I liked the sound—the phonetic effect—of Lea Lander," she explains. "Krugher is very German and very hard and I am not that, as you can see. And Lander, this is the machine that goes to the moon! And I was always very attracted to the moon, and I was thinking 'I can never go to the sun because I would be burned before I got there, but perhaps I *will* go to the moon.' And I was reading many times 'Lander'—a long time ago—and I said, '*This* will be my name.'"

Krugher's choice of name met with resistance from her agent, who thought it would more to her professional advantage to keep her birth name and publicize her family relationship to the popular German actor Hardy Kruger, a "second or third cousin." So it was as "Lea Krugher" that she starred in Mario Caiano's *Golia e la schiava ribelle/Goliath and the Rebel Slave* (1963) with Gordon Scott, and also *Sei donne per l'assassino*. Krugher's

LIKE *a fashion layout from Death Magazine, the police discover the lifeless bodies of Greta and Peggy in this artful arrangement.*

character name in *Sei donne* was suggested by Bava himself, because he thought she resembled Greta Garbo. Ten years after playing Greta—the *donna* smothered by a pillow—she would work again with Bava (under the new screen name of Lea Lander), playing Maria, the principal hostage of his 1975 crime thriller *Cani arrabbiati/ Rabid Dogs.* In that film, too, the characters remark on her supposed resemblance to Greta Garbo.

"I moved to Italy to do *Sei donne,"* Lander relates. "I loved the story very much, and I [looked forward to] the opportunity of working with Eva Bartok, a big star. Of all the other actresses, I remember only Mary Arden. I liked her . . . She was my—how do you say it?—my idol. She was very nice and kind, and had a mysterious glamor like an American actress in a Hitchcock film, always very elegant. [11] We were shooting in a beautiful villa on Via Pertica. We arrived there during the day and the house took you away—to another time, another place . . . ! Full of beautiful antiques, neo-classical architecture. I was most impressed by the villa, I loved to explore it—and it was full of ambiance and atmosphere. Mario Bava was always very kind, very optimistic, and keen to solve problems because every day we had to improvise. He was very relaxed and always seemed on top of things. I also remember his son Lamberto, and how respectful he was of his father. He was his second assistant. He watched and followed his father's guidance, and I admired that. It's incredible now, the success of Mario Bava's pictures, as Mario did everything himself and for not very much money. I never realized the commercial impact the film would have."

Undoubtedly cast to exploit her remarkable resemblance to a department store mannequin was Claude Dantes, who had previously given her most widely-seen performance in an uncredited role—as the mother of a baby falsely claimed by another, barren woman in King Vidor's *Solomon and Sheba* (1959). Dantes' other screen credits include Mario Costa's *Rage of the Buccaneers* (1961, starring Vincent Price and Ricardo Montalban) and an interesting, but little-known Italian horror film entitled *La jena di Londra/ The Hyena of London* (1963). Made less than a year before *Sei donne per l'assassino*, *La jena di Londra* features a Claude Dantes who bears only the slightest resemblance to the one in *Sei donne,* being at least forty pounds heavier.

Of all his co-stars, Cameron Mitchell remembered Claude Dantes best: "She told me that she had suffered from a nervous eating disorder and had gone to Paris about a month before the film started. In those days, they'd put you to sleep for three weeks, massage you, give you pills or injections to relax you, and it would help take the weight right off. Obviously, when we did the film, she looked great." Dantes is known to have made only one other movie after working with Bava: *L'uomo mascherato/ Goliath and the Masked Avenger* (1965), directed by Vertunnio De Angelis.



CLAUDE DANTES *as Tao-Li, drowned in a murder scene unusually explicit for its time.*

The sixth of the film's *"sei donne"*—or its first, if you like—was Eva Bartok, its top-billed actress. Born Eva Maria Szoke in 1926, Bartok was only 37 years old at the time of filming but she had already written her autobiography, *Worth Living For*, published in 1959. In this memoir, she writes movingly about the volatile wartime conditions of her homeland of Kecskemet, Hungary. As a young girl, she shared a house with her widowed mother that was occupied by a Hungarian soldier as her country awaited invasion—not knowing whether it would come from Nazi Germany on the left, or from Russia on the right. She later fell in love with another Hungarian soldier at the age of 15; the diary angle of *Sei donne per l'assassino* must have had some resonance for her, as she writes that this soldier entrusted her with a candid diary of his war experiences in Russia, making her promise to burn it in the event of invasion. They burned it together one week later as Nazi forces descended on Kecskemet. By the time she was 25 years old, Eva had been married three times. Her first marriage was at age 15 to a Nazi soldier who helped her and her mother to escape from Hungary, raped her on their wedding night, and then confessed, after the war ended, that he wasn't really a German soldier at all; he was promptly arrested as a war criminal by the Hungarian government. Her second marriage was to a chance acquaintance who wed her as a means of gaining her (and her mother's) passage into Paris; it was immediately and amicably annulled. Her third husband was film producer Alexander Paal, who married Eva to repay kindnesses shown to him by her late father, thus making it possible for her to leave Paris for the complete freedom of London. There, she pursued a career in films under the wing of fellow Hungarian Alexander Korda, whom she impressed with clippings of her theatrical successes in their homeland.

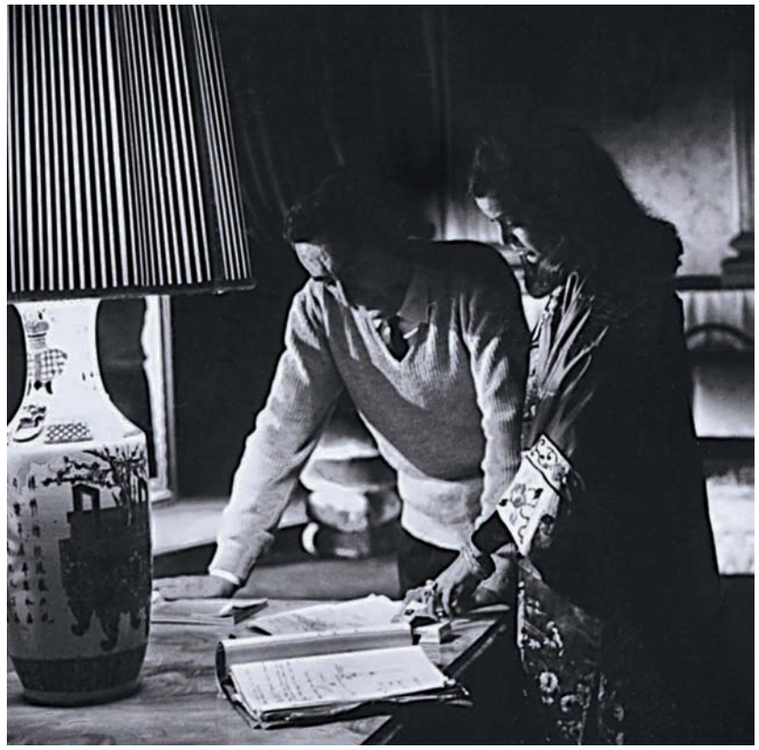
11 When told how much Lea Krugher admired her, Mary Dawne Arden laughed and said, "I didn't know that! She was probably just grateful that I didn't kill her for dropping the car's trunk door on my nose!"

While Korda was grooming her for stardom, Bartok often appeared in the British society pages wearing unusual fashions, which she had designed and created herself out of sheer penniless necessity. In 1953, after parting ways with Korda, she was cast in *Der Leztze Walzer/The Last Waltz* opposite German actor Curd Jurgens. They fell in love, and subsequently married in 1955. Before *Sei donne per l'assassino*, Bartok starred in such films as Robert Siodmak's *The Crimson Pirate* (1952), Terence Fisher's *Spaceways* (1953), John Gilling's *The Gamma People* (1956), and her only American film, *Two Thousand Bedrooms* with Dean Martin, which she made after divorcing Jurgens in 1957. After making her US debut, Bartok became the topic of international headlines when it was discovered that she had given birth to a daughter out of wedlock. The child's name, Deana, gave rise to speculation that her father was Bartok's Hollywood co-star, Dean Martin. Years later, after her daughter had reached adulthood, Bartok publicly confessed that her true father was Martin's "Rat Pack" cohort Frank Sinatra, with whom she had a short affair during the production. (The child on the cover of her book looks very much like him.) In later years, Bartok's name was romantically linked to Britain's Marquess of Milford Havens. Her past history as a fashion innovator and hobnobber in British high society, and as the object of international scandal, made Eva Bartok ideal casting for the role of the Countess Christina Como.

Like many of her co-stars in this movie, Eva Bartok was a person of unusual substance, awareness, and intelligence, who preferred life and the company of interesting people to a more visible career. In addition to chronicling the turbulence of her times, her autobiography examines her inner turbulence as well, a deep-seated spiritual unrest—with her since childhood—that she sought to comfort by reading the Bible, the wisdom of Buddha, and the works of Freud, Einstein, and Carl Jung.



EVA BARTOK *as Countess Cristina Cuomo, flinching from the discovery of Isabella's body.*



MARIO BAVA *and Eva Bartok consult the screenplay.*

Bartok "found that they all agreed on one thing: that life as we see it is wrong, that life as we live it is wrong, that life as we attempt to describe it does not conform to the inner reality that must exist if there is any sense at all in the universe." She eventually found a path to contentment at the Institute for the Comparative Study of History, Philosophy and the Sciences, founded by J. G. Bennett, a disciple of the mystic George Ivanovich Gurdjieff. Eva found that Bennett's system of arriving at personal clarity through a disciplined routine of physical work and continuous learning helped to instill in her the sense of order, purpose, and alertness which had always eluded her.

Bartok retired from films around 1967, made a brief cameo appearance in one last film in the mid-'70s, and died at age 71 of heart failure in a London hospital on August 4, 1998. The press reported that she died "homeless, penniless, and alone," to which her daughter Deana responded in her August 11 eulogy, "Homeless, because she never appreciated the domestic trappings in life. Penniless, because she didn't really care about money. Alone—*she was not!* God was with her, I was with her in spirit, and so were many other people." [12]

On the set, Bartok kept her distance from her fellow actors. "I remember that Eva Bartok was very much the diva," laughs Lea Lander. "More often than not, we had to wait for her and I thought to myself, 'These are lessons for you—to teach [you] how to behave when, one day, *you* are a diva!' She was beautifully dressed and she always looked beautiful. She had her own makeup room with a star on the door. She also had all these male admirers after her."

Bartok's naturally red hair works very well in concert with the film's color scheme, and Bava became very partial to redheads; the female leads of his next several pictures—Jany Clair (*La strada per Fort Alamo*), Norma Bengell (*Terrore nello spazio*), and Erika Blanc (*Operazione paura*), and also the later Claudine Auger (*Ecologia del delitto*)—all had red or strawberry blonde hair.



THIS BELGIAN *affiche incorporates graphic elements from the Italian one-sheet and locandina designs.*

Also appearing in the periphery of scenes at Cristiana Haute Couture are Heidi Stroh (who had some hit singles in Germany in the 1970s), Mara Carmosino, and Nadia Anty.

The film's status as an international co-production resulted in unequal revenue for the actors. An experienced hand at the insecurities of Italian film production, Cameron Mitchell was paid in cash from a suitcase that was brought to the set at the beginning of each week. The same was probably also true for Eva Bartok, but many in the supporting cast—like hard-working actress/translator Mary Arden—worked in advance with the understanding that they would be paid in full at the end of production, and never saw their salaries. (Arden estimates that her pay would not have amounted to much more than $500, saying, "I acted to promote myself; I earned my living by modelling.") On the other hand, the West German investors—Top Film—evidently took very good care of the German actors in the cast.

Thomas Reiner was not only paid for his work, but treated to a salaried vacation: "I don't know how big the budget was," he marvels, "but they could afford to send me on holiday for two weeks! After my first day of shooting, the producers—very fine people, unlike some others I know from Germany—came up to me and said, 'You now have two weeks off. Go and see Rome!' The catering was very good, as well."

The same is true of Lea Lander, who confides, "I was paid a small amount by the German producer, Top Film . . . but there have been other pictures here in Italy I have not been paid for."

L'atelier della morte was retitled *Sei donne per l'assassino* during post-production. The new title was another of Bava's winks at a mainstream success of the day, in this case Leopoldo Torre-Nilsson's *Quatre femmes pour un heros* ("Four Women for a Hero," 1962), a French import that proved very popular in Italy in 1963, thanks to the star presence of glamorous Alida Valli. Bava's tongue-in-cheek title would prove inspirational in its own right; in later years, many Italian thrillers would proclaim a nominal debt to *Sei donne per l'assassino*, none more overtly than Stelvio Massi's admittedly cut-rate *Cinque donne per l'assassino* ("Five Women for the Murderer," 1972).

Bava himself would be the next Italian director to take another stab at the *giallo*, with a formulaic reworking of *Sei donne per l'assassino*, entitled *Cry Nightmare*. Circumstances caused Bava to abandon the production before it was realized, and it fell into the hands of his rival Antonio Margheriti, who filmed Bava's script basically as written and released it as *Nude . . . si muore/The Young, the Evil and the Savage* (1968). But it was not until the worldwide 1970 success of Dario Argento's *L'uccello dalle piume di cristallo/The Bird With the Crystal Plumage*—a film that also had German investors, and was sold in West Germany as a Bryan Edgar Wallace

12 Omar Martinez, *Eva & I, A Dedication*, http://members.tripod.com/evabartok/id22.htm (February 4, 2006).

adaptation—that the *giallo* came into its own as an Italian film tradition. Incredible as it may seem, with such recent examples as Dario Argento's *Ti piace Hitchcock?/Do You Like Hitchcock?* (2005), the *giallo* has outlasted every other cinematic genre indigenous to Italy, surviving even the Spaghetti Western.

Music

After their fruitful collaboration on *La frusta e il corpo,* Bava made a point of retaining Carlo Rustichelli to write the music for *Sei donne per l'assassino.* Interviewed late in life, the composer remembered his surprised reaction when Bava first screened the picture for him: "There was no doubt, it was something new. I was somewhat shocked by it, partly by its erotic quality. Yes, it certainly shocked me. But I think I wrote some things for it that worked . . . Generally speaking, I am more keen on murder mysteries than horror movies . . . the traditional *giallo,* where the murders are committed with a sense of style." [13]

Rustichelli did more than write "some things that worked." He was inspired to compose the definitive *giallo* score of the pre-rock era. In the later genre work of Dario Argento, the violence of murder is accentuated with the violence of progressive rock scores by such artists as Goblin and Keith Emerson; the nature of the music also underlines the art form as an entertainment, preventing the viewer from experiencing these often sadistic moments in a realistic sense. With group-oriented rock still in its infancy, Rustichelli gravitated toward a form of music that would reflect the film's extreme stylization, its use of *tableaux vivant*, as well as its underlying sensuality. He moved instinctively toward the Tango.

He composed a main theme—titled *"Atelier"* when it appeared as the A-side of a CAM 45 rpm single—that is reprised in various forms throughout the picture. In the Italian version it is first heard under the main titles as a tango-flavored piece played by a small orchestra with solo trumpet, alto saxophone, and bongo percussion. As the picture progresses, and as the size of the cast diminishes, the sound of the orchestration also scales down; the main theme is echoed as a bossa nova played by a small combo in a nightclub, as a nervous *arpeggio* for strings, as a moody dirge for Hammond organ, and so on, until the full orchestra resumes for the final crescendo.



COMPOSER *Carlo Rustichelli at his piano, photographed by Daniela Catelli while being interviewed for this book.*

One of the slower, sparser variants was released on the B-side of the CAM single as *"Defilé"*—in which alto sax is replaced by a shimmering section of glissando strings; here, a descending section of woodwinds, strings, and kettledrums takes the beauty of the main theme on a detour into ominous danger. Elsewhere, Rustichelli's score employs a looming Hammond organ over the strings—sometimes teasing with the *leitmotif*, sometimes doubled by baritone sax in a more delicate, spookier cue—adding gooseflesh to the chill. For the scene of Tao-Li's drowning, Rustichelli underscores her struggle with deep, resonant kettledrums and her surrender with a bass octave mash on the Hammond.

At Bava's request, Rustichelli reused some of the *misterioso* cues he had written and recorded for *La frusta e il corpo*; these proved to be quite popular, also resurfacing again in Antonio Margheriti's *I giganti di Roma/The Giants of Rome* (1964), Bava's *Operazione paura/Kill, Baby . . . Kill!*, and in the Spanish-made Paul Naschy vehicles *Una Libélula para cada muerto/A Dragonfly for Each Corpse* (1973) and *El Ultimo Kamikaze* ("The Last Kamikaze," 1984). Another recycled cue, which Rustichelli had originally composed and recorded for the Gina Lollobrigida film *La bellezza d'Ippolita* (1962), can be heard during the fashion show runway sequence.

With its tick-tocking bongos and sultry feel, Rustichelli's score is akin to Henry Mancini's soundtrack for Orson Welles' *Touch of Evil* (1958), another film in which style and sleaze were deliciously entwined. It is one of the most beloved scores in the Bava canon. While he could still play the theme from *La frusta e il corpo* on the piano from memory in his last years, Rustichelli retained no particular memory of the themes he wrote for *Sei donne per l'assassino,* and being blind, he could no longer read their charts. It was not until the year after his death in 2004 that the film's score was finally issued on CD by Digitmovies, paired with the music for *La frusta e il corpo.*

Distribution

Though it would inaugurate the most enduring of all Italian cinematic genres, the importance of *Sei donne per l'assassino* was not immediately recognized in its homeland. It performed disappointingly at the Italian boxoffice, taking in only 123 million *lire* [$77,000]—making it only one-third as profitable as the more mainstream *Gli invasori,* and failing to recoup its investment costs. It subsequently became almost impossible to see in Italy, until its belated (and incomplete) home video release in the spring of 1999. The tape was distributed only in food markets and sold out almost immediately.

Despite Mario Bava's successful track record with American International Pictures, James H. Nicholson and Samuel Z. Arkoff were never offered the US distribution rights to the film. After the interference he had suffered with good grace during the production of *I tre volti della paura/Black Sabbath,* Bava must have known that his first reel—in which a woman was shown being mutilated, killed, and (presumably) dragged into the bushes for a farewell sexual assault—would be enough to queer the deal with the kings of the kiddie matinee.

Stepping in to fill the breach were Lawrence and Bernard Woolner of Allied Artists, who had previously released *Hercules in the Haunted World.* Remarkably, they released the picture in America with virtually no editorial interference, giving US audiences their first undiluted Mario Bava experience. The Woolners were also responsible for dreaming up the evocative English-language title of *Blood and Black Lace.*

Aside from one or two very minor trims of redundant dialogue, the American version differs from the original only in terms of its main title sequence. For the Italian version, Bava delighted in posing each of his primary actors in the manner of a salon mannequin; the result is a surprising, and completely winning, tribute to a remarkable cast from a

13 Carlo Rustichelli, *Mario Bava Maestro of the Macabre* interview transcript, unused, 2000.



FRENCH *grand affiche, art by Constantin Belinsky.*

director who often voiced his wish that he could make movies without actors. This was fine for a European adult audience, but for the purposes of an American exploitation release, the sequence was not scary or portentous enough to keep an audience in its seats. Therefore, the Woolners contracted Filmation Associates to prepare a more appropriately menacing title sequence. Though Bava had no hand in the creation of this sequence, Filmation's work is fully in keeping with the stylistic impact of the film that follows—with its slow, deliberate montage of nude store window mannequins, bathed in red and green light, disrupted by the violence of gunfire. While it's unfortunate that Bava's tongue-in-cheek titles would not be seen by a wider public (until the film's DVD release in 2000), the Filmation Associates credits are a splendid *hommage* to Bava's technique.



THE CRUDE *US insert poster goes the Italian title's body count two better by promising "The 8 Greatest Shocks Ever Filmed!"*



DANISH *poster for a belated 1970s release, art by Kurt Wenzel.*

When *Variety* reviewed the film, their critic incorrectly reported that Italian-, German-, and English-language versions had been simultaneously filmed to satisfy the international market. Everyone interviewed about the film for this book has confirmed to me that the script was written in English, and that the cast was required to speak their lines in English, naturally or phonetically as the case may be. Only a guide track was recorded on set, to facilitate later dubbing. Actor–director Mel Welles supervised the recording of the first English soundtrack, which was recorded with Cameron Mitchell, Mary Arden, and other cast members post-syncing their own lines. Welles himself dubbed the lines of Inspector Silvestri and some other secondary characters. For reasons Welles could not understand or explain, his soundtrack—which would seem to be the more authentic choice—was not used. Instead, when the Woolner brothers acquired the film for US distribution, they had the film entirely redubbed in Los Angeles, under the supervision of Lou Moss. In this version, the only English track ever circulated, most of the male performances—including those of Cameron Mitchell and Thomas Reiner—were dubbed by the popular voice artist Paul Frees.

Born Solomon Hersh Frees in Chicago in 1920, Paul Frees got his start in radio, where he first attracted serious attention in the 1940s, as the spooky announcer of the seminal horror radio series *Escape*. As an actor, he made occasional onscreen appearances in movies like *The Thing From Another World*, *Suddenly*, and *Son of Sinbad*, but he's best remembered for the narration he contributed to movies like *The War of the Worlds*, *The Shaggy Dog*, and *The Manchurian Candidate*, as well as comedy albums like *Spike Jones' Spooktacular in Screaming Sound* and amusement park rides like the Haunted Mansion at Disneyland. He was also the voice of Boris Badenov, Francis the Talking Mule, John Beresford Tipton (the unseen benefactor of the TV series *The Millionaire*), the Talking Rings in *The Time Machine* (1960), the Pillsbury Dough Boy, Morocco Mole, the killer computer in *Colossus: The Forbin Project* (1970), John and George on the ABC animated series *The Beatles*, Crusty the hermit crab in *The Incredible Mr. Limpet* (1964), and countless other pop icons of the period. He also directed the English dubbing of some horror and science fiction pictures, including Toho's *The H-Man* and *King Kong Escapes* (1966, in which he dubbed the villain, Dr. Who). Worthy of a place on the Mt. Rushmore of American popular culture, Paul Frees died in 1986 at the age of 66.

Some years after Frees' death, the Freedom of Information Act revealed to Elvis biographer Peter Guralnick that the voice artist had served as an undercover narcotics agent for the Bureau of Narcotics and Dangerous Drugs throughout the 1960s—the period during which he dubbed *Blood and Black Lace*.[14] So when Frank is being grilled by Inspector Sylvester, he's being grilled by the real thing!

While no scenes were cut from *Blood and Black Lace, per se*, the reworked English dubbing suppressed some adult material. For example, in the scene at the police station, Marco accuses Cesare of being the killer, reasoning that he kills beautiful women because he is impotent, a fact which caused him to be abandoned by his wife, a year earlier. Some material after the departure of Clarisse was also cut from the US version, when Silvestri decides there is

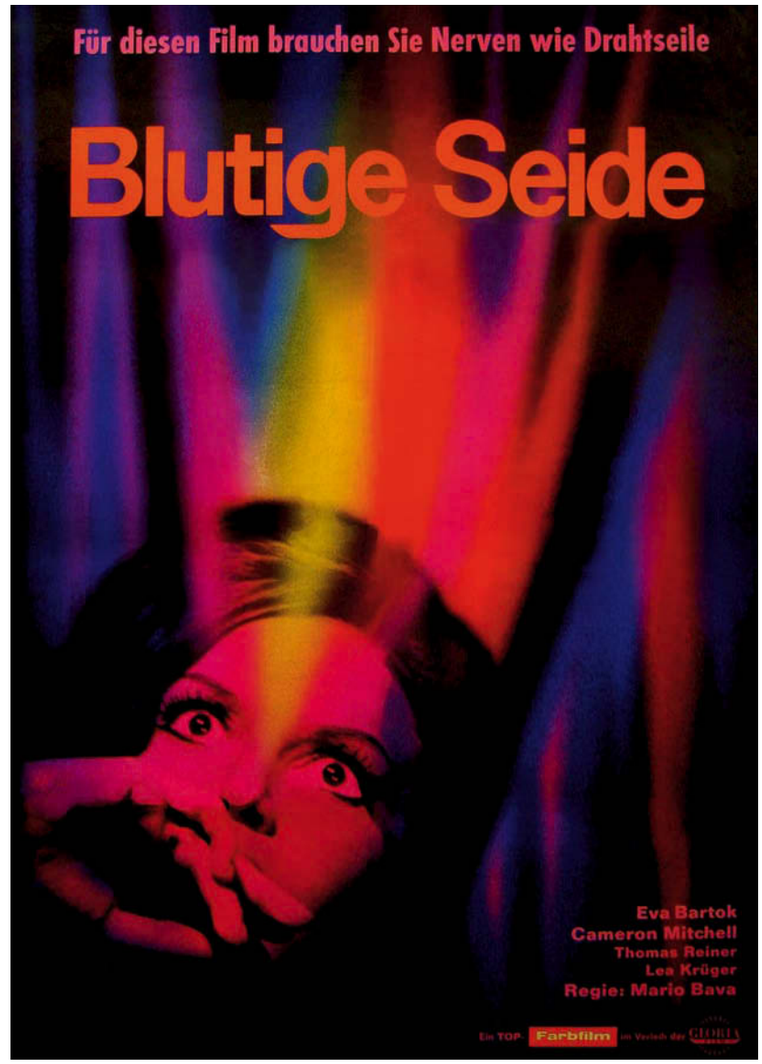
reason to hold the remaining four suspects overnight. This footage is actually fairly redundant, as it's explained again in the subsequent scene, when Max calls Christina to explain his situation.

The wholesale Anglicization of the film's credits paid off with an amusing *Variety* review by "Whit.," which praised the "okay mystery" as being "handsomely produced by Lou Moss . . . Harry Brest's art direction is tops, and color photography by Herman Tarzana takes advantage of his backdrops." Certainly even more amusing to Bava would have been the reviewer's observation that the film was "backgrounded by expensive sets which add a certain quality not always distinguishable in films of this sort."

When *Sei donne per l'assassino* was released in Great Britain in 1965, the anonymous critic ("P. J. D.") of *Monthly Film Bulletin* joked that Bava's "most expensive-looking and decorative horror film to date" seemed to establish a new era of Italian filmmaking, "the Red Telephone era"—a pun based on the *telefoni bianchi*. The observation was tongue-in-cheek, but in fact, within five years, *Sei donne per l'assassino* would be revealed as the true harbinger of something new and tenacious in the field of Italian filmmaking.

The international release proved only moderately successful, with the film doing some of its best business in West Germany, where it was called *Blutige Seide* ("Bloody Velvet"), and in Austria, where it was titled *Der Würger mit der Maske* ("The Strangler with the Mask"). The picture's success sufficiently impressed the producers of the West German Edgar Wallace *krimis* that their next script to go into production, *Der Bucklige von Soho/The Hunchback of Soho* (1966), became the first to be filmed in color—not only in color, but in bold, garish colors—with director Alfred Vohrer and cameraman Karl Löb doing their best to reproduce *Sei donne*'s delirious palette.

14 Peter Guralnick, *Careless Love—The Unmaking of Elvis Presley* (Boston MA: Little, Brown & Company, 1999), 412.



GERMAN *A1 poster, Style B.*

Commentary

Sei donne per l'assassino is one of Mario Bava's most tightly plotted films, but for most viewers, the fine points of its narrative are overcast by its sadistic violence and perverse visual beauty. Nevertheless, it reflects—even in its title—Stanley Kubrick's theory that "All a good film really needs is six non-submersible units" (that is, six great scenes). It's not a highly original story, but its heightened visual sense makes the film the equivalent of a familiar story retold by a master *raconteur*. Marcello Fondato's script is extremely capable in the way it baits audience suspicion, how it juggles the film's various intricate relationships, while proposing (and later exonerating) its red herrings, but all of this hard work is ultimately secondary to the diabolical genius that Bava and Ubaldo Terzano brought to its pictorial interpretation.

The ruination of beauty is a theme that runs throughout Bava's work, from the postwar documentary shorts that catalogued the damage done to Rome's ancient art and architecture, to the very first scene of *La maschera del demonio* (the hammering of the spiked mask onto the face of Princess Asa); it also persists through his later work, in the form of the outrageous murders that result from a contractor's plan to level the natural forest surrounding a scenic bay and replace it with a contemporary resort in *Ecologia del delitto/Twitch of the Death Nerve* (1971). This situation is reiterated in *Baron Blood*, in which an ancient castle is being modified into a commercialized tourist trap. But only in *Sei donne per l'assassino* does this subject so nakedly and fetishistically take center stage. "Perhaps the sight of beauty makes him lose control of himself and kill," Inspector Silvestri speculates about the killer—a line that seems to echo something said by Prince Vajda in *La maschera del demonio*, when he speculates that the witch Asa may be branding her victims—her twin descendants—with her own beauty before killing them. Those who would destroy beauty destroy themselves.

In *Sei donne . . .* Bava films the murders of six beautiful women in a way that is savage and shocking, yet also sensuous and almost supernaturally beautiful. The acts of violence are eroticized in the moments preceding death, while the aftermath of violence is depicted ironically—with the women's brutalized remains elegantly posed, as though participating in "still life" fashion layouts for *Death* Magazine. In some instances, the irony extends to panning away from a fresh corpse to a laughing Cupid or some other decorative



SPANISH *poster.*

angel, or the plucked strings of a harp, which has the doubly perverse effect of introducing an element of spirituality to the proceedings. The "Madonna lighting" Bava had used on Gina Lollobrigida and Maria Fiore in the 1950s here falls on the faces of dead and mutilated women, revealing angels in the wreckage. Color also plays a crucial part in these scenes—heightened, irrational splashes of amber, green, and lavender light that suggest not the encroachment of the supernatural (this story, after all, is rooted in reality), but the presence of danger, the hot blush of arousal and excitement. Making a fetish of the instruments of crime, eroticizing the quickening and suddenly halted breath of half-naked, full-breasted victims, romancing an atmosphere of terror out of scenic beauty, filming death as an orgasm and corpses as angels . . . These would become the hallmarks of all the best *gialli* that followed in the wake of *Sei donne per l'assassino.*

But what inspired Bava to lend grace notes of beauty to the horror of violent death? The answer can be traced, in part, to Lewis Milestone's *All Quiet on the Western Front* (1930), which Bava singled out on more than one occasion as his favorite film. Impressive as it is, Milestone's anti-war classic would not seem at first glance to have had much influence on Bava's horror films, though it is possible to see the influence of its battle sequences on similar scenes that Bava filmed for various movies; for example, in *La battaglia di Maratona*, Bava—like Milestone's cameraman Arthur Edeson—placed his camera in specially dug trenches, the better to depict war at ground level. For many viewers, however, *All Quiet on the Western Front* lingers in the memory on the strength of the powerful, poetic grace note that substitute cameraman Karl Freund devised for the film's finale. In this scene, the young German soldier protagonist Paul Baumer (Lew Ayres) sees a butterfly land and flex its wings on the battlefield, not far from his foxhole. Irresistibly attracted to the alighting of this beautiful thing in a place where beauty has become so impossible as to be alien, he reaches out from his hiding place to touch it—attracting a sniper's bullet. It may have been the first time onscreen that death was depicted in such poetic terms, and it may well have been this scene that impressed Bava most deeply, for its ironic juxtaposition of beauty and horror, and also for the element of spirituality it brought to an otherwise meaningless, random act of violence.



CIGARETTES *aren't the only thing at Cristiana Haute Couture that are bad for your health. Inspector Silvestri (Thomas Reiner) says "no" to Max's friendly offer.*

Freund, like Bava, was a cameraman who became a director best-known for his horror films. He would direct only two films in the genre, *The Mummy* (1932) and *Mad Love* (1935), but both are stylish, romantic, and erotically perverse—exemplary examples of the macabre as refracted through a very refined eye.

Another director who had built upon this technique was Jacques Tourneur, the credited director of *La battaglia di Maratona,* who—working around a Production Code that forbade the graphic depiction of violence—made such "poetic terror" scenes the hallmarks of his three pictures for RKO producer Val Lewton: *Cat People* (1942), *I Walked With a Zombie* (1943), and *The Leopard Man* (also 1943). Bava was certainly familiar with Tourneur's work—to the extent of paying homage to the "corn meal" scene from *The Leopard Man* in *Baron Blood.*

Thanks to Mel Welles, we have evidence of another filmmaker who exerted influence on Bava's future approach to depicting violence and murder onscreen. During the period when *Sei donne per l'assassino* was in production, Bava could often be seen at the Café Rosati, a bar frequented by film people; it was there that he made the acquaintance of Welles, who had already been responsible for dubbing some of Bava's pictures into English. "There was a French film that Bava loved to talk about—*Judex,* by a director named Georges Franju," Welles recalled. "He loved this film, and he had been impressed by the actor who was in it, Channing Pollack, who had also starred in one of my own pictures, *The Red Sheik.* It gave us something to talk about."

It makes perfect sense that Bava was impressed by the work of Franju. *Judex* is an elegant remake of a silent serial by Louis Feuillade, which told a story of heinous crime with the soft touch of a fairy tale. But Franju's earlier work—particularly the *abattoir* documentary *Le Sang des bêtes/The Blood of the Beasts* (1949) and the surgical horror film *Les Yeux sans Visage/Eyes Without a Face* (1959)—was expert at depicting moments of horror with a sense of poetry. It was this *frisson,* this butterfly of death, that Bava pursued in *Sei donne per l'assassino*—and he was just as surely

influenced by Hitchcock's *Psycho*, in that its murder scenes were masterpieces of cinematic design. Hitchcock had given audiences two memorable set-pieces of murder in *Psycho* (the shower scene and the Arbogast murder); Bava would give them three times as many, each one as lovingly photographed as a magazine centerfold.

While much has been written about the extremity of the film's sadism and violence, no blood is actually spilled. "Mario hated violence," insists Freddy Unger, "and he didn't like to show blood. But the producers were always pushing him to show more, so sometimes he would shoot a scene two ways, one with more blood, just to please them—but he would never use it. He preferred to be inventive—with the cutting, with the lighting."

From the very first shot, in which the red-and-gold shingle hanging outside the premises of Cristiana Haute Couture is dismantled by a strong gust of wind, Bava underscores the tenuousness of public image. The first dialogue scene, as Frank appeals to Nicole for a drug fix outside the salon, establishes the citadel of feminine beauty as a front for unattractive activities, and its covert tensions inaugurate a mood of mystery before the first murder is committed.

Bava's attention to color is evident in the first murder sequence, as Isabella takes a nighttime walk through the park at Via Sciarra wearing a shiny red raincoat. The presence of red not only attracts the eye and signals danger, but it tricks the viewer into "seeing" blood where none has been spilled. As Isabella walks through the park, her coat projecting the warmest and most vital of colors, her message is negated as the assassin—a faceless cypher of black-and-white—steps into frame, his mask limned in a deathly blue. Isabella suffers a brutal killing, but we actually see very little of it: the killer grabs her, slams her head several times against a tree, and then garrotes her to death; as he drags her dead body deeper into the woods, the camera lingers on the fresh scars entrenched in her face and cleavage, and as Death drags its claim out of view, the camera tilts up to reveal a chucking ornamental stone cherub. Point and counterpoint.

Inside the salon, Mark returns from repairing the fallen sign, and the camera follows him to a private place, where we observe him—behind a wall of bevelled glass—taking some pills in silhouette. Not only does the shot implicate him in the drug-trafficking going on at the salon, but his second return from outside (after the murder of Isabella) posits him as a suspect, as does—in this shot—the foregrounded image of a mannequin skinned in red velvet, a chromatic reminder of Isabella.

The color red is woven throughout the picture in decorative ways—it is the background color of the Cristiana Haute Couture sign, and also the color of the salon's telephones, drapes, and mannequins. When Isabella's diary is found, it is bound in red leather, making it a personification, of sorts, of the lady in red. [15] Appropriately, the diary is first discovered during a fashion show by Nicole ("Heyyyy," she purrs, "Isabella kept a diary!"), the only girl at the salon willing to model the black dress that was scheduled to be worn by Isabella. The other girls describe Nicole as "cynical," an opinion which is borne out by the way she opens the diary at random and recites a romantic passage aloud, in disrespect for the dead.

The discovery of the diary prompts a fabulous, Langian montage of every face in the place that harbors a secret. Everyone in the room clearly covets the diary—to destroy it, to know what's in it, possibly to use what's in it. In slightly more than a minute since its introduction, Isabella's diary assumes an almost superhuman aura—an object of unholy fascination for every vulture in the place, until Nicole insists on her right to present the diary to the police herself and slips it into her purse—which happens to be black, the color of Isabella's "bad luck" dress. Every sweaty close-up is then reprised, followed by a cut back to the purse itself, giving it an equal weight of personality in the montage, and amplifying its dark threat.

Black becomes as telling a color for Nicole as red was for Isabella. After putting the diary in her bag, she receives a phone call, allegedly from Frank, arranging to meet her at his antiques shop. The attentive viewer's superstitions may be raised by the telephone, which is red with a black receiver—it is identical to, and probably the same prop as, the telephone used by Michèle Mercier in *I tre volti della paura*'s *"Il telefono."* Bad luck seems to envelop Nicole, chumming the very air around her; it begins to take definite form while she is modelling on the runway, as her handbag is stolen under the cover of a passing wardrobe rack. [16]



THIS RICHLY *atmospheric shot predisposes the viewer to regard Mark (Massimo Righi) as a drug addict.*

15 Perhaps there is a standard type of diary sold in Rome, but Isabella's diary looks identical to the diary kept by the Countess Frederica, which sets another series of murders into motion in Bava's 1971 film *Ecologia del delitto/Twitch of the Death Nerve.*

16 Wes Craven clearly had this scene in mind when he filmed a similar set-up for *Wes Craven's New Nightmare* (1994), in which a child is abducted from a movie set as a wall of scenery is moved by stagehands between the child and the camera.

Alfred Hitchcock was fond of telling interviewers that, while other directors gave audiences slices of life, he gave them slices of cake. It's an apt analogy because the results of Hitchcock's meticulous pre-planning are often confectionary; but if his thrillers are slices of cake, Bava's are heavy on the icing. His attention is lavished on the surface. Nowhere in his *oeuvre* is this more apparent than during Nicole's visit to Frank's antique shop. It is Bava's quintessential Technicolor sequence, and perhaps the definitive example of how to shoot a horror sequence in color.

Nicole has tempted bad luck by wearing the dead woman's dress, and here she innocently crosses a threshold into an entire shop filled with second-hand possessions. The shop interior is fraught with unexpected colors—green, violet, gold and magenta—and the strobing of the "Dancing" sign glimpsed outside at a nearby nightclub turns the harlequin lighting into a veritable heartbeat, in which all the variety of life alternates with the absolute void of death, being with nothingness. The sign also offers a tacit explanation for the music heard throughout the sequence; it is Carlo Rustichelli's tango-flavored theme music, which remains distant-sounding on the soundtrack until the assassin first makes his presence known—at which point, it reasserts its identity as soundtrack music with a sudden, startling increase in volume that brings it *right into the room.*[17] Rustichelli's score is further manipulated by having it abruptly cut off as Nicole fends for her life in the dark; its sudden absence has the uncanny effect of making Nicole seem doubly exposed and vulnerable. As the scene progresses, her black dress is also ripped to reveal her bra, introducing an erotic *frisson* that is certainly indebted to *Psycho*, but which was still extremely rare in horror films in 1964. Ultimately, Nicole makes the acquaintance of an unforgettable, medieval fashion accessory: a spiked iron glove which is slammed onto her face with merciless force. It's a variation on the Mask of Satan in *La maschera del demonio*, but because it is filmed without the hyperbole of that earlier sequence (with its big muscleman executioner and big, big hammer), it is even more devastating. The sequence is such a standout that, when *Sei donne per l'assassino* was released in Denmark, it was retitled *Jernhanden i rædselsnatten,* which means "The Iron Hand in the Night of Horror."



NICOLE *is assaulted at Frank's antiques shop by a man in a white mask.*

In the finished film, the spiked glove strikes home after only a slight hesitation over Nicole's face. When the scene was shot, Bava experimented with drawing out the suspense to a more gruelling degree by having Nicole struggle to keep the glove away from her face, as its blades inched nearer and nearer. A photograph survives of the idea, but ultimately, Bava and editor Mario Serandrei decided that the scene was more frightening when its payoff was swift and blunt.



AS ORIGINALLY *photographed, Nicole's death scene prolonged her struggle with the iron glove.*

The shocking nature of the murders in *Sei donne per l'assassino* tend to distract one from the details of the plot and how well constructed it is. Early in the fashion show sequence, a brief dialogue scene between Nicole and Peggy establishes that the Countess' moods have become more erratic since the death of her husband—the salon's former owner—in a car wreck. Here, in a blithe throwaway reference that will later help to elucidate the reasons behind the campaign of murder, Bava can be found once again indulging his penchant for backstory, extending his narrative beyond its actual length not with illusion but *al*lusion. Audience suspicions and expectations are also constantly baited and surprised, as in the scene where Peggy is followed to her doorstep by Mark. We're on guard because Mark has been acting suspiciously; we know he's hopped-up on something, we saw (what we presumed to be) his silhouette eavesdropping on Nicole's phone call shortly before she was killed, and he was also shown to be outside and in the vicinity when Isabella was murdered. But in this scene, he's revealed to be an ordinary man who has fallen in love with an uninterested, but not uncompassionate, woman.

Peggy's own suspicious behavior is revealed to have a fairly honest motive. It is she who has stolen Isabella's diary, but not to use its information against others, as we might expect. We're teased right up to the last second with her true intentions: when she determines that the diary contains references to her secret abortion, she tears out only the pertaining pages . . . and then, on second thought, without reading further, she throws the entire book on the fire—which can be read as a cautious gesture or a very generous one. Superstition may also play a part in her actions, as is suggested by a comment of Bava's, which describes his own encounter with the written reproaches of the dead. In his *Positif*

interview, Bava confessed to Ornella Volta, "This very morning, inside a book, I found an unopened letter that a friend had sent to me ten years ago. We had been arguing at the time, and so, not wishing to read disagreeable things, I filed it away unopened, without reading it. A few months ago, I learned that this friend—whom I never saw again—had died, so today, it's like I've received a letter from the Beyond. What would you have done in my place? I *burned* it . . ."

The film reaches its apex of sadism with the sequence of Peggy's torture and death. Forty years later, it remains a hard scene to top for its unrelenting cruelty; it could easily pass for a playlet filmed on the stage at the Theatre du Grand Guignol in Paris. [18] With its subterranean catacombs, abducted girl, and the unmasking of her abductor, this scene also suggests a certain debt to *The Phantom of the Opera*, but the unmasking here is staged to increase our suspense rather than to assuage it. Mary Arden plays the scene vulnerably yet courageously; it's her shocked reaction that sells the unmasking, and it's wonderful to see Peggy's whimpering give rise to a sense of pluck when the pain she has suffered crosses that line where she understands she has nothing left to lose. Those who watch the scene closely will notice an abrupt sound edit at the end of the scene. Arden confirms that additional footage was filmed of her face being pulled off the stove, ruined and smoking, and she agrees with my assessment that the shot was probably considered too strong, too tasteless to be included—but it must have been a late decision, because the cut was obviously made after the film was scored. Photographs of this cut material also exist, and if we contemplate how the shot might have looked onscreen—a gloved hand pulling Peggy's head back from the stove by its hair, the steam clearing to reveal her ravaged face, its welts swelling in tight close-up until blood begins to run from them, as Rustichelli's demonic cymbals reached their full crescendo—we can begin to appreciate the overwhelming power it might have had, and how it might have made Bava's suggestions of violence elsewhere in the picture seem weaker.



NEVER *before published photo shows Peggy's ruined face as it is lifted from the stove—a shot removed from the final cut.*

The death of Greta (smothered by a pillow as her legs writhe orgasmically) would seem to be the weak link in this daisy chain of death, design-wise, but the suspenseful preamble to that moment finds Bava working at top form. When she returns home and discovers Peggy's ravaged body in the boot of her car, Lea Krugher's wonderfully nerve-wracked performance leaves us uncertain of whether she's hiding the corpse to protect herself from being framed with it, or if she put it in the trunk herself to dispose of later. After hiding the body behind a decorative partition below the stairs to the second floor of the Marquis' dwelling, Greta goes upstairs, where Bava attends to her undressing by framing the shot in leaves, suggesting a view through a window that really isn't there. Peeled down to a black slip (unlucky color), she flinches at the sound of a harp. At this, we cut downstairs, where the strings of the instrument are still vibrating in the foreground of the shot, a stone cherub peers into frame, completing the ironic suggestion. As the strings cease to vibrate, the camera begins a slow, inexorable track across the floor, snaking toward the partition, peering behind it at the concealed body of Peggy, which is then pulled offscreen by its ankles, her ghastly blue visage seeming to float away of its own accord. This shot provides the climax for the film's French trailer, which I was once privileged to see in 35 mm with a select group of friends. We had all seen this movie at least a dozen times before on video, but this shot assumed a power on the big screen that was completely unexpected—it was like being touched by the hand of God. [19]

Whereas Greta's death is all build-up, the murder of Tao-Li takes us by surprise by beginning *in progress*, with no suspenseful build-up whatsoever. This sequence remains shocking today for many reasons. First of all, the very suddenness of the scene—which grabs us, as it grabs its victim, and thrusts us into the midst of her struggle for life, the pounding kettledrums of Carlo Rustichelli's orchestra mimicking her thundering heartbeat—catches us offguard; its lack of overture may be indicative that Hitchcock had already played the bathroom murder card to perfection in *Psycho*. Secondly, as the killer turns the corpse over, Tao-Li's breast is cupped and squeezed—a first in a horror movie, taking advantage of a breakthrough moment in Joseph L. Mankiewicz' *Cleopatra* (1963), which was probably the first all-ages movie to show a man caressing a woman's breast. The aftermath of the murder, as the soulless, voluptuous shell slides underwater like a mannequin, is also disturbing. Has a victim ever seemed as heartbreakingly vulnerable as Tao-Li as she lies there, cradled by the water? As she sinks, the scene becomes as redolent of birth as it is of death—and here, once again, Bava succeeds in showing us the angel in the wreckage and the obscenity of murder. [20] The climax of this scene—a

17 In his 1982 *giallo, Tenebrae*, Dario Argento would similarly toy with audience perceptions of theme music, with the accompaniment heard during a sequence suddenly stopped when a character lifts the needle from her stereo turntable—only to have the music promptly continue, as authentic soundtrack accompaniment.

18 Founded in 1897, Le Theatre du Grand Guignol presented plays and vignettes built around strangulations, decapitations, garottings, bleedings, burnings, and various acts of torture for nearly 70 years. But in the late '50s, as horror films began to introduce more and more graphic violence—with pictures like George Blair's *The Hypnotic Eye* (1960, Georges Franju's *Les Yeux sans Visage/Eyes Without a Face* (1959), Joseph Green's *The Brain That Wouldn't Die* (1960), and Bava's own *La maschera del demonio*—attendance began to drop and the theater finally closed its doors (and long tradition) in 1962. The following year, the gore film was officially launched with Herschell Gordon Lewis' *Blood Feast* (1963).

19 Incidentally, the room in which this scene was shot can also be seen in Jean-Luc Godard's masterpiece, *Le Mépris/Contempt*, which was shot at Cinecittà and other locations in and around Rome not long before *Sei donne per l'assassino*, went into production. In the Godard film, the room belongs to the villa being rented by Jerome Prokosh, the producer character played by Jack Palance, and appears in a scene between Michel Piccoli and Giorgia Moll, both of whom had (or would) work with Bava at one time or another. Many of the same furnishings are present—the cherub and the harp, for instance. In the scene, Piccoli plucks the harp's strings, and because the film was shot with live sound, we can hear that the strings are flaccid and horribly out of tune.

20 This scene so impressed Mexican director Pedro Almodóvar that he used it, and other clips from *Sei donne per l'assassino* in the first scene of his 1986 movie *Matador*, which showed Antonio Banderas masturbating to various televised images of graphic horror.







A TRIO *of suicidal murders: Jacqueline Pierreux strangling herself in I TRE VOLTI DELLA PAURA, Daliah Lavi preparing to stab the ghost of Kurt in LA FRUSTA E IL CORPO, and Cameron Mitchell comforting Eva Bartok after making an attempt on her life—not suspecting that their next embrace will mean his death.*

shot of Tao-Li's submerged, staring face as a cloud of blood billows into frame from her slashed wrist—was censored in many different countries, including most prints circulated in the United States until its DVD release in the year 2000. The scene doesn't trump the shower murder in *Psycho*, but it isn't redundant, parodic, or disgraceful; the fact that it, like the shower murder, has also been widely imitated—in such films as J. Lee Thompson's *Happy Birthday to Me* (1981), Dario Argento's segment of *Due occhi diabolici/Two Evil Eyes* (1990), and Martin Scorsese's *Kundun* (1997)—testifies to its own unique power and originality.

Sei donne per l'assassino built upon the model of *Psycho* in another significant way. While *Psycho* introduced the killer with the split personality, *Sei donne* introduced the killer with the split identity. After revealing the culpability of Max Morlan halfway through the picture, Bava reserves for the final reel the surprise that he was working in concert with Cristina, who is herself responsible for the murders of Greta and Tao-Li. By sharing the identity of the assassin, the two lovers (who were being blackmailed by Isabella, who knew of their involvement in the death of Cristina's husband) are able to provide each other with alibis. It's an elegant solution to the mystery—more than thirty years before Wes Craven pulled the same trick in *Scream* (1996)—and it also perpetuates Bava's ongoing fascination with twins and doubles. In the midst of juggling all the red herrings in this picture, Bava and Fondato fortunately remembered to include a bit of dialogue between Max and Cristina, revealing that they are secretly married—thus giving Max a legal path to her fortune in the event of her death.

Over the years, *Sei donne per l'assassino* has been accused of objectifying its women victims and eroticizing the violence against them. On the contrary, it is *the fashion world* that objectifies women. As an industry, it has probably done more to reduce women to a surface image than any other; at its worst, it abstracts them to the point of making them look inhuman, if not actually dead. Real flesh-and-blood women have literally killed themselves trying to live up to the images projected by the world of *haute couture*. If anything, *Sei donne* shows us how offensive are the aesthetics that we apply to women in life, when applied to them in death. By arranging the models' corpses in a photogenic manner, Bava was certainly making an ironic statement; he didn't get any special kick out of expressing violence against women through his art. He sympathized with women too much for that—any careful examination of Bava's work will reveal that all of his best, most dimensional characters are women; it's clear that he identifies with them, and it is obvious from the way he photographs them that he loves them. We always side emotionally with the *sei donne*, not with the *assassino*. We often assume the victim's points of view prior to the moment of death. Obviously, there *is* an erotic element in the murders—dresses get torn, or the women are attacked while in some stage of undress—but as titillating as this may be for some viewers, it serves two legitimate purposes: it introduces an added dimension of vulnerability to the moment, and it juggles another red herring, namely Inspector Sylvester's theory that the killer is a sex maniac. What Bava is really doing by "eroticizing" these scenes, is what he does from the very beginning of the picture—he is imparting information visually, allowing us to draw our own conclusions, and then surprising us by showing us how deceptive appearances can be.

If there's a philosophy to this movie, it's one shared by Bava's later "body count" movie *Ecologia del delitto/Twitch of the Death Nerve*: that it is pointless to do anything purely for money, and worthwhile to do only those things we love, or do out of love. But, this being a coarse

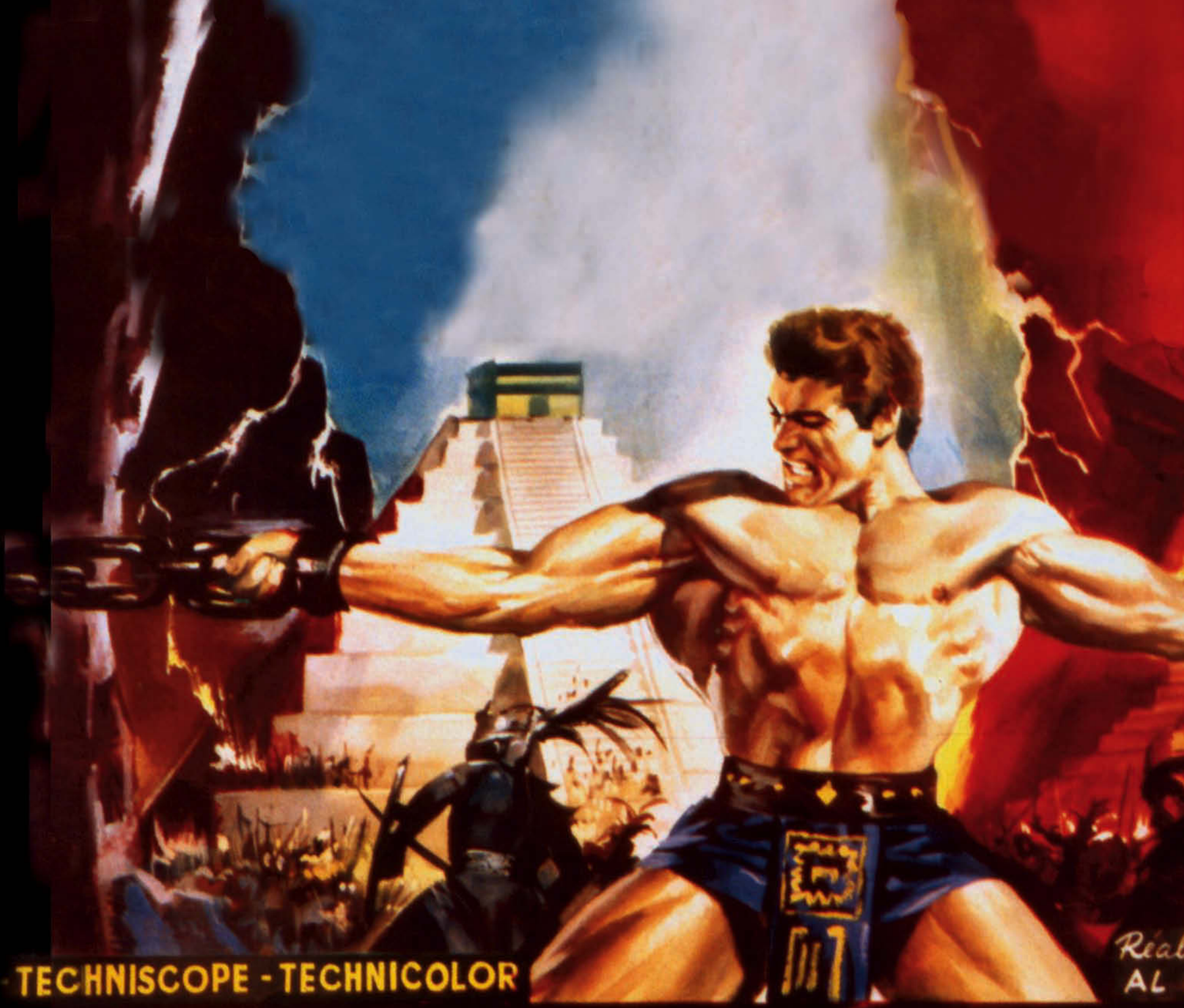


THE GREAT *final shot of the film: a telephone hangs by its cord as two lives hang by a thread.*

and evil world, very often the things we do for love are conquered by the common lust of others for money. As in *La frusta e il corpo, Sei donne per l'assassino* concludes with a woman simultaneously embracing and slaying her lover, whose lavished affections are revealed as illusory. Bava directs both scenes in such a way that we feel that Death liberates neither partner, but unites them instead in the Great Beyond. Bava's uneasy marriage had taught him that we are forever bound to the people we love; we may sometimes hate them too, but these relationships are fated and thus inescapable.

The film ends as the camera zooms past the dead bodies of Christina and Max to the red telephone receiver, knocked off its cradle, swinging on its cord—the image rhymes enticingly with the opening shot of the red sign falling and swinging on its chain. It obviously reflects a film prepared with a formal sense of design, but Bava pretended to scoff at anyone who took it seriously. "Some people from *Cahiers du Cinema* once came 'round to my house," he wrote in his *La città del cinema* memoir. "My daughter told me they were interested in knowing the connection between the sign swinging in the storm at the beginning of my film, and the telephone left dangling when Bartok died at the end. I couldn't remember *how* the film had ended!"

Actually, there *is* a connection—it is hard to believe that Bava wasn't at least somewhat conscious of it—which is very well expressed by Luigi Barzini in *The Italians:* "Fear can be detected behind the Italians' peculiar passion for geometrical patterns, neat architectural designs, and symmetry in general, which is part of their love for show—mainly the fear of the uncontrollable and unpredictable hazards of life and nature . . . [Even the] greatest Italian literary masterpiece, Dante's *Divina Commedia* . . . is composed of an introductory canto and three parts, each of thirty-three cantos, each ending with the same word, 'stelle.'"



HERCULE L'INVIN

DE ONOVERWINNELIJKE

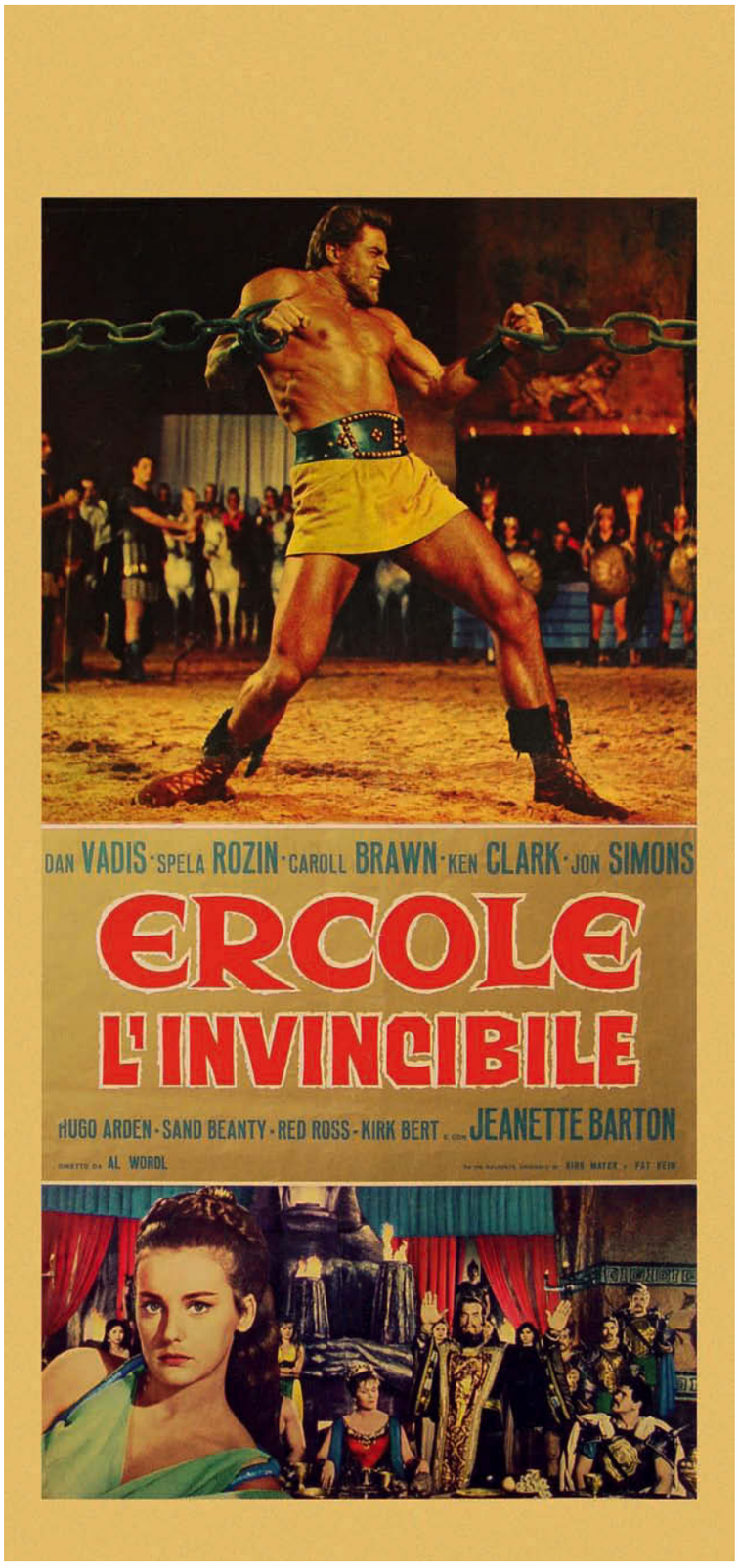


BELGIAN *affiche for "Al Wordl's" ERCOLE L'INVINCIBILE, which features stock and original Mario Bava effects footage.*

Men of Steel, Men of Stone

Ercole l'invincibile
Maciste e la regina di Samar
Il castello dei morti vivi

DURING THE PERIOD of late 1963 to early 1964, the activities of Mario Bava went unrecorded. He was not a director who spent his time between films resting and recharging his creative batteries, so there is every reason to believe that he remained active in friendly, unofficial capacities. Of the other Italian features produced during this period, two offbeat additions to the rapidly expiring *peplum* cycle contain effects scenes suggesting Bava's hush-hush involvement, and we have surprising confirmation of a day job that Bava performed for a scene ultimately cut from a rather remarkable medieval horror film.



ITALIAN *locandina.*

Ercole l'invincibile

Released to Roman theaters only one week after *Sei donne per l'assassino* was the latest, and one of the last, Hercules films of the Italian Golden Age: *Ercole l'invincible*. Produced for Metheus Film by Mario Siciliano, the film was shot in the latter months of 1963, when Bava was between directorial assignments. Not only does this film contain a fair amount of stock footage from earlier *pepla* for which Bava was responsible, but it also features several new and delightful effects shots and sequences that, though uncredited, are too accomplished and particular in style to have been the work of anyone but Cinecittà's "Mr. Fix-It."

There is much about *Ercole l'invincibile* that is mysterious. The film's credits are cloaked in a panoply of pseudonyms and misspellings that give it the appearance of a work from another dimension. Italian publicity materials credit the direction to "Al Wordl," while Italian references credit "Al World," a pseudonym for Alvaro Mancori (b. 1923). Like Bava, Mancori was a director who began his career as

Ercole l'invincibile

"Hercules the Invincible"
Filmed at Cinecittà and on location
Autumn 1963
First released: March 19, 1964
Technicolor, Techniscope, 2.35:1, 85 minutes

Production: Metheus Film, Mancori Film (Rome). Distributor: Regionale.

Belgium: *De Onoverwinnelijke Herkules*, Cosmopolis Films
France: *Hercule l'Invincible*
Germany: *Der Grösste Sieg des Herkules*, 10/15/65, 83m
UK: *Hercules the Invincible*, Golden Era Distributors Ltd., 8/64, 85m 31s, Certificate "U," passed with cuts
US: *Son of Hercules in the Land of Darkness*, Embassy Pictures Corporation, 1966

Maciste e la regina di Samar

"Maciste and the Queen of Samar"
Filmed at Cinecittà and on location
Early 1964
First released: June 27, 1964
Eastmancolor, Cromoscope, 2.35:1, 92 minutes

Production: Nike Cinematografica (Rome), CFPC (Comptoir Français de Productions Cinématographiques, Paris). Distributor: Atlantis.

Belgium: *Maciste Tegen Versteende Mannen*, Les Films Eddie de Jong, 1965
France: *Maciste Contre les Hommes de Pierre*
Mexico: *Hércules Contra los Fantasmas*
Spain: *Maciste Contra los Fantasmas*
UK: *Hercules Against the Moon Men*, Miracle Films Ltd., 3/65, 88m 34s, Certificate "U," passed with cuts
US: *Hercules Against the Moon Men*, Governor Films, "Cosmicolor/Lunarscope," 5/65, 90m

Il castello dei morti vivi

"The Castle of the Living Dead"
Filmed on location at the Castello di Balsorano, Artena and at Parco dei Mostri, Bomarzo
Spring 1964
First released: August 5, 1964
B&W, 1.85:1, 90 minutes

Production: Serena Film. Distributor: Cineriz.

France: *Le Château des Morts-Vivants*
UK: *Castle of the Living Dead*, Tigon Film Distributors Inc., 12/67, 89m 49s, Certificate "X," passed with no cuts
US: *Castle of the Living Dead*, AIP-TV, 1968

a cameraman. One of his previous camera assignments was Antonio Leonviola's *Maciste, l'uomo più forte del mondo/Mole Men Against the Son of Hercules* (1961), which may have been another of Bava's anonymous effects jobs. A talent for cinematography ran in the Mancori family: Alvaro's sons Guglielmo "Memmo" Mancori and Alessandro "Sandro" Mancori followed in his footsteps. Sandro Mancori is the credited cameraman of *Il pistolero segnato da Dio* ("A Gunman Marked by God," 1968), a Spaghetti Western that is known to have been at least partially shot by Mario Bava.

After co-directing one more picture—the omnibus film *Racconti a due piazze* ("Stories of Two Places," 1965), starring Sylva Koscina and Leopoldo Trieste—Alvaro Mancori directed no more films. He didn't have to; earlier, in 1962, he had founded Elios Studios where, in 1964, a Western town set was erected for Sergio Bergonzelli's *Jim il primo/The Last Gun*, starring Cameron Mitchell. With Westerns beginning to supplant the *pepla* as Italy's leading cinematic export, Mancori's property was one of only three such Western towns extant in Rome proper—the other two being in Cinecittà (which was more expensive to rent) and Dinocittà (which was literally at Rome's southern border and far from the center of town)—and thus immensely profitable.

Judging from *Ercole l'invincibile*, directing was not really Mancori's forte, but the film is of great interest as a side project for Bava. As usual, he took the job without credit, but the quality and personality of the film's special effects are as good as a signature.

The screenplay of *Ercole l'invincibile* was credited to the mysterious "Kirk Meyer" and "Pat Kein" (also listed as assistant director), and the cinematography is cloudily credited to "Claude Haroy." Curiously, the direction of the American version is credited to "Lewis Mann," whom the cagey Italian credits list as production supervisor. Was this production in fact supervised by "Louis Mann," the collective pseudonym used by producers Ermanno Donati and Luigi Carpentieri on such films as Riccardo Freda's *L'orribile segreto del Dr. Hichcock/The Horrible Dr. Hichcock* (1962) and *Lo spettro/The Ghost* (1963)? The truth about this picture may never be known.

Hercules (Dan Vadis) rescues a beautiful young girl (Spela Rozin) who is attacked by a lion while preparing to bathe in a stream. She is Teica, the daughter of Tideo, a shepherd king who presides over a small village. He tells Hercules it is the local custom to reward men who save village women by offering their hand in marriage, but Teica's station will not allow this; however, if Hercules can find and kill the dragon of the hill and return with its smallest tooth (which is said to grant wishes), he will permit their marriage. Hercules agrees, and goes to a Sibyl for directions to the dragon's lair; when he refuses to bring the tooth to the Sibyl due to its prior claim, she curses him and the tooth, reducing its power to the granting of a single wish.

As Hercules is slaying the dragon, King Tideo's village is raided by the Demios—a tribe of cannibals, led by the Oriental warlord Kabaal ("Ken Klark" a.k.a. Ken Clark). The village is burned to the ground, the villagers taken hostage. ("They believe that by eating the hearts of valiant men, they too will become brave!") Only Babar ("Hugo Arden" a.k.a. Ugo Sasso), a quack doctor, manages to elude their notice. He stays behind, becoming a comic sidekick to the returning Hercules, and leads him to the stone fortress of the Demios, encircled by a moat of volcanic lava. Hercules uproots a tree to use as a bridge across the lava, and is soon taken prisoner.

He is chained to two opposing elephants, to be torn apart—his flesh later to be eaten by the Demios, who hope to thereby absorb his courage—but his prayer to Zeus to shatter the chains is answered. One of the elephants nearly tramples the Queen ("Carol Brown" a.k.a. Carlo Calo), but Hercules saves her. The Queen becomes enamored of Hercules, enticing the jealousy of Melissa ("Joan Simons" a.k.a. Maria Fiore), the daughter of Kabaal. She murders the Queen and blames the killing on Teica, who has been made to serve as a handmaiden. For this information, Melissa is made Queen to her father, and Teica is tied to an altar and bled to feed the witnesses







SCENES *from ERCOLE L'INVINCIBILE: a radio-controlled miniature effects shot that suggests Bava's involvement, followed by two shots of Dan Vadis as Hercules.*

of her coronation. ("Her beauty is great," notes Melissa. "Our women will want to drink of her blood!") During this ceremony, Hercules discovers a stone wall damming the lava flow, and uses his strength to bring it down. Meanwhile, the prisoners revolt and the lava approaches. King Tideo is killed by Kabaal while trying to free Teica from her sacrificial altar, but Hercules returns in time to rescue her. Melissa, in possession of the dragon's tooth, stays behind but finds the talisman no protection against the lava flow. ("Foul liquid of the Earth, stay back! I, Melissa, command it!") Hercules leads the prisoners to the stone drawbridge that takes them to safety, and then uses his strength to destroy it, sending Kabaal and his armies to their deaths in the lava. [1]

Released directly to television in America as *Son of Hercules in the Land of Darkness*—with Hercules recast as his own "son" Argoles!—Mancori's film is akin to *La sfida dei giganti*, dodging the need to produce new special effects by recycling footage from older *pepla*—in this case, Bava's special effects from Pietro Francisci's *Le fatiche di Ercole*. Consequently, when Hercules goes to slay the dragon of the hill, medium shots of Dan Vadis jumping over a prop dragon's swinging tail are intercut with long-shots of Gabriele Antonini as Ulysses, confronting the Tyrannosaurus Rex that guards the Golden Fleece. (The fleece hanging in plain sight throughout the sequence is ignored in favor of the offscreen extraction of a dragon's tooth we never see!) Likewise, when Hercules uproots a tree to improvise a bridge to the Demios' lair, it is the tree uprooted by Steve Reeves at the beginning of *Le fatiche di Ercole* that we see.

But the real point of interest here are several new effects shots that are too accomplished to have been the work of anyone in Rome other than Mario Bava. There are two excellent glass matte paintings of King Tideo's village (one before, one after the raid); the exterior of the Demios fortress, with its lowering stone bridge (similar in design to the radio-controlled prop later used as the entrance to Diabolik's lair in *Diabolik*) and forbidding lava moat (the same polenta and calcium pellets concoction used to create the lava river in *Ercole al centro della terra*), including shots of horsemen riding over the drawbridge; a glass matte painting of the uprooted tree bridge over the lava moat; a chamber with lever-controlled flames (a clever alignment of onset smoke pots and double-exposed flames filmed on a black set); miniature reconstructions of the set flooded with intruding lava; overcranked shots of toy horses tumbling over the broken drawbridge into the lava moat; and a climactic shot of low, lavender smoke filling the Queen's chamber. These shots intermittently lift an otherwise lame film above the genre's average.

Two of the actors featured in *Ercole l'invincibile*—American actor Ken Clark and a young CSC graduate, Alberto Cevenini (who adopted the *nom d'ecran* "Kirk Bert," possibly in tribute to Kirk Douglas and Burt Lancaster)—were subsequently recruited by Mario Bava to star in his next official feature, *La strada per Fort Alamo/The Road to Fort Alamo*, which would be shot, as serendipity would have it, at Mancori's property, Elios Film Studios. (Might Bava have offered his special effects expertise to Mancori in exchange for studio time?) The same is true of Jany Clair, the Titian-haired star of Bava's next probable side project, *Maciste e la regina di Samar/Hercules Against the Moon Men*.

Maciste e la regina di Samar

This Italo/French co-production, financed in part by the same company that was on the point of producing Bava's next feature *La strada per Fort Alamo*, was made in the immediate wake of *Sei donne per l'assassino*. Since only the German participants in that production say that they were paid, Mario Bava himself may have been left uncompensated at the end of production.

"You can't imagine how many times I've been stiffed by producers," Bava once acknowledged. "I make them a movie, and then I run to the nearest bank to cash my check, so that I can pay my bills, my back taxes, and so forth, and what do you know? It's made of rubber and I've worked for free! So what else is there to do? I start making another movie as soon as possible, because I have to pay my taxes!" [2] This explains why Bava may have been compelled to spend the months immediately following the completion of *Sei donne per l'assassino* with some anonymous, paying side projects such as the three covered in this chapter.



FRENCH *affiche for MACISTE E LA REGINA DI SAMAR, depicting star Alan Steel in an insidious death trap.*

Maciste e la regina di Samar/Hercules Against the Moon Men was destined to be the last directorial stand of Giacomo Gentilomo, for whom Bava had worked during the production of *Maciste contro il vampiro/Goliath and the Vampires* and *L'ultimo dei vichinghi*. Gentilomo—who lived until April 16, 2001—withdrew voluntarily from the film business to pursue a career in painting. Gentilomo may have been a frustrated painter, but—except for the segments on which Bava assisted or replaced him—his films do not have a painterly quality; even when they show an interest in color, his uses of color tend to be monochromatic, as evidenced by certain scenes in *Maciste contro i vampiri* which are tinted a blazing red, and the scenes of the Moon Men in *Maciste e la regina di Samar*, which are tinted an otherworldly, cellophane green evoking the "green cheese" of lunar legend.

The ancient city of Samar was the site of the crash-landing of an enormous lunar meteorite, which formed a new mountain in the desert region. It came to be known as the Mountain of Death, the headquarters of a new form of life—monsters from the moon, led by the high priest Rodolphus, who demands a regular sacrifice of the city's young. As the film's story commences, Queen Samara (Jany Clair) is perpetuating the tradition of her ancestors, by countenancing the continuation of this form of regimented murder. The

wise old Claudius (Nando Tamberlani) appeals to Samara to fight the Moon Men, telling her of a man from Ciaran who is strong and resourceful enough to repel them—a man named Maciste ("Alan Steel" a.k.a. Sergio Ciani).

Unbeknownst to Claudius, Samara is actually in league with the Moon Men, who have promised her all the wealth of Earth once they have conquered the planet; to ensure that they can do this, they demand that she turn over her half-sister, Bilis (Delia D'Alberti), as their sacrifice on the evening that "Saturn comes into conjunction with Mars, under the influence of Uranus." Bilis is blissfully unaware of her sister's plan, and is preparing to ask her permission that she may marry her cousin, Prince Darix (Jean-Pierre Honoré).

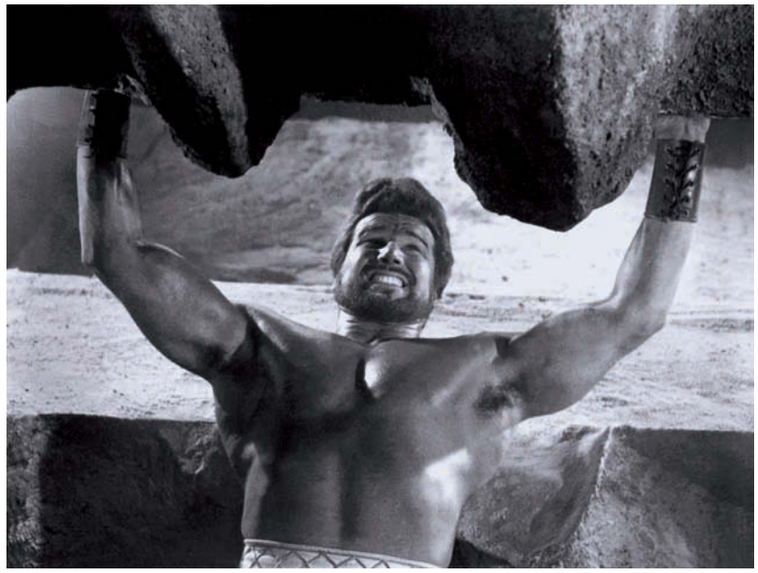
When the Queen learns that Claudius has already summoned Maciste to Samar, she orders her chief guard, Mogol (Goffredo "Freddy" Unger), to make sure he does not reach the city alive. Her army tries to sabotage Maciste, but he easily defeats the entire unit. Met by Agar (Anna Maria Polani), the daughter of Claudius disguised as a man, Maciste is taken to the royal castle. Claudius apprises Maciste of the situation and receives his promise to liberate the town from their alien oppressors. As Claudius takes Maciste into a secret passage to meet with members of a nascent resistance movement, Agar sees the eyes of Queen Samara peering at them through a secret panel. In a subterranean tunnel, Claudius is impaled by hidden spears and Maciste is dropped into a pit that promptly fills with water. He manages to claw his way through the wall of the pit, finding an ape-like monster awaiting him on the other side; he fights and kills it. Further on, he is reunited with Agar, who takes him on to the tavern where the revolutionaries await his orders. The Queen swears she will have her revenge on Maciste.

At the tavern, Maciste learns that Prince Darix is spearheading the rebellion, along with the tavern-keeper (Giuliano Raffaelli). One of the freedom-fighters who survived his own attempted sacrifice leads Maciste to the Mountain of Death and shows him around. Queen Samara identifies Darix as a conspirator and has him speared, but Maciste comes to his rescue. He takes the injured man back to the tavern, where the commonfolk warn Maciste of the Queen, who wears a pendant around her neck that contains an irresistible love potion. Maciste is caught by the royal guard while trying to rescue a fake Bilis, and he is put to the test by being placed between two enormous spiked walls threatening to sandwich him. His superior strength causes the mechanism to break. Impressed, Samara orders for Maciste to be taken to her quarters. There, in her bedchamber, she tries to drug him into subservience, but knowing her plan, he spills the potion when she is distracted by a minor disturbance from Mogol. To prove his devotion to her, Samara has Agar and Darix brought into Maciste's presence; he shocks them by recommending the death sentence—the slower the better—perhaps starvation. Samara agrees and has them sent to her dungeon in chains. When the Queen confides her full plan to Maciste, he reveals that he is not in her power—and Samara slips away through a secret compartment. She has already delivered Bilis to the Moon Men, who are bleeding her to reanimate their own dormant leader, a twin of Bilis named Queen Selena. Samara goes to the Mountain of Death to plead with Rodolphus for assistance against Maciste, but having no further need of her, he has her crushed between the stone bodies of his rock-like henchmen. Maciste frees Agar and Darix from their chains and they all race toward the Mountain of Death, which is engulfed in a terrible sandstorm as the moon prepares to collide with Earth. Maciste finally forces his way through the stone barricades of the Mountain and destroys the stone men, Rodolphus, and the throbbing brain of their lunar god.

The time of sacrifice has ended for Samar, and as Maciste prepares to ride away to the next of his adventures, he asks that Agar share his future with him.







THE LEADER *of the Moon Men prepares to rejuvenate the dead Queen Selena; a group of rock creatures surround Queen Samara (Jany Clair); and Maciste ("Alan Steel" a.k.a. Sergio Ciani) pits his strength against the forces of evil.*

1 This synopsis is based on the American version of the film, which was released directly to television as *Son of Hercules in the Land of Darkness*, and differs slightly from the Italian synopsis—in which Melissa is working to restore the throne to her mother Ethyl (Jeannette Barton) and not to usurp it herself.

2 Luigi Cozzi, *Il cinema dei mostri* (Rome, Italy: Fanucci Editore, 1987), 249–60.

She agrees, and they ride off toward the horizon.

There are quite a few special effects in this film, which accords a rather prominent screen credit (at least in the English version, which doesn't necessarily mean anything) to Ugo Amadoro. Amadoro's name also appears in this capacity on the films *Seddok (L'erede di Satana)/Atom Age Vampire* (1960) and *Roma contro Roma/War of the Zombies* (1965), but further searches for screen credits turn up nothing. Amadoro is a mysterious figure, due to his limited number of credits and the fact that Mario Bava's name is also sometimes associated—rightly or wrongly—with those other two films. There is a remote possibility (I stress "remote") that Amadoro was someone's pseudonym—the surname suggests "love of gold"!—but this is less easy to prove than it would be to simply accept that Amadoro, whoever he was or is, was hired to supervise the film's special effects, while Bava was brought in to actualize effects scenes that were beyond his ken.

The film's very first shot—of a fiery meteor crashing into a scale model landscape, complete with tiny trees and running water, and treated to some *camera truca* overlays of spot flame—looks very much like Bava's work. Similarly, the scene in which Rodolphus the Moon Man pays an astral visit to Queen Samara in her quarters was achieved by means of a glass shot, with the Moon Man inserted into the shot by means of his reflection on a pane of glass angled between the camera and actress Jany Clair; it is the kind of shot that Bava had done time and again, relying on the steadiness of his father's vintage Mitchell camera.

Bava's presence is most discernible during the extended sequence of Maciste, Agar, and Darix braving a sandstorm to reach the Mountain of Death at the film's climax. There is no set, *per se*, only a studio floor covered in sand, with various tree branches and fake rocks strewn about. The static environment is enlivened with visible gusts of wind, which are treated to the most intense color gel lighting; at one point, the heavy winds flummoxing Maciste are as red as Hell itself, as he makes his way through rocks illuminated with yellow, orange, blue, and green gels. Another



us *one-sheet poster.*

point in favor of Bava's paternity is the hallucinatory quality of this sequence, which is allowed to go on at such a length that the viewer begins to feel sucked into the sheer metaphysics of it, a sensation that can only be felt in Italian fantasy films of this decade in the work of Mario Bava—particularly *Ercole al centro della terra* and *Operazione paura/Kill, Baby . . . Kill!*.

Then there is the matter of the climax as it pertains to Bilis, who is taken to a secret chamber, laid parallel to her identical twin, Queen Serena, and bled—hand to hand—so that the other, evil version of herself might live again. This may be a naked restatement of the climax of *La maschera del demonio*, but it is not handled in a way that suggests Bava's involvement on-set. What does evoke Bava are the various cutaways, before and during this sequence, to moody shots of the moonrise (39:40–50 on the Something Weird DVD release of *Hercules Against the Moon Men*) and the slow, malefic approach of the lunar orb as it threatens to collide with Earth (1:09:27–30, 1:33:15–44), but what is curious about these shots is that they appear to have been imported from an older, scratchier, black-and-white picture, perhaps even from an old reel of effects test footage, which the color tinting of these shots and sequences may have been introduced to artfully conceal. (When viewed on DVD, the difference between the two film stocks is impossible to miss, with the effects footage looking as though it could date back to the 1940s.) Part of this tinted footage is the final corruption of Queen Serena's face—an optical disintegration, rather than the sort of lighting trick Bava would have done—which is also curious in that, here, Serena really doesn't resemble Bilis at all, nor does she resemble the wax figure inhabiting her glass coffin earlier in the picture, possibly sculpted for Gentilomo by his old friend, Eugenio Bava. The stone creatures commanded by Rodolphus look very much like the handiwork of whomever designed Procrustes for *Ercole al centro della terra*.

At 1:24:30, as the moon begins to smoke and effect conditions on the Earth's surface, just before the sandstorm begins, the film suddenly cuts to an orange-tinted montage of documentary stock footage of various cataclysms, like volcanic eruptions, crashing waves, and hellacious tropical storms. Here the movie does what Bava did when working with stock footage in such films as *La morte viene dallo spazio* and *Caltiki il mostro immortale*, so this sequence may also reflect his involvement. As happens during the climax of *Gli ultimi giorni di Pompei/The Last Days of Pompeii* (1959), the documentary footage was shot at regular gauge but is stretched to an anamorphic screen ratio, in this case "Cromoscope" (or "Lunarscope," as it was dubbed in America).

Maciste e la regina di Samar could have been one of the most entertaining *pepla*, but it is held back by inadequate casting, some dull art direction, uneven pacing, and Gentilomo's inability to stretch a *lire* as well as Bava could. Beetred and oiled like a champion sportscar, Sergio Ciani is a likeable hero and acquits himself in a fistfight with perhaps greater panache than any of his fellow musclemen, thanks to the clever action choreography of Freddy Unger. But while he is an acceptable Maciste, the retitling of the American edition raises the bar to a level he cannot quite attain; he is not a Hercules—nor was he meant to be. To approach this film as the story of a demigod robs the film of its proletariat premise, which reaches back to Maciste's defense of the oppressed in *Cabiria*, and Ciani's performance of its exceptional everyman character. An American viewer might wonder why Hercules strains so much while pulling two iron bars apart, but to an Italian

viewer, the scene is a testament to what a single person can do, if determined, and it is this human aspect of Maciste that makes him truly heroic. As for the film's evil Queen Samara, Jany Clair does not have the classical beauty of Gianna Maria Canale, and her primary attitude is one of petulant spite, but her imperfections manage to support her performance, somehow making sense of her determination to be rid of her more beautiful, blonde, full-bosomed sister Bilis.

Il castello dei morti vivi

When I interviewed actor Luciano Pigozzi for this book, he spoke at length about how deeply impressed he had been by Mario Bava's talent for matte painting. After talking a bit about the trick shots he had executed for *La frusta e il corpo,* he made the following surprise revelation:

"Another time, he was up on the mountain, and he asked for three or four white sheets—I don't know what for—and he painted. The scenery was very bad, but after he made the special effect . . . my God! You could see a ship, all the time making with this special glass, and you see the ship on this postcard—and he put it very close to the water, and you could see this ship going up and down, up and down, and afterward, it disappeared."

Which film was this?

"It was, it was . . . *Il castello dei morti vivi. The Castle of the Living Dead.*"

Bava worked on that film, too?

"Yeah. He came to make that scene, that special effect."

I trust Pigozzi's memory, because it remains very sharp on other counts, but I have not been able to find such a shot—at least not in the American television prints of *The Castle of the Living Dead.* Of course, these pan-and-scanned prints are missing a portion of their compositions from start to finish, so it is possible that Bava's effect appeared in the periphery of a scene and would only be visible when the film was shown in its correct 1.85:1 ratio. Pigozzi himself supplies the other possible explanation: "Maybe they cut it, because the story was very long." Although the shot is not visible in currently available versions of the picture, a discussion of the film must be included, if only to account for how Bava spent his time between features.



THIS ITALIAN *locandina pictures Gaia Germani at the upper right. She played the masked oracle Medea in* ERCOLE AL CENTRO DELLA TERRA.

In the wake of the Napoleonic wars, people struggle to make ends meet. A travelling acting troupe—consisting of the beautiful Laura (Gaia Germani), ex-soldier Bruno (Jacques Stanislawski, who pretends to be Laura's brother as a protective measure), Dart (Luciano Pigozzi, who plays Harlequin), the fire-eating Gianni (Ennio Antonelli), and the dwarf Neep (Antonio De Martino)—stage entertainments in public squares, including a gallows skit in which a hangman (Bruno) is tricked by a condemned Harlequin into taking his place in the noose. After one such performance, the troupe receive an invitation to give a private performance at a castle for three gold pieces. En route, they stop at a tavern, where a violent argument over money breaks out between Dart and Bruno, causing Dart to quit with an oath of revenge. His place is taken by Eric (Philippe Leroy), a homecoming general in the wars whose horse was stolen by Dart as he made his escape.

In the woods near the castle, the troupe notice a complete absence of sounds and find a petrified bird on a tree branch. A witch (Donald Sutherland) appears, warning them in rhyme-speak against going to "the castle of the living dead." ("Some will live and some will die, before the morning sun is nigh!") They proceed to the castle anyway, where they are received by Count Drago (Christopher Lee) and his footman Sandro (Mirko Valentin). The castle is adorned with all manner of petrified creatures, many now otherwise extinct, which Drago has treated with a special chemical. Prior to giving their performance, Drago offers some drugged wine to Bruno, and the gallows skit results in tragic consequences. Dart rides up to the castle during the performance and scales the outer wall to peer through Laura's bedroom window; she sees him, and it is presumed that he was somehow responsible for arranging Bruno's death, as he swore he would. While seeking entrance to the castle, Dart is found and slain by a scythe-wielding Sandro.

At breakfast, Count Drago offers Eric a cup of coffee without success. Bruno is given a proper funeral on the castle grounds, which are visited by the incompetent, allergy-ridden constable Sgt. Poe (Sutherland again, in a dual role) and his two officers. As the troupe prepare to leave, Eric disappears, having been overcome by Sandro and taken to the Count's laboratory. Laura encounters Drago, who overstates his sudden wish that she remain at the castle with him ("You're a very beautiful woman . . . You should stay this way forever"). His overtures offend her.



She goes to her room, pouring herself a glass of the cognac which the Count provided to her the night before; a surprise causes her to spill it, and she watches in horror as a cat laps it up and becomes a rigid thing. Running through the castle, she discovers the room of the late Countess Drago, preserved in youthful beauty in a bed overrun with rats and spiders, staring for all eternity into a mirror placed in her hand. Meanwhile, Sandro makes an attempt on the life of little Neep, who survives being thrown from the castle parapet and is cared for by the witch—who reveals herself to be one of Drago's early experiments, a beautiful young woman turned into a deformed crone by his chemicals.

Searching for her companions, Laura finds her way to Drago's lab, where she finds the petrified remains of Dart and frees Eric from his bonds. They are nearly shot by Sandro, but Drago intervenes. He dips a small hook into his petrification chemical, which he intends to use on them, so that they will play "the leading parts in [his] eternal theatre." Fortunately, Sgt. Poe and his men arrive just in time, and out of sheer desperation, Drago charges Eric and Laura with trying to steal some of his prize specimens. The police nearly arrest them, disregarding their warnings of the frozen people on the premises. However, the witch arrives to confirm their story and the Count attacks her. In their struggle, Drago manages to impale himself with the dipped hook and is frozen instantly. Sgt. Poe takes a brief tour of the castle rooms and frees Eric, Laura, and Neep, who ride on to other adventures.

Il castello dei morti vivi features many actors and crew members who had worked previously with Mario Bava: Luciano Pigozzi, of course; Christopher Lee, who is excellent as the droll, somewhat lovesick ghoul; Gaia Germani, who played the masked Sibyl in *Ercole al centro della terra*; and Mario Serandrei, who toiled at the editing table. The film was produced by Paul Maslansky, a New Yorker who had relocated to the continent to work as a unit manager on

ITALIAN *quattro-foglia, art by S. Wizett. Likely the only publicity artwork produced for this underrated and little-exported film.*

the Ray Harryhausen film *Jason and the Argonauts* (1963). It was his first job as a producer, in which capacity he still works today; he is best-known for his series of *Police Academy* comedies (and its spin-off TV series) in the 1980s and '90s, one of which—1994's *Police Academy: Mission to Moscow*—features Christopher Lee.

Who directed the film is more difficult to assess. Many sources claim that the film's direction is credited to "Herbert Wise" a.k.a. Luciano Ricci (*Solo contro Roma/Alone Against Rome,* 1962); this may be true of Italian prints, but American prints credit screenwriter "Warren Kiefer" a.k.a. Lorenzo Sabatini, with directing it. According to David Pirie's book *A Heritage of Horror: The English Gothic Cinema 1946–72,* Ricci was given credit solely for quota purposes, presumably because Sabatini had not directed before. As Pirie notes, it is rumored that the film's assistant director, Michael Reeves—an American-born Briton not yet 20 years old—was allowed to direct some second-unit scenes, which turned out so much better than Sabatini's footage that he was allowed to graduate to the first unit when Sabatini fell ill. Maslansky denies this—however, according to him, Reeves was rewarded with permission to write a few additional scenes and dialogue for the picture, involving secondary characters like the dwarf. Many have speculated that the film's witch—an uncredited dual role played by Canadian actor Donald Sutherland at the outset of his distinguished career—was one of Reeves' contributions, but Sutherland, who has named all of his children after his directors, christened his first son Kiefer—which tells us who he remembers directing *his* scenes. However, when asked who directed his scenes in *Il castello dei morti vivi,* Luciano Pigozzi says, "I don't remember who the director was . . . He was English." To make matters still more confusing, Herbert Wise was also the name of an English director actively working at the time, mostly in British television.



DART *(Luciano Pigozzi) and the dwarf Neep (Antonio De Martino) on location at the Parco dei Mostri.*

His best-known work includes the miniseries *I, Claudius* (1976) and the ghost story *The Woman in Black* (1989).

Dismissing the possibility that this other Herbert Wise was involved, Michael Reeves' specific contributions to the film would appear to include the scenes involving Dart, such as the gallows skit, the tavern fight, the scaling of the castle wall to Laura's bedroom window, and his death-by-scythe. All of these elements share a distinct personality with the three films Reeves would direct before his untimely death at the age of 24: [3] *Il lago di Satana/The She Beast* (1966), *The Sorcerers* (1967), and *Witchfinder General/The Conqueror Worm* (1968). Another patently obvious Reeves contribution is the film's opening narration (*"The wars were over. Napoleon was locked with his ambitions in an island prison and the shattered remnants of his armies disbanded. Some went peacefully home, others made the highways unsafe for travel. There was no war, but the killing had not stopped . . ."*), which shows an attention to historical timing extremely uncharacteristic of Italian horror, and strongly parallels the opening narration of his final, and finest, film.

Shot in black-and-white by Aldo Tonti—the cinematographer of Visconti's *Ossessione* (1943) and Fellini's *Le notti di Cabiria/The Nights of Cabiria* (1957)—*Il castello dei morti vivi* reflects its mixed parentage and nationality by being at once very characteristic of the Italian horrors of this period, yet also quite original. The movie is enjoyable in its use of familiar locations like L'Aquila's Castello di Balsorano, beloved for its appearances in *L'amante del vampiro/The Vampire and the Ballerina* (1960), *La cripta e l'incubo/Terror in the Crypt* (1964), and Paul Morrissey's *Flesh for Frankenstein* (1973)—and also the Parco dei Mostri, a 16th century park adorned with a dozen or more mythological creatures carved in stone, which also appears in Charles Band's 1988 horror film *Meridian.* The cavern serving as the secret entrance to Drago's castle, whose exterior is carved in the likeness of a screaming face, is known as the Orco, and it is one of the most popular attractions in "Monster Park," which remains open to paying customers to this very day. [4]

Despite the familiarity of its locations and an obviously low budget (the soundtrack, credited to Angelo Francesco Lavagnino, recycles Riz Ortolani cues from Margheriti's *Danza macabra/Castle of Blood*), *Il castello dei morti vivi* film boasts a strong, medieval atmosphere, its Brughelian characters and settings evoking the look of old woodcuts and fairy tale illustrations. In some ways, the film anticipates the Bergmanesque touches that would soon surface in Roger Corman's *The Masque of the Red Death* (1964), as well as certain historically attuned British horror films, like Piers Haggard's *Blood on Satan's Claw* (1970) and Gordon Hessler's *Cry of the Banshee* (1970), which followed in the wake of Reeves' *Witchfinder General.* Tonti's cinematography, with its bold front-lighting and long shadows, also hints at German Expressionism, while Christopher Lee's appearance as Count Drago suggests the inspiration of silent era villains, such as the Devil in Guido Brignone's *Maciste all'inferno/Maciste in Hell* (1925).

Regrettably, *Il castello dei morti vivi* is now but one step away from becoming a lost film in its original screen ratio. The negative elements are said to repose in a European archive, where they will remain until some enterprising video company agrees to pay the unrealistic fee its owner is charging. The film was never given a theatrical release in the United States, where it has only been shown in the form of an extremely grainy, badly-cropped, 16 mm TV print that has since fallen into the public domain.

3 Reeves died on February 11, 1969, reportedly by taking some prescribed depression medication after an evening of drinking. For decades, Reeves' death has been characterized by the press (and the glamorizing fan press) as a deliberate act of suicide, but official documents have recently surfaced—in Benjamin Halligan's 2003 biography of Reeves—which declare it to have been an accident.

4 Interested readers are referred to the Bomarzo website, http://www.bomarzo.net (February 9, 2006).





New Frontiers

"Space-ships and time machines are no escape from the human condition."
—Arthur Koestler, The Boredom of Fantasy

KEN CLARK *and Fernando Villeni enact the same scene in different millennia in* LA STRADA PER FORT ALAMO *and* TERRORE NELLO SPAZIO.



ITALIAN *due-foglia, art by G. D. Stefano.*

La strada per Fort Alamo

The Road to Fort Alamo

IN THE YEARS since it was made, *La strada per Fort Alamo*—Mario Bava's first excursion into the Western genre—has become one of his most elusive films. Although entirely (and somewhat deservedly) eclipsed today by many other Italian Westerns, the it was produced at a time when the so-called "Spaghetti Western" had yet to be born, before the films of Sergio Leone—beginning with *Per un pugno di dollari/A Fistful of Dollars* (1964)—established the cinematic vocabulary of this national genre.

Much like the Italian horror film in the mid-1950s, the Italian Western was nothing new in 1964, but it had been extinct long enough to become something new. One of the earliest Italian Westerns, *Una signora dell'Ovest* ("A Lady of the West") was directed by Carl Koch in 1942.[1] Christopher Frayling tells us that Koch's film was criticized in its day by Giuseppe De Santis for its "cardboard backings . . . and a general atmosphere of the baroque."[2] (If this is an accurate description, Koch's film was a stylistic antecedent of *La strada per Fort Alamo* and would make very interesting viewing.)



MARIO BAVA*'s first Western incorporates visual elements that would not be out of place in one of his horror pictures.*

Una signora dell'Ovest and its immediate successor, Giorgio Ferroni's *Il fanciullo del West* ("The Child of the the West," 1942), were inspired by Puccini's opera *La fanciulla del West* (first filmed in 1911), and as the genre evolved, operatic devices would become inseparable from the stylistic *brio* of Italian Westerns. Apart from the spotty appearance of some Wild Bill Hickok adventures in the early 1950s, the genre lay dormant until Italian interest was reawakened by a series of West German co-productions made in the early 1960s. These romanticized, unambiguous stories of the Old West were based on the writings of Karl May (1842-1912), the best-selling German author of all time.

Westerns had been popular in Germany as early as the 1930s. Desperate to recover a national sense of optimism which had been lacking in their films since the postwar years, Hamburg's Rialto Films bought the rights to May's numerous Western novels and characters and set a series into motion with *Der Schatz im Silbersee/The Treasure of Silver Lake* (1962), directed by Harald Reinl and starring Lex Barker as "Old Shatterhand" and Pierre Brice as "Winnetou." Its commercial success quickly led to sequels like Hugo Fregonese's *Old Shatterhand* (1963, with Daliah Lavi as an Indian maiden!), Reinl's magnificent *Winnetou I – III* trilogy (1964-66), and Alfred Vohrer's *Unter Geiern/Frontier Hellcat* (1964) with Stewart Granger and Elke Sommer. Most of these international co-productions had Italian money involved, and as they became more successful in Italy, the Italian investors became eager to eliminate the middlemen and so began producing their own Westerns in open competition with the Germans. Only four "purebred" Italian Westerns were produced in 1964: Leone's film, Bava's film, *Buffalo Bill—L'eroe del Far West* (starring Gordon Scott and directed by Mario Costa under the laughable alias "John W. Fordson"), and Sergio Corbucci's *Minnesota Clay,* to which Bava contributed anonymously. As an accomplished matte painter, Bava was the only director in the bunch who came to the job equipped to transform ordinary dirt roads on the outskirts of Rome into breathtaking vistas from the Old West.

La strada per Fort Alamo—written by Enzo Gicca Palli, Bava's assistant director Franco Prosperi, and actress Livia Contardi (who played the role of Hadda in *Gli invasori*)—was co-produced by Achille Piazzi and Comptoir Français du Film, the cooperation that bankrolled Bava's *Ercole al centro della terra* in 1961. More recently, Comptoir Français had produced Georges Franju's Feuillade adaptation *Judex* (1963), one of Bava's then-current favorites. French investment was attracted to the project because it could be sold in France as *Arizona Bill*, in an attempt to forge a traditional relationship with a series of twenty "Arizona Bill" movies which had been filmed in France between 1907 and 1913, with Joë Hamman in the title

La strada per Fort Alamo

"The Road to Fort Alamo"
Filmed at Elios Film Studios (Rome) and on location
February – March 1964
First released October 24, 1964
Eastmancolor, Totalscope, 2.35:1, 82 minutes

Production: Piazzi Produzione Cinematografica (Rome), Protor Film (Rome), Comptoir Français du Film Production (Paris). Producer: Achille Piazzi. Director: John Old [Mario Bava]. Assistant director: Charles Price [Franco Prosperi]. Screenplay: Vincent Thomas [Enzo Gicca Palli], Charles Price [Franco Prosperi], and Jane Brisbane [Livia Contardi]. French adaptation: Louis Sauvat. Script girl: Priscilla Cooper [Priscilla Contardi]. Director of photography: Bud Third [Ubaldo Terzano]. Camera assistant: Claud Raguse. Art direction: Demos Philos [Demofilio Fidani]. Costume design: Mila Vance [Tina Grani]. Makeup: Leo Travers [Euclide Santolli]. Hairdresser: Mary Gang [Renata Magnanti]. Military Advisor: Col. Elliot R. Edwards. Production supervisor: James Garrett [Armando Govoni]. Editor: Wilson Dexter [Mario Serandrei]. Music: Piero Umiliani. "The Way to Alamo," sung by Tony Wendall. Distributor: Belotti Film.

Ken Clark (Bill Mannerly/Bud Massidy), Jany Clair (Janet), Michel Lemoine (Kid Carson), Kirk Bert]Alberto Cevenini], CSC (Slim Kincaid), Dean Ardow [Gustavo De Nardo] (Sgt. Warwick), Anthony Gradwell [Antonio Gradoli] (Capt. Hull/Hollis), Andreina Paul (Mrs. Collins), Gérard Herter (Mr. Silva/Silver, uncredited).

Belgium: Arizona Bill, Cobelciné, 1965
France: *Arizona Bill,* Comptoir Française du Film Production, 3/24/65, 88m
Germany: *Der Ritt nach Alamo,* "The Ride to Alamo," Ceres Film Verleih, 10/8/65
Turkey: *Alamo Kahramanlari,* "Heroes of the Alamo"
US: *The Road to Fort Alamo,* World Entertainment Corporation, 7/10/66, 82m

role. The original Italian title, once again, tweaked the nose of a more prestigious Italian release, namely Federico Fellini's *La strada* (1954).

Like *Sei donne per l'assassino*, which was partly inspired by the West German Edgar Wallace crime thrillers (or *krimis*) produced by CCC, *La strada per Fort Alamo* is much closer to the *falscher-Amerikaner* look of Rialto's "Winnetou" films than to the grittier neorealistic Westerns being innovated at the same time by Leone. Filmed by much the same crew that Bava used on *Sei donne per l'assassino*, his Western has a look that is baroque as well as expressionistic, with some interior "exteriors" as patently unreal as the painted backdrops of Kobayashi's *Kaidan/Kwaidan* (1963). Bava imbues the film not only with scenic interest, but with elements of horror. While Leone's classic is more earthy, Bava's borders on the unearthly; and while *Per un pugno di dollari* finds Leone's later operatic tendencies not yet in bloom, Bava's film is (in a literal sense) a "horse opera"—a traditional Western staged with bold splashes of artifice.

With its scattered cattle skulls and a full moon that stares from a baleful night sky like a wen, Bava's West is a dark and barren place whose landscapes suggest the post-apocalyptic, as well as the post-traumatic. His Indians are dangerous shadow beings who communicate with bones and screams and drums, and his Western heroes—Union Army soldiers, in this case—are in fact the invaders of this eerie, unknowable terrain. In many ways, *La strada per Fort Alamo* is a rehearsal for Bava's next film, the science fiction/horror classic, *Terrore nello spazio/Planet of the Vampires* (1965).



KEN CLARK, *Jany Clair, and Michel Lemoine are the outlaw protagonists of LA STRADA PER FORT ALAMO.*

Synopsis

Bill Mannerly, a once-prosperous rancher, has become an embittered drifter since the day his sister was murdered and his ranch was burned to the ground by marauding Union soldiers. Stumbling across some dead Union soldiers ambushed by Osage Indians, he discovers in their possession a requisition order for $150,000 to be given them for the Fort Lawrence payroll. Bill rides to the nearest town to report his finding, but arrives too early to wake the town's sheriff. While passing the time over breakfast in a saloon, he happens to save a likeable, knife-throwing outlaw, Slim Kincaid, from a group of card sharks led by the slimy Mr. Silva.

Slim thanks Bill by taking him to the cavern hideout of a band of outlaws bossed by the ruthless Kid Carson. Wishing revenge against the Union soldiers who ruined his life, Bill ingratiates himself to the gang by telling Carson about the requisition letter and the dead Union soldiers, whose uniforms will provide useful disguises. A much larger man than Carson, Bill dons a lieutenant's uniform, while Carson is forced to adopt a common private's clothes. The "requisition" goes smoothly until Carson sadistically slays an old woman in the bank. The group return to their hideout to find one of their fellows butchered by the Osages, and their own clothes stolen. Bill fights with Carson over the money, and when Slim comes to his defense, both are knocked unconscious and left behind by Carson and company. As they leave, Osages appear from the recesses of the cave, strip Bill and Slim of their uniforms, and stake them to the desert ground to die of thirst.

A Union escort led by Capt. Hull, en route to Fort Alamo, rescues Bill and Slim from exposure. Bill's tattered uniform identifies him as a lieutenant, so he identifies himself as "Lt. John Smith of Fort Alamo," and Slim as "Pvt. Jim Kincaid." They are accepted by the Captain and put into fresh uniforms. Among the members of the convoy, Bill meets Janet, a young woman arrested for trying to kill a Union soldier who raped her. In time, the nosy Sgt. Warwick discovers the truth about Bill's disguise, prompting Bill to plan his escape under cover of night. As he and Slim prepare to sneak away with two Union horses, they learn that a marauding Osage Indian has had the same idea and intends to free the horses to render the encampment vulnerable to a morning attack. Bill and Slim kill the Indian, though it means waking the camp and foiling their own getaway.

The next day, the evil Carson—still wearing his Union private's uniform—is rescued (with most of the stolen $150,000) by the convoy during a shoot-out with the Osages. The money is placed in Bill's custody, according to Army regulations stating that any discovered currency becomes the responsibility of the second-in-command. When Carson tries to molest Janet, Bill has him put in irons. The Osages ambush the convoy in transit by sending their remaining share of the stolen money downriver, drawing soldiers out into the rapids to recover it. The convoy's only hope is for someone to sneak out at night, when the Osages

1 The probable first Italian Western was *La vampira indiana* (1913), directed by Sergio Leone's father Roberto Roberti, and starring Leone's mother, Bice Waleran.

2 Christopher Frayling, *Spaghetti Westerns: Cowboys and Europeans from Karl May to Sergio Leone* (London UK: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1981), 32.



will not attack, and alert Fort Alamo to their distress. After exchanging some tender words with Janet, Bill volunteers to make the run. He turns the saddlebag of cash over to Sgt. Warwick for safekeeping, then enters the river, swimming past the Indian camp underwater while breathing through a reed.

As morning arrives, the Osages launch their bloodthirsty attack against the men, women, and children of the convoy. Just as lives begin to be lost on both sides, Bill rides back with reinforcements from Fort Alamo. The Indians are defeated, but Carson soon takes advantage of the rampant bloodshed to enact some violence of his own. He clubs Warwick and relieves him of the money, only to be attacked by Slim, who gets shot in the back. Before he dies, Slim pleads with Bill to avenge him. Bill pursues Carson to a high ridge, where they fight for the money. Carson nearly gets the upper hand, but is shot just in time—by Janet. Bill returns the payload to Sgt. Warwick, who swears his silence and releases both Carson and Janet, saying that no one will miss them in the presence of so much death. The errant couple pledge their love to one another and look forward to building a new life together on a ranch they will build "somehow" with "clean money"—not realizing that wads of ready cash, sent down river by the Osages, is floating on the surface of the river only a few feet away from them.

Cast

Cast in the lead role of Bill Mannerly was Ken Clark, who was born in Neffs, Ohio, on June 4, 1927. Tall and ruggedly handsome, with a bare chest like Robert Redford's, Clark started out as a beefcake photographer's model and as a contract player at 20th Century-Fox, then was cast in a small role in Robert D. Webb's *On the Threshold of Space* (1956). Thereafter, he moved immediately into Westerns: the Elvis Presley vehicle *Love Me Tender* and *The Proud Ones* (both directed by Webb, as well) and Delmer Daves' *The Last Wagon* (all 1956). In 1958, he played his last role for Fox in the musical *South Pacific* (1958), after which he had small speaking roles in three episodes of *Alfred Hitchcock Presents*, including the legendary "Lamb to the Slaughter," starring Barbara Bel Geddes and directed by Hitchcock himself. With this experience behind him, Clark dedicated himself to pursuing bigger roles in smaller films. He succeeded with the lead role in Bernard L. Kowalski's *Attack of the Giant Leeches* (1959), an independent production that was distributed with great success by American International Pictures. After another cheapie, David Bradley's *12 to the Moon* (1960), Clark decided to do what other American "he-men" had done, by trying his luck in Rome. His first role was the Mongolian warlord Kabaal in one of Mario Bava's recent interludes, "Al Wordl's" (Alvaro Mancori's) *Ercole l'invincibile / Son of Hercules in the Land of Darkness*—in which, to add insult to injury, he was billed as "Ken Klark." After this mishap, *Le strada per Fort Alamo* must have seemed like the opportunity of a lifetime to Clark, who plays the heroic lead stoically, but passably well.

Exotic, Titian-haired Jany Clair—most recently, Queen Samara in Giacomo Gentilomo's *Maciste e la regina*

BELGIAN *affiche.*



BUD *(Ken Clark) shares a tender moment with Janet (Jany Clair) before he must venture through Osage country in search of help.*

di Samar—was, in some ways, the Maria Montez of Italian exploitation's golden years. Born Jany Guillaume on September 2, 1938, in Lille, France, she had not been acting in films quite as long as Clark, but she had many more to her credit. Among these were Jacques Becker's *Montparnasse 19* (1958), Vittorio Cottafavi's *Le legioni di Cleopatra/Legions of the Nile* (1960, with Linda Cristál as Cleopatra), *Le Nuits de Raspoutine/Nights of Rasputin* (1961, with Gianna Maria Canale and Ivo Garrani), and the French/Italian co-productions *La vendetta della maschera di ferro/The Prisoner of the Iron Mask* (1961) and *Le Monstre aux Yeux Verts/Planets Against Us* (1962), both of which also featured her *Fort Alamo* co-star and fellow Comptoir Français contract player, Michel Lemoine. After *La strada per Fort Alamo,* Clair was cast opposite Ken Clark once again in Riccardo Freda's spy thriller *Coplan agent secret FX 18* (1965–6). Clair also received screen credit for dubbing roles in the French editions of some Italian fantasy films, including *Il gigante di Metropolis/The Giant of Metropolis* (1961).

Bava favorite Gustavo De Nardo was back in harness as Sgt. Warwick, the Union Army's watchful third-in-command officer. It may be the best performance he gives in any Bava film; he looks right in the uniform, and his dialogue is unusually sensitive, as when he begins to see through Bill's disguise due to his willingness to criticize fellow officers in conversation with a soldier of lower rank. Considering that Antonio Gradoli's Capt. Hull exists only to remind his subordinates that he must be addressed as "sir," Warwick's sharp-eyed intelligence, sincerity, and sense of fair play are the only redeeming values to be found in the film's portrayal of the Army—everyone else is depicted as either a tyrant, a fugitive, or a fool.

Gérard Herter—memorable for his villainous parts in *Agi Murad il diavolo bianco* and *Caltiki il mostro immortale*—makes a surprise uncredited appearance in the minor role of gambler Mr. Silva. According to dramatic law, a villain crossed by our heroes in Act I should rear his ugly head again in Act III, but Herter's complete disappearance from the subsequent narrative and lack of billing suggest that some German co-production funds may have fallen through, or that Bava improvised the part in response to an old friend's need for work.

Credited here for the first and only time as "Kirk Bert," Alberto Cevenini was a young Italian actor who had previously appeared in Antonio Leonviola's *Taur, il re della forza bruta/Taur the Mighty* (1960), Pino Mercanti's *Il duca nero/The Black Duke* (1963, with Cameron Mitchell), and *Ercole l'invincibile.* He would work with Bava once again, as the ambitious young Andy in *Minnesota Clay* (1964) and in *Terrore nello spazio* (1965, playing the doomed younger brother of top-lined Barry Sullivan), both times under his real name. His character of the knife-throwing marksman Slim shows the influence of James Coburn's character Britt in *The Magnificent Seven* (1960) and foreshadows Cameron Mitchell's Rurik in Bava's "Viking Western" *I coltelli del vendicatore/Knives of the Avenger* (1966).

The most compelling actor in the movie is, without a doubt, Michel Lemoine. Born circa 1928, Lemoine is a self-confessed admirer of *"cinema bis"* (B-movies) who made his first screen appearance in *Julie de Carneilhan* (1948). After playing a small role in



CARSON *(Michel Lemoine) and Bud pose as Union soldiers to cash a requisition order for $150,000 at a bank.*

Jean Cocteau's *Le Testament d'Orphée/The Testament of Orpheus* (1960), Lemoine had his breakthrough as the male lead in José Benézéraf's erotic hit *L'Etérnité pour nous/Sin on the Beach* (1961) with Sylvia Sorrente, followed by the aforementioned films with Jany Clair, and another film for Benézéraf, *Le Concerto de la Peur/Night of Lust* (1962). His Italian films of the 1960s include Giorgio Ferroni's *Ercole contro Moloch/The Conquest of Mycenae* (1963), *Delitto allo specchio/Sexy Party* (1964), and two features in Antonio Margheriti's "Gamma 1" quartet, *I criminali della galassia/Wild, Wild Planet* (1965) and *I diafanoidi vengono da Marte/War of the Planets* (1966). In the late '60s, he worked with his wife, actress Janine Reynaud, in several films for Spanish director Jesús "Jess" Franco (*Necronomicon/Succubus*, 1967) and French director Max Pecas (*Je suis un Nymphomane/Forbidden Passions*, 1970). Afterwards, Lemoine's acting career continued in an erotic vein, and he made the crossover into writing and directing erotic films, which he continued to do in France and Germany through the late 1990s. One of his films, *Les Week-ends malefiques du Comte Zaroff* (1976), an erotic variation on *The Most Dangerous Game*, was released in France with the decidedly Bavian title *Sept femmes pour un Sadique* ("Seven Women for the Sadist"). With his almost excessively handsome good looks and crazed eyes, Lemoine is at his best in villainous roles and he is often cast as a decadent aesthete. Though the character of Kid Carson isn't particularly well used in *La strada per Fort Alamo*, Lemoine has some terrific moments, particularly his lazy gunplay during his first meeting with Bill, and his look of insane excitement as he watches the Wagon City bank manager count out $150,000.

In a special issue of the French fanzine *Monster Bis*, Lemoine reminisced about his *La strada per Fort Alamo* experience to journalist Norbert Moutier: "Mario Bava was an extraordinary director and he needed all of his talent to get through that picture, because it was really difficult. The producers had money problems with that film, and Bava had to fight constantly . . . but he was very sly! When you watch the film, you have the impression that there are about forty horses, right? In fact, there were only seven. He made them run around in circles so that they would appear and then reappear on screen, creating the illusion of a huge stampede. When the producers saw that shot, they became very worried: 'You're crazy for spending all that money on horses!'

"I also have, well, *burning* memories about the film. I had a fight scene with Ken Clark around an open fire. Of course, my back was covered with padding to protect me against the flames when I fell into them. But on the night we filmed the master shot for that sequence, I forgot to put my padding on. When I fell into the fire, I was *really* burning! That's probably why I'm so convincing in that scene."

Moutier also asked Lemoine how Bava, a *maestro* of the fantastic cinema, reacted to directing something as earthbound as a Western.

"He just did it; he didn't have time to think about it, with all the other problems that were besieging him. He took special care to set the lighting, to give the impression of a bigger budget. But I must tell you, in the evenings when we had our *aperitifs* together, we talked exclusively about his horror films."[3]



KID *Carson has no compunction about shooting another man in the back, as seen in this German lobby card.*

Music

Hired to write the music for *La strada per Fort Alamo* was an unlikely choice for the assignment: the noted jazz composer Piero Umiliani. Born in Florence on July 17, 1926, Umiliani first became consumed with music at the age of 14, when he discovered Duke Ellington's recording *Hot Jazz*, which was a contraband item in Italy under Mussolinian rule. He studied composition with Vito Frazzi and majored in counterpoint and fugue at the Luigi Cherubini Conservatory of Florence. After moving to Rome and establishing himself as a nightclub pianist, composer, and arranger, Umiliani landed the job of scoring Mario Monicelli's film *I soliti ignoti/Big Deal on Madonna Street* (1958). This landmark score—which featured the solo trumpet of the California expatriate and "cool jazz" artist Chet Baker—was part of the vanguard in the movement now known as "crime jazz," which also included such composers as Elmer Bernstein (*The Sweet Smell of Success*), Henry Mancini (*Touch of Evil, Peter Gunn*), and Umiliani's original font of inspiration, Duke Ellington (*Anatomy of a Murder*). Umiliani and Baker continued to collaborate on film scores for several years, including Nanny Loy's 1959 sequel *Audace colpo dei soliti ignoti* and Franco Rossi's *Smog* (1962), and his light-hearted compositional style lent itself particularly well to comedies like the Fellini/Visconti/De Sica/



COMPOSER *Piero Umiliani.*

Monicelli omnibus *Boccaccio '70* (1962).

La strada per Fort Alamo was one of Umiliani's earliest opportunities to score something other than a comedy, but the results are so stereotypical and poorly integrated that his contribution—more often than not—has an unwelcomely comic effect. The theme song, "The Way to Alamo" (sung by Tony Wendall), is lyrically ominous ("The blue sky will go cloudy/The ravens will fly low . . .") while musically echoing Herb Alpert's 1962 hit, "The Lonely Bull." As Bill first rides into Wagon City, the theme is reprised with a solo trumpet in place of the vocal, emphasizing its Spanish values even more. Inside the saloon, though it is very early in the morning and inhabited only by four poker players and a sleeping bartender, we hear the obligatory rinkytink piano. A jagged "danger theme" is introduced when Bill stumbles upon the dead Union soldiers, and is replayed throughout the film; one of the better cues written for the picture, it is nevertheless highly inappropriate in its "crime jazz" orchestral colorings. After an aural sampling of jazz of this sophistication, "Janet's Theme"—a homely, warbling harmonica piece—is simply laughable, and the "Love Theme" played during her scenes with Bill is a simple waltz-time theme that sounds quaint and old-fashioned rather than emotional. In short, the score is extremely uninspired and sounds as if it were written in reply to a concept rather than dailies. The music and the editing rhythms of the picture are at odds throughout, and the music is sometimes dragged in arbitrarily to color scenes in which nothing is happening except conversation.

Umiliani would score two more films for Bava in the years ahead: the vivacious *giallo, 5 bambole per la luna d'agosto/5 Dolls for an August Moon* (1970, one of his finest and most beloved scores) and the comic Western *Roy Colt & Winchester Jack* (1970).

Distribution

La strada per Fort Alamo was made—in and around Rome—at roughly the same time that Sergio Leone and American actor Clint Eastwood were filming their landmark *Per un pugno di dollari* in Almeria, Spain. Ultimately, they were released to Roman theaters one month apart, with Leone's film (credited to "Bob Robertson") opening first, on September 19, 1964; it premiered out-of-town, in Florence, one month earlier. *Per un pugno di dollari* was an immediate sensation, grossing over 3 billion (yes, billion) *lire* [$1,870,000] in its initial release, making it one of the most successful Italian films of all time. The latest film by director "John Old," on the other hand, attracted only 130 million *lire* [$81,000]. Given these figures, it might seem that Bava's effort failed dismally. However, to put matters in their true perspective, *La strada per Fort Alamo,* miserable though its earnings were, outgrossed all but two of the films previously directed by Bava—the exceptions being *La maschera del demonio* (a bare improvement at 139 million *lire*) and *Gli invasori* (326.3 million *lire*). Therefore, although it was unlikely that the movie placed a cent in the black, it was one of Bava's top Roman successes to date.

Bava's film was the first to be picked up for distribution in the United States, but both films had to wait a while; *The Road to Fort Alamo* was released by World Entertainment



ITALIAN *locandina.*

3 Lemoine's comments courtesy of Norbert Moutier, who also translated them.







SCENES *and collages of images from the film are represented in this partial Italian fotobusta set.*

Corporation (formerly Sigma III, the distributors of the classic *The Horrible Dr. Hichcock/The Awful Dr. Orlof* double bill of 1962) in the summer of 1966, while United Artists resisted a US release of *A Fistful of Dollars* until February 1967.

The Road to Fort Alamo contains some bewildering changes of names: Bill Mattingly is "Bud Massidy" (one of those non-existent surnames which haunt the popular Italian popular cinema in translation), Sgt. Warwick is "Sgt. Carter" (someone's nod to *Gomer Pyle, U.S.M.C.*?) and the Osage Indians are the "Ozark" Indians. Because the export prints were credited to "John Old" as well, the film's American release—which was spotty, at any rate—was overlooked by fans of Bava's horror films.

Even watchful Bava fan Joe Dante managed to miss it: "The poster said it was directed by John Old, so I didn't know it was the new Mario Bava picture . . . I went to see the co-feature and, as I walked in, *Road to Fort Alamo* was on and had about ten more minutes left to run . . . I could tell it was a Bava film almost immediately! There were these gorgeous color gels, cattle skulls in the dirt, sadistic Indian tortures . . . and I sat there feeling sick, because it was the last day of the booking and I knew that I'd screwed up and would probably never get a chance to see it again. To this day, I still haven't seen *The Road to Fort Alamo*."

Commentary

Like Sergio Leone's *Per un pugno di dollari,* a Western retelling of Akira Kurosawa's samurai film *Yojimbo* (1961), *La strada per Fort Alamo* is a transgeneric remake of an earlier film—and, for Bava, one much closer to home. Intentionally or not, it is a Western remake of Jacques Tourneur's *La battaglia di Maratona,* the story of Philippides, which Bava had photographed and co-directed in 1959.

Ken Clark's Bill Mattingly resembles Steve Reeves' Philippides in several respects (including onamatopoetically): both men are farmers plucked from private life to fight as soldiers; both are betrayed by their war experience, and in their bitterness they turn their backs on duty in favor of self-interest. After being pulled into battle one last time, they find themselves in a no-win situation and must save their fellows (and recover their spirit) by making a dangerous solo run to alert reinforcements; afterwards, both men are allowed to return to private life, with the woman they have freed from captivity at their sides, with nothing but a dream of rebuilding what they once lost.

This mythic parallel gave *La strada per Fort Alamo* the potential to become an important cult Western, but for whatever reason, Bava's attention to the project was either divided or simply uninspired. He had no prior interest in the genre, and he was less comfortable working out-of-doors than in a studio environment he could control. As with *Ercole al centro della terra,* producer Achille Piazzi was apparently unable to provide his director with much more support than a mostly empty sound stage at Elios Film Studios and a few dirt roads, leaving Bava and his team to "suggest" the rest. In the meantime, tensions were coming to a boil between Bava and Ubaldo Terzano, who had been increasingly frustrated by lack of recognition for his work since Bava was generally assumed to be solely responsible for the cinematography of his films.

Though it is fairly impossible to see today in a decent print, *La strada per Fort Alamo* has the richly colorful, luxuriant look that distinguishes Bava's other work of this prime period (1963–64), but there are rough edges that show he was ill at ease working in this *milieu* (at least on this particular assignment) and wanted to wrap things up as quickly as possible. Consequently, the story's historic/mythic parallels remain undrawn, opportunities to generate suspense are flagrantly neglected, and the cast flounders in a continuum consisting solely of long and medium widescreen shots. It is entirely possible to watch the film and not recognize Antonio Gradoli (one of the most experienced actors in the picture, with a screen career dating back to the late 1930s) in the role of Capt. Hull, because he is wearing a false mustache, shown mostly in profile, and never observed more closely than in medium shot. The action scenes also unfold mostly in long-shot, preventing the camera from bringing the viewer

into the midst of the action. In a scene where the wagon convoy is attacked by the Osages, a shot of Bill riding his horse alongside Janet's wagon, leaping off his horse onto the wagon, and seizing the reins from her, is filmed entirely in medium shot, without a single horse in sight! Sergio Leone's most important stylistic contribution to the Spaghetti Western—the close-up, the widescreen stare into the eyes of men who do not speak, the almost microscopic study of the landscapes etched into the faces of men who have lived—didn't occur to Mario Bava.

Besides failing to make the fullest use of its cast, *La strada per Fort Alamo* disappoints the viewer by not staging the sequence toward which its entire narrative arc is moving: Bill's dangerous night trek on foot through Osage country to Fort Alamo. Perhaps Bava found the script's parallels with the story of Philippides pretentious (or redundant, since he had already filmed it once), and so elected to de-emphasize them, but in doing so, he robbed his film of the scenes with the greatest potential for dramatic conflict and suspense: Bill's actual run (with any number of perils along the way), his exhausted arrival at Fort Alamo (where he would need to convince the officers of his own credentials as a soldier before persuading them to follow him into battle), and the race back to the campsite as the Osages prepare to strike at dawn. The mind boggles at what Bava might have done visually to depict a race against the sunrise. More likely, though, is that Bava was prevented from realizing the film's fullest potential by the simple lack of time and money, as Michel Lemoine described.

As the climax stands, we see Bill leave, cross the river, and steal a horse from the Osages—then we dissolve to the next morning with the Osages' abrupt attack on the encampment, with the Fort Alamo cavalry riding in close behind. The attack itself is startling in its abruptness, but also in its fury; like all Bava "raid" sequences (like the one that opens *Gli invasori*), it revels in the horror of war—the young mother played by Andreina Paul reaches for a pistol as the Indian shadows draw near, intending to shoot her terrified child rather than see it scalped—but it could have been made far more intense with a more protracted and suspenseful set-up.

In an unsuccessful instance of post-modern comedy relief, Bava illustrates the rising fear within the encampment by having one soldier jump in exaggerated fright as a butterfly passes by—perhaps a veiled reference to *All Quiet on the Western Front.*

Another disappointment is the film's failure to sketch its villain, Kid Carson, as a truly dangerous adversary to Bill Mattingly. After flying off the handle and shooting the old woman in the bank, and leaving our heroes for dead among the Indians, when Carson later reappears in the narrative, he must spend most of his remaining scenes disguised as a Union Army private, making him subservient to Bill's phony rank of lieutenant. With Carson afraid of being exposed, Bill has the upper hand until the final confrontation, which is more in the nature of a blind attack than a duel.

Bava's cinematographic concerns with this production were clearly not performance-based, but rather compositional and scenic. During action scenes, the camera tends to be rock-steady, relying on screen composition and editing to give the action the punctuation they require. One of the film's most memorable shots is the fistfight between Bill and Kid Carson, after Carson's attempted violation of Janet. The entire fight is framed in long-shot, just inside the entrance of a cave; the surrounding stone walls are illuminated with different color gels, but the fight itself is backlit by the natural light pouring through the cave opening and down a flight of carved steps, leaving the two men in silhouette and kicking up occasional clouds of dust. The shot goes on just long enough to cease to be about the fight, and to become about itself, as an abstract work of kinetic art.

Throughout the film, the actors are secondary to the landscape, most of which is artificial. The film's main titles appear over a lovely matte painting that shows a splendid mesa-crowned







4 For some reason, the distributors of the French version—*Arizona Bill*—were unable to superimpose the French credits over Bava's original matte background, so they were superimposed over a much cruder painting executed by another hand. As the titles stop, the poor painting dissolves into the better one!



SGT. WARWICK *and Bud find Union soldiers crucified and mutilated by an Osage tribe.*

panorama sprouting out of an ordinary Roman country road of grass and dust.[4] Elsewhere, Bava's paintbrush adds a simple cactus to the side of a road. As the film proceeds, and ventures deeper into Osage territory, Bava begins to romance a darker, more horrific vocabulary from the Western imagery. At one point, the convoy is halted by an occult arrangement of cattle skulls and tomahawks left in the middle of the road as an ill omen; later, a tracking shot past a wall inscribed with mysterious Indian symbols gives way to a view of two Union soldiers left crucified on a pair of crossed wooden beams. (Grimacing at their unseen faces, Sgt. Warwick observes, "They even burned their eyes out.") The interior "exteriors" filmed at Elois are even more unmistakable as outposts of Bava's universe; with its eerie trees and bold blue cycloramic backdrop, the camp site would look identical to the forest surrounding Gorka's family cottage in *I tre volti della paura*, if not for a small fence of wooden planks, a campfire, and a resting horse. When an Osage scout invades the campsite to steal the Army's horses, his appearance is directly preceded by one of the film's most arresting images: a brace of dead tree branches reaching across the screen like the tentacles of a squid.

Bava's weird melding of horror and Western imagery is unusual, but not unique. The film's look and atmosphere is somewhat prefigured by an earlier Western: Hugo Fregonese's *Apache Drums* (1951), produced by the great producer of 1940s RKO horrors, Val Lewton. *La strada per Fort Alamo* owes almost as much to this Lewton production as to the legend of Philippides. The hero of *Apache Drums*, Sam Leeds (Stephen McNally), is also forced to ride out of town after using his sharp eyes and quick draw to expose a card cheat in a local saloon. In both films, the bodies of white men and women mutilated by Indians are discovered and described. While *Apache Drums* features a character who wears a hat to cover a partial scalping, Bava's film parodies the act of scalping by showing one of Carson's men being forced to sacrifice a lock of hair to provide Bill with a false mustache for their requisition caper. In both films, a group of people must spend an entire night encircled and tormented by the pounding of Indian drums in preparation for a merciless attack, until the "outsider" among them takes it upon himself to make an heroic dash for help.



WARWICK *and Bud comfort Slim ("Kirk Bert" a.k.a. Alberto Cevenini), who has been shot by the vicious Kid Carson.*

The End of an Era

Though it isn't one of his better films, *La strada per Fort Alamo* heralds the end of Bava's classic period. It proved to be his final collaboration with three of his most important co-workers: cameraman Ubaldo Terzano, master editor Mario Serandrei, and assistant director Franco Prosperi. According to Lamberto Bava, "Terzano left because he was fed up with everyone looking at his work and saying that Mario Bava was responsible. He wanted to be accepted as a cameraman in his own right." Sadly, Terzano's move toward independence would not produce the desired result. His most visible later work was as the camera assistant to Luigi Kuveiller on such films as Paul Morrissey's *Flesh for Frankenstein* and *Blood for Dracula* (both 1973), Dario Argento's *Profondo rosso/Deep Red* (1975), and Lucio Fulci's *Lo squartatore di New York/The New York Ripper* (1982). Terzano refused to be interviewed for this book, and evidently continues to nurture the hurt feelings brought about by his

break with Bava. I would have loved the opportunity to tell his story and give his contribution its entire due.

As the storyboarder and lighting director of his own films, Bava was the artist most responsible for the look of his films; however, it is obvious that his films lost a certain standard of quality when Terzano left the Bava squad. Bava may have storyboarded each shot, but Terzano framed them, watched each take unfold through the viewfinder as it was happening, and chose which takes to print. Seldom in Bava's later work will we encounter the kind of slow, insinuating tracking shots that Terzano piloted so capably, and never again will Bava's images be quite as sensuous in their interplay of light and shadow as they were during the tenure of Terzano.

After the success of *Il gattopardo/The Leopard,* Mario Serandrei became Italy's busiest film editor and he made his few remaining films for directors better able to afford him: Francesco Rosi (*Il momenta della verità*), Luchino Visconti (*Vaghe stelle dell'orsa,* 1965), Sergio Corbucci (*L'uomo che ride/The Man Who Laughs*), and Gillo Pontecorvo. Serandrei died unexpectedly of a heart attack in 1966, at the age of 59, while cutting Pontecorvo's *La battaglia di Algeri/The Battle of Algiers.*

Franco Prosperi recalls his last Bava collaboration with distaste: "Mario was useless at making Westerns; he had no talent for it. I disown that movie completely; it was kind of a disaster. Everything started with the idea of a producer, a famous one who later went to jail, and there was another person involved, whom we met at the time of *Ercole al centro della terra*, who—unlike the other guy—we knew had a lot of money because he was backed by then-Cardinal [Giovanni] Montini, who owned SPA Cinematografica, which had also produced Antonioni's *Il grido.* SPA was very important; when Montini became Pope Paolo VI, he shut it down, but it had been one of the most important film companies, run by people from Milan. After *La strada per Fort Alamo*, I went on to do *La baia di Napoli* and other films, and I quit Mario's crew because I was earning more from the Americans. We stayed friends, however, and later, when I directed a film for De Laurentiis—*Io non scappo, fuggo* [1969], starring [Alighiero] Noschese and [Enrico] Montesano—I took on Mario's son, Lamberto, as my assistant director."



A HARROWING *moment as a mother at the Union encampment considers whether or not to murder her own daughter rather than see her fall into the hands of the Osages.*

When Bava lost these invaluable team players, his work could not help but enter into a new period. From this point on, Ubaldo Terzano would be replaced behind the camera by Antonio Rinaldi, a longtime member of the Bava squad as chief electrician. Born in Rome on January 17, 1915, Rinaldi was introduced to the film business by his brother, a boom operator, who hired him to work as an electrician at Cinecittà. In this capacity, he climbed high into the studio rafters, where he operated the lamps recessed in the catwalks and ceilings. Rinaldi first worked with Bava in this capacity on *La donna più bella del mondo/Beautiful But Dangerous* in 1955, whereafter he rose to the role of chief electrician.

The traditional procession in camera teams is to rise from the position of focus puller to camera operator to director of photography; Terzano himself had followed these steps. It is uncommon for a chief electrician to ascend to the position of director of photography, and perhaps unprecedented for one to vault directly to that position—particularly at the belated age of 50. But this arrangement emphasizes the underlying facts that Bava was unwilling, at this point in his career, to start over from scratch with a new head man on his camera team, and that he himself was the true director of photography on his films, regardless of who was credited onscreen as director of photography. Bava drew the storyboards, made all the aesthetic decisions in pre-production and on-set, and approved everything before allowing the camera to turn; Rinaldi communicated the lighting and camera teams in accordance with his director's wishes.

Rinaldi had learned a great deal about the art of lighting from Bava over the years, and he adapted quickly and smoothly to his new role. "He was my mentor, the best director of photography I ever met," he told Alberto Pezzotta in 2004.

With Rinaldi now in charge of the camera unit, the cinematography of Bava's films became less fluid and more mechanical, characterized by an expedient but sometimes injudicious use of the zoom lens—the most-criticized hallmark of Bava's "middle period." With only a couple of exceptions when Bava could not afford the formal services of a D.P., Rinaldi would remain by his side through the filming of *Baron Blood* (1972)—a period of seven years.

Mario Serandrei proved harder to replace, as Bava floundered through a series of editors until finding Carlo Reali, who supervised the cutting of all but two features from the director's final decade. When Reali and Rinaldi worked together, moments resulted that nearly equalled the classic poise of the Serandrei-Terzano period that is synonymous with the very best of Mario Bava. There were still great things ahead.



JAPANESE *poster art.*

Mario Bava's Secret Filmography

Minnesota Clay

WHEN ASKED ABOUT his collaborations with Mario Bava, actor Cameron Mitchell recalled that they worked together on six different films, though their official filmographies include only three. According to Mitchell, another of their secret alliances was *Minnesota Clay*, in which he gives an appealing performance in the unusual role of an aging master gunfighter who must somehow rid his hometown of two opposing gangs though handicapped by incipient blindness.

Minnesota Clay was the first Western directed by Sergio Corbucci, a contributor to the scripts for *Gli ultimi giorni di Pompei* and *Il ladro di Bagdad*, who would mature into an Italian Western specialist second only to Sergio Leone. Corbucci was one of those fellows who increased his chances for advancement in his profession by keeping a lot of irons in the fire. Before *Minnesota Clay* went into production, Corbucci was set to make his directorial debut with *Danza Macabra/Castle of Blood*, based on his original screenplay, but he was forced to withdraw when a previous directorial obligation (1963's *Il figlio di Spartacus/The Slave*, starring Steve Reeves) was suddenly green-lighted. Consequently, he entrusted his horror film to his friend Antonio Margheriti, who had just completed his own first foray into horror with *La vergine di Norimberga/Horror Castle* (1963), starring Christopher Lee and Rosanna Podestà, which he directed as "Anthony M. Dawson."

"[Corbucci and I] were very close friends and often worked together," Margheriti explained. "Sometimes I shot the exteriors of his films, and sometimes he returned the favor on my pictures, so it was natural for me to take over." [1]

Cameron Mitchell's recollections of the *Minnesota Clay* situation were vague—the most he could say was that Bava was "around" to "assist" Corbucci—but the truth can be determined by scanning the available facts. The Italo/Spanish/French co-production was reportedly filmed on location in Spain at Poblado de Manzanos, Torrelaguna, and Manzanares de Real, near Madrid, and at Elios Studios in Rome, by the film's credited cinematographer, José Fernandez Aguayo. By examining the film closely, one can see that very little, if any, of the picture was actually shot in Spain—perhaps the two scenes involving Ortiz (Fernando Sancho) and his gang, but not much else. The bulk of the movie takes place either in or outside the saloon, or in or outside Jonathan's farmhouse, all of which would have been shot at Elios, with the exception of some farmhouse exteriors, such as reverse shots, which could easily have been filmed by rebuilding a farmhouse façade on location in Spain; this would be cheaper, after all, than bringing Sancho and all the other members of Ortiz' gang to Rome. Aguayo would have been in charge of the Spanish photography, but labor laws would have prevented him from shooting any of the Italian footage, so Corbucci would have needed an Italian cameraman for the majority of the shooting. It was exactly the sort of assignment that Mario Bava would have happily accepted, on the stipulations, that he not be credited and that the work was fast.

The look of the film fully supports this explanation, with even the early prison scenes reflecting Bava's technique with their framing, their compositional sense, and their use of zoom and semi-wide-angle (28 or 30mm) lenses. What is even more interesting about *Minnesota Clay* are the ways in which it suggests Bava's involvement in the realms of its scripting and direction. Corbucci certainly could have used a helping hand, as his filmography shows that he spent much of 1964 running back and forth between different movie sets—writing, directing, even co-directing such pictures as *Danza macabra, Massacro del Grande Canyon/Red Pastures* (co-directed with Albert Band) and the Franco and Ciccio comedies *I due mafiosi/The Amazing Dr. G* and *I figli del leopardi/Sons of the Leopard.*



ESTELLA *(Ethel Rojo) confides to Clay (Cameron Mitchell) that Ortiz plans to raid his brother's ranch in search of buried gold.*

Synopsis

The year is 1883, and the place is Drunner Prison—a.k.a. "The Rat Hole"—a forced labor camp in New Mexico, near the border. Eighteen years into a life sentence for murder is Minnesota Clay, reputed to be the world's greatest pistol-shot. He has waited in vain for someone on the outside to step forward to clear his good name. Over the years, he has had to learn to live carefully in prison;

Minnesota Clay

Filmed on location near Madrid and at Elios Studios, Rome
September – October 1964
First released: November 12, 1964
Eastmancolor, 1.85:1, 99 minutes

Production: Ultra Film—Sicilia Cinematografica (Palermo), Jaguar Films (Madrid), Franco London Film (Paris). Producer: Danilo Marciani. Director: Sergio Corbucci. Assistant directors: Romolo Girolami, A. Hurtado. Screenplay: Adriano Bolzoni, Sergio Corbucci and José Gutiérrez Maesso, from a story by Bolzoni. Directors of photography: José Fernandez Aguayo, Mario Bava (uncredited). Camera operator: Mario Mancini. Camera assistant: Simone Zanfroni. Art direction: Carlo Simi. Assistant art director: Francisco Canet. Costume design: Carlo Simi. Hairdresser: Gianna Picchi. Production manager: Faustino Ocaña. Production inspector: Michele Marsala. Production secretary: Arcangelo Picchi. Editor: Franco Fraticelli. Music: Piero Piccioni [CAM]. Sound: Alberto Bartolomei. Distributor: Titanus.

Cameron Mitchell (Minnesota Clay), Georges Rivière (Fox), Fernando Sancho (Ortiz), Alberto Cevenini (Andy), Antonio Casas (Jonathan), Diana Martín (Nancy/Elizabeth), Ethel Rojo (Estella), Anthony Ross [Antonio Rossi] (Scratchy), Nando Poggi (Tubbs), Julio Peña (Lt. Stevens), Joe Kamel (Millicet), with Simón Arriaga, Madeleine Dehek, Patricia Del Frate, Toni Fuentes, Antonio Jiménez Escribano, Alvaro de Luna, José Manuel Martin, Mario Morales, Guillermo Méndez, Gino Pernice, Manuel Peña, José Riesgo, Alfonso Rojas, Pietro Tordi, Carlos Villefranca.

Canada: *Minnesota Clay*, Astral Films
France: *L'homme de Minnesota,* 3/9/66, 90m
Germany: *Minnesota Clay,* 9/7/65, 91m
Spain: *Minnesota Clay,* Izaro Films S.A., 2/22/65
UK: *Minnesota Clay,* Compton Film Distributors, 8/66, 89m
US: *Minnesota Clay,* Harlequin International Pictures, 8/10/66, 89m

he suffers from a degenerative eye disease, and as the prison doctor warns him, "One punch and that will mean night for you." After saving a fellow inmate from drowning, Clay talks to the prison doctor about his condition. During this conversation, Clay spies a poisonous snake preparing to bite Doc and unholsters the doctor's gun to shoot it; he then takes advantage of the weapon in his grip to take Doc hostage, becoming the first prisoner ever to escape "The Rat Hole." A $10,000 reward for his recapture is promptly posted.

After relieving Doc of his horse and the last $40 in his wallet, Clay leaves him at a riverside—returning his gun—and rides away to his hometown of Mesa Encantada. En route, he sees a wagon under attack by three marauding gunmen, who shoot an old man. Two of the men ride away while the third hides in ambush. Thinking quickly, Clay dismounts in time to grab a fallen rifle and shoot his would-be assassin. Surviving the attack are a woman and her black mute servant. She introduces the dead man as the father of Gen. Domingo Ortiz, the leader of a Mexican gang intent on taking over Mesa Encantada—and introducers herself as "Ortiz' woman," Estella. The gunmen were emissaries of Fox, who was hired by Mesa Encantada to protect its people against Ortiz and promptly named himself Sheriff and took over the town for his own evil, profiteering purposes. Mesa Encantada is now known as "Terror Town" because of his methods of intimidating the locals, which include demanding "protection" money from local merchants. In a page taken from John Ford's Stagecoach, Fox is also the man who set up Clay, making it necessary for him to kill the Luke Brothers in self-defense, and who never came forward to testify in his defense—so Clay rides on to Mesa Encantada with a score to settle.

Upon arriving in town, Clay goes to the saloon where he has a tense reunion with Fox. Afterwards, a callow youth named Andy approaches Clay, knowing of his reputation and pleading with him to instruct him in the art of shooting—so that he might help him to save the town from Fox. Clay refuses, saying, "The cemetery is filled with guys who learned to shoot." Fox's men raise hell through the town, frightening a woman's horse and sending her wagon out of control. Clay rides to her rescue and is startled by the resemblance of this young schoolteacher to his late wife, Elizabeth Mullighan. When she refers to the ranch of her uncle Jonathan, Clay realizes that this young woman, Nancy, is his own daughter—not yet born at the time of his arrest. She wears a bracelet adorned with half a medallion, formerly her mother's; Clay owns the other half, which he later gives her as a present, remarking on the lovely music they make when the pieces clink together. After paying a visit to his brother-in-law Jonathan at his ranch, where they are soon joined by Nancy and Andy, several Mexican horsemen arrive to escort Clay to a compulsory meeting with Gen. Ortiz.

Clay demonstrates his marksman abilities to Ortiz' satisfaction, and is given a sack of loot—partly for avenging his father's death, and partly on the condition that he kill Fox and leave the town vulnerable to his takeover. Clay is later told by Estella that Ortiz suspects that Jonathan keeps gold buried on his ranch and plans to raid it; she permits him to escape the encampment, to alert Jonathan, only to kill one of Ortiz' men and steal a fortune in gold herself, pinning both crimes on Clay. Telling Ortiz where he has gone, Estella causes the very raid she anticipated. Clay rides back to the ranch and advises Jonathan to send Andy to Drunner Prison, inform its officers of his whereabouts, and collect the $10,000 reward for his daughter's sake. Meanwhile, in town, Fox's men are distracted from beating up Andy (who has refused to pay for personal "protection") by the arrival of a note from Estella, tipping them off to the coming raid. Ortiz and his army arrive at the farmhouse and set it ablaze with Clay inside, smoking him out. He tries to save the photograph of Elizabeth, but it is ultimately consumed by the fire. Clay is shot in the arm and badly beaten, leaving his vision hanging by a thread. Before he can stab Clay to death, Ortiz is stunned by the arrival of Fox's gang and shot to death by Estella, now intent on joining Fox. They take Clay as a captive, tying him up in a barn.

Fox meets with the businessmen of Mesa Encantada and tells them that he requires an annual protection fee



HIS EYESIGHT *failing, Clay must face a final showdown with longtime enemy Fox.*

1 Peter Blumenstock, "Margheriti—The Wild, Wild Interview," *Video Watchdog* 28, May/June 1995, 48.

of $100,000, the first payment due within twenty-four hours. Estella's expectations of a sexual victory celebration with Fox are quashed when he declines her invitation to "take" her. She retaliates by freeing Clay, then tries to endear herself to Fox by informing him. He doesn't believe her protestations in the matter and forces her to swear her innocence on a Bible. When she dares to commit this blasphemy, Fox shoots her to death.

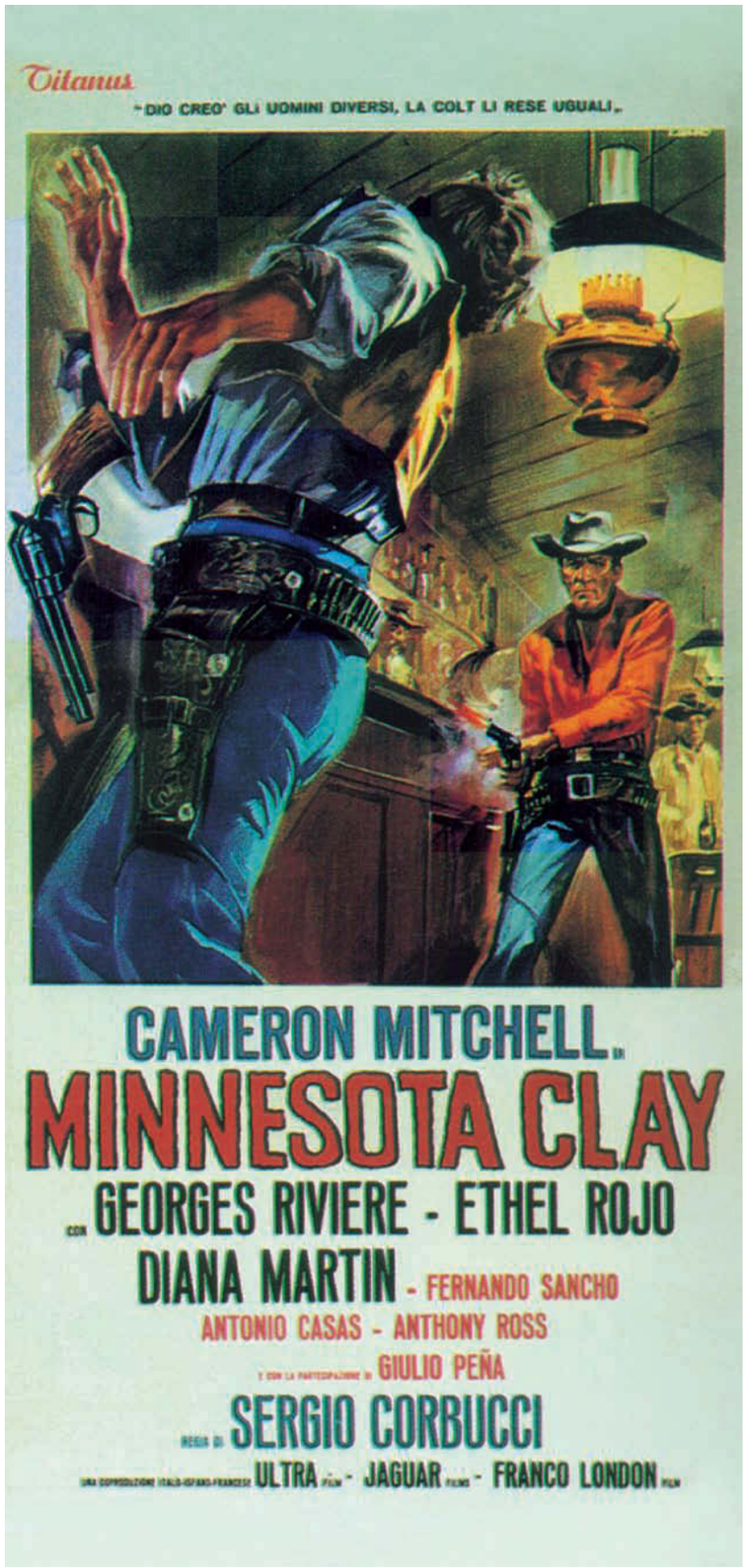
As night descends on Terror Town, Fox's gunmen find their advantage over the nearly blind Clay reduced, and his bullets diminish their number one by one. Ultimately, the contest narrows to Clay and Fox, who abducts Nancy to deflect Clay's attentions and to trick him into shooting her. But, at the last minute, the two pieces of her medallion bracelet make their "beautiful music," and Clay's last bullet finds its way home into Fox. Simultaneously, Fox's gun discharges into Clay, and the two opponents fall to the ground simultaneously. Nancy rushes to Clay and embraces him as he collapses.

In an epilogue found only in European prints, the military guards from Drunner Prison pay Jonathan a large sum of money for ridding the town of Fox and Ortiz. When they ride away, Clay emerges from the ranch house, wearing a pair of glasses, his right arm in a sling. He bids farewell to Nancy and Andy, predicting that they will marry soon, and has a final few words with Jonathan in friendship. Clay gallops off to the top of a nearby hill, where he removes his arm from the sling, removes his glasses, tosses them high in the air, and fires single bullets through both lenses.

Alternately, the English version ends shortly after Clay fires on Fox and falls to the ground. As Nancy embraces him, he confesses the truth of their relationship, instructs her to collect the $10,000 reward on his head, and dies in her arms.

Commentary

Minnesota Clay was the first sign, in the wake of Sergio Leone's *Per un pugno di dollari*, of the coming maturation of the Italian Western. Even moreso than Leone's genre-defining film, *Minnesota Clay* prophesies what the so-called "Spaghetti Western" would become in its peak years, and also the direction that Leone's own work would take; it is an elegy for the heroes of the Old West and for America's lost innocence, as right and wrong become confused, as family ties become lost or obscured by lies and legend, and as local government is usurped by organized crime. The tone is not gritty yet whimsical as in the "Dollars" trilogy, nor operatic, but bittersweet and fatalistic, with a semi-mythic dimension. In its English version, especially, it anticipates by several years the trend of downbeat movie endings that would become increasingly prevalent nearer the end of the decade.



ITALIAN *locandina.*

Clay may be introduced with the all-too-common reputation of "best pistol-shot in the whole world," but his talent never really takes center stage, nor is he congratulated by impressed spectators after demonstrating his prowess, which he does in an offhand, almost unconscious way; in fact, it seems that Clay's Zen-like mastery of his six-shooter is the minimal talent necessary to survive in this violent landscape. *Minnesota Clay* is not a film about ability, but disability—as the hero lives in stoic fear of his deteriorating eyesight and its broader consequences.

Minnesota Clay might have crumbled under the weight of its own brooding aspect, if not for a few moments that seem to have been deliberately included to inject some mild humor. Quite a few of Corbucci's later Westerns incorporated touches of broad, slapstick humor, and a little of this can be seen in the character of Andy, played by Alberto Cevenini—*La strada per Fort Alamo*'s "Kirk Bert." Andy (who resembles Bob Dylan in Sam Peckinpah's *Pat Garrett and Billy the Kid*, 1973) is a young man of good heart and wholesome intentions, but he is initially portrayed as something very close to an imbecile; he leaps, fully clothed, into a water trough to illustrate how impressed he is by Clay's prowess with a six-shooter, and is so infatuated with Nancy that he trips over his own two feet in front of her, then yelps out to her uncle, "Whaddya know? I fell for her!"—yet he proves himself a hero, running defenseless

through the night to summon the cavalry, as Bud Mannerly did in *La strada per Fort Alamo*. Another comic touch occurs with Clay's first entrance into the saloon at Mesa Encantada, where he sidles up to the bar and—like Sid Caesar in a *Your Show of Shows* skit—orders a glass of milk. (Mitchell definitely says "milk" onscreen, but the Italian dubbers didn't get the joke and so looped Clay's order as "acqua" instead.) All of the film's saloon interiors and exteriors were shot in Rome at Elios Studios, so Bava would have been behind the camera for this scene, and it is a joke he would "milk" again in *Ringo del Nebraska/Savage Gringo* (1966), which he co-directed with Antonio Román.

Bava's contributions to the film's cinematography are most apparent in a night scene outside the saloon, where Andy is shown being beaten by Fox's right hand man, Scratchy, for "not paying up." Inside, Fox is putting the squeeze on some local merchants for a preposterously high, weekly "protection" fee, and on the sound of a connecting punch, the scene cuts outside to a low-angle shot of Andy falling backward into the dust directly in front of the lens. In terms of lighting, camera position, and the crisp alacrity of the action within the composition, the shot is almost identical to a shot from the bank robbery scene of *La strada per Fort Alamo*. The scene—which ends with Fox reading a note alerting him to Ortiz' coming raid on the Mullighan ranch and Andy scrambling away to tell Clay—is also revealing in its shadow-rich, expressionistic lighting and inventive use of color gels, particularly the radiant honey-colored light haloing the two lanterns hanging on either side of the saloon doors.

Another saloon shakedown scene follows fifteen minutes farther on, as Fox informs the businessmen of Mesa Encantada of his $100,000 demand, followed by his upstairs meeting with Estella, where he rejects her invitation to "take" her, reasoning that "One day you'll run into a young chap smarter and more interesting than old Fox, and Ortiz and I will come to the same end." The lighting of this scene, calling for a mood of complicity, foreshadows the look of a similarly themed scene between Fabienne Dalí and Max Lawrence (Luciano Catenacci) in Bava's 1966 film *Operazione paura/Kill, Baby . . . Kill!*

But it is during the final showdown between the nearly blind Clay and Fox and his gunmen that Bava's presence is most richly felt. Here, the night streets are a wilderness of color and shadow, buckshot with random splashes of amber, red, and green; the silhouette of a wagon wheel looms on a brick wall like a giant spider web; Clay is seen reloading his gun in the foreground of a deep focus shot, visible to us but not to Scratchy, who stands only a few steps away from him, blinded by the night; and then we cut back inside as guns are heard blasting without, Fox looking up from his ongoing game of Solitaire to see Scratchy walking zombie-like across the floor, sidling up to the bar, raising a shotglass to his lips and falling down dead—a scene that recalls another that Bava would stage in his next feature, *Terrore nello spazio/Planet of the Vampires,* as the captain of a spaceship spies on a fellow crew member walking across the room with a suspicious, corpse-like gait. The occasional subjective shots that bend and blur the marauding shapes perceived by Clay anticipate the distorted reflections of faces on metal walls as also seen in *Terrore nello spazio.*

Later, when Clay hides in a darkened storage shed from the stalking Fox, everything about this cat-and-mouse game recalls the *mise-en-scène* of the antiques store sequence from *Sei donne per l'assassino*, with the stakes of life and death played against a backdrop of material antiquities (bottles, rope, wagon wheels, etc.), while the quality of the frost on the windows anticipates atmospheric touches that would receive their definitive statement in *Operazione paura.*

Even more fascinating, from a Bavian perspective, are those aspects of *Minnesota Clay* which echo themes, as well as visual reinforcements, remembered from earlier Bava films. The most significant of these are Mesa Encantada's deterioration from a safe community into a den of lawlessness (the English dub actually nicknames it "Terror Town"), and the resemblance of Nancy to Elizabeth (revealing her as Clay's daughter), which is further emphasized by the separate interlocking pieces of the lockets carried by Clay and Nancy, which echo the regal birthmarks shared by Erik and Iron in *Gli invasori.* Each of these additions to the script is made in the context of short, minor, detached shots or scenes that could easily have been added by Bava after the bulk of the film had been shot, enriching its tapestry immeasurably without contradicting or otherwise disturbing any of Corbucci's original intentions. The reference to "Terror Town" is spoken offscreen by Andy; without his words, the scene simply posits him and Clay as witnesses to a routine shoot-'em-up, but with his words providing a running commentary, the scene becomes a compact but affecting document of a once-great town's downfall into violence and vice. Clay's visit to Elizabeth's grave immediately precedes his arrival in town, yet when he first comes face-to-face with Nancy, after halting her runaway carriage, there is nothing in his expression to underscore her supposed resemblance to Elizabeth; that shot comes earlier, back in town, in another fleeting insert that could easily have been shot days or weeks after the surrounding footage. (It is also a shot that makes instinctive, rather than logical, sense, because a man with Clay's deteriorated eyesight would not be able to recognize Nancy from such a distance.) With a minimum of footage, this material brings a wealth of backstory to *Minnesota Clay,* giving it an emotional resonance it would not otherwise have.

Minnesota Clay was one of the first Italian Westerns released in Rome after the surprise success of *Per un pugno di dollari,* and it reaped the benefits of that distinction, earning a respectable 400 million *lire* [$249.000] in its initial playdates—substantially less than Leone's 3 billion *lire* boxoffice take, but more than twice as much as Bava's own *La strada per Fort Alamo.* It was subsequently sold to Spain and Germany, where Westerns were already big, but sales to English-speaking territories were not immediately forthcoming, despite the fact that nearly the entire cast had spoken their lines in English.

The film was dubbed into English in Rome, with Cameron Mitchell dubbing not only his own performance, but those of Georges Rivière (Southern accent) and Antonio Casas (New England accent), as well. There is probably no way of confirming it, but the actor who dubbed the performance of Fernando Sancho sounds remarkably like Anthony Quinn, who incidentally was in Italy at the time making *Marco the Magnificent* (1965). The rest of the dubbing is fairly atrocious, with Diana Martín's performance suffering particularly as a result.

Minnesota Clay was eventually acquired for American and British release in 1966 and 1967, respectively, after the first two "Dollars" films had finally shown their mettle in the marketplace. In America, it was acquired by Harlequin International Pictures, a fledgling distribution outfit owned by Tommy Noonan, a bespectacled light comedian best remembered for appearing with Jayne Mansfield in her controversial "nudie cutie" *Promises! Promises!* (1963), which he also produced. After distributing only a few films, Noonan—who took a presentational credit on the US release of *Minnesota Clay*—succumbed to brain cancer in April 1968, at the age of 45.

After Noonan's death, *Minnesota Clay* effectively disappeared in the United States after a few local television playdates, becoming one of the hardest-to-see Italian Westerns. In 2002, it became available on Japanese DVD, as part of Imagica's "Macaroni Western Library," in an attractive widescreen presentation that included a choice of Italian or English soundtrack, as well as the Italian coda sequence, never before seen outside of Italy. Though the style of this coda is rather straightforward, the final shot of Clay riding away, with his shot-through spectacles at rest on the ground, is palpably the work of Bava in its ironic message and clever use of foregrounded information.



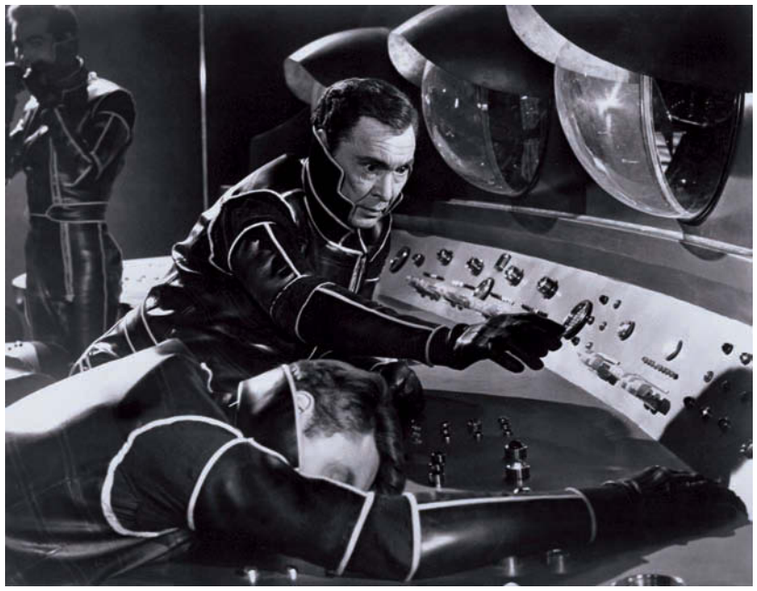


TERRORE NELLO SPAZIO

Planet of the Vampires

MARIO BAVA had been responsible for the first serious Italian science fiction film, *La morte viene dallo spazio,* in 1958, but that initial work was too earthbound and documentary-like to excite audiences or successfully establish a new Italian genre of filmmaking. Overlooking an intermediary science fiction comedy (*Totò nella luna,* 1958), Italy's next attempt at *fantascienza*—Antonio Margheriti's color space opera *Space-Men/Assignment Outer Space* (1960), made in the semi-realistic manner of George Pal's *Destination Moon* (1950)—proved far less successful, earning only 41 million *lire* [$26,000], one-fourth the earnings of Bava's ground-breaker.

CAPT. MARK MARKARY *(Barry Sullivan) is trapped in a derelict spacecraft occupied by the remains of an extinct alien race in TERRORE NELLO SPAZIO.*



MARK *tries to regain control of the Argos when it is caught in the powerful gravity field of an unknown planet.*

Regardless of his film's commercial disappointment, Margheriti refused to abandon the genre and was tenacious in his efforts to corner the Italian science fiction market. He went on to make *Il pianeta degli uomini spenti/Battle of the Worlds* (1961) starring Claude Rains; in hindsight a well-made and occasionally poetic film, it was largely regarded at the time as a sad waste of Rains, who made only a few more films (including *Lawrence of Arabia* and *The Greatest Story Ever Told*) before his death in 1967. In 1965, Margheriti directed an entire quartet of science fiction movies: *I criminali della galassia/Wild, Wild Planet, I diafanoidi vengono da Marte/War of the Planets, Il pianeta errante/Planet on the Prowl*, and *La morte viene dal pianeta Aytin/Snow Devils*. Filmed for Italian television, where they were shown in black-and-white, all four of these colorful films won the approval of an international theatrical release through Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer. These pulpy, imaginative adventures anticipated *Star Trek* by chronicling the serial adventures of the crew of the starship "Gamma I." Although their campy qualities have helped them to acquire a cult following in recent years, Margheriti's Gamma I films were not enthusiastically received at the time of their original release.

It was Mario Bava's next feature, *Terrore nello spazio*, that put Italian science fiction cinema on the map. Though not greeted with much enthusiasm in its homeland, it became a major export success, particularly in United States where it was released by American International Pictures as *Planet of the Vampires* on a double-bill with Daniel Haller's H. P. Lovecraft adaptation, *Die, Monster, Die!* (based on "The Colour Out of Space"). Lovecraft's original title would have ideal for Bava's film—a Technicolor phantasmagoria of color and shadow that hinted at the potential horrors that might lurk in the black void of space, and fretted over the vulnerable solitude of those pioneers venturing into it. It brilliantly reinvented the other worlds available to science fiction as a new kind of haunted house for the generation raised on televised lift-offs from Cape Canaveral—one as vast as the universe itself.

Thanks to AIP's involvement in the picture, it received an unusual amount of publicity during all stages of production. Around the same time, Italian producers—long resistant to science fiction—began to fund a number of other Italian science fiction films, the most famous example being Elio Petri's *La decima vittima/The 10th Victim* (1965)—a wild adaptation of Robert Sheckley's sci-fi short story "The Seventh Victim," starring Marcello Mastroianni and Ursula Andress.[1] However, the most lasting legacy of *Terrore nello spazio* has been its influence on some of the most important science fiction blockbusters of our time, notably Ridley Scott's *Alien* (1979), which was greeted by *Cinefantastique* magazine at the time of its release as a rip-off fusion of Bava's film and Edward L. Cahn's *It! The Terror From Beyond Space* (1958). *Alien* itself became one of the most widely imitated of science fiction films, and filtered through it—and experienced more directly, via its recent release on DVD—the ideas put forth by *Terrore nello spazio* continue to influence filmmakers and inspire the genre today, as witnessed by such films as David Twohy's *Pitch Black* (2000) and Brian De Palma's *Mission to Mars* (2001).

Synopsis

Two spaceships—the Argos and the Galliot—have been sent to investigate a mysterious pulse signal which has been emanating from the uninhabited planet Aura for the past two years. The two ships communicate, and Capt. Salas of the Galliot offers to land first; Capt. Mark Markary of the Argos agrees. Once the Galliot lands below the thick fog of Aura, the insistent signal comes to a complete stop and all communication from the Galliot ceases.

Terrore nello spazio

"Terror in Space"
Filmed at Cinecittà
22 April – June 1965
First released: September 15, 1965
Technicolor, 1.66:1 and 1.85:1(spfx only), 88 minutes

Production: Italian International (Rome), American International Pictures (US), Castilla Cooperativa Cinematográfica (Madrid). Producer: Fulvio Lucisano. Director: Mario Bava. Assistant directors: Serena Canevari, Manuel San Roman. Assistant to the director: Lamberto Bava. Screenplay: Ib Melchior, Alberto Bevilacqua, Callisto Cosulich, Antonio Román, Mario Bava, Rafael J. Salvia. Based on the story "Una notte di 21 ore" ("One Night of 21 Hours") by Renato Pestriniero. Director of photography: Antonio Rinaldi. Camera operator: Saverio Diamanti. Assistant operator: Giorgio Aureli. Art direction: Giorgio Giovannini. Special effects: Mario Bava (uncredited). Special models: Carlo Rambaldi (uncredited). Technical advisor: Eugenio Bava (uncredited). Electronic effects: Paolo Ketoff. Wardrobe: Gabriele Mayer. Makeup: Amato Garbini, Giancarlo del Brocco. Hairdresser: Gabriella Borelli. Shoes: Pompei. Weapons: Esplovit—G. Stacchini. Production supervisor: Giancarlo Sambucini. Production secretaries: Lucio Romeo CSC, Rosalba Scavia. Editors: Antonio Gimeno, Romana Fortini. Music: Gino Marinuzzi Jr., Antonio Perez Olca (Spanish version only). Sound: Mario Ronchetti. Boom operator: Eugenio Fiore. Distributor: Sidis.

Barry Sullivan (Capt. Mark Markary), Norma Bengell (Sonya), Angel Aranda (Wess), Evi Marandi (Tiona), Fernando Villeni (Dr. Karan), Massimo Righi (Capt. Salas), Ivan Rassimov (Carter), Rico Boido (Keir), Mario Morales (Eldon), Stelio Candelli (Brad), Kirk Bert [Alberto Cevenini], CSC (Toby), Franco Andrei, Giuseppe Mattei (Brent, uncredited).

Additional US credits: Screenplay: Ib Melchior and Louis M. Heyward. Associate producer: Salvatore Billitteri. Sound recording: Titra Sound Corporation, New York. Color prints by Pathé. Voice artists: Barry Sullivan (Capt. Mark Markary), Peter Fernandez (Wess). Music: Kendall Schmidt (Thorn-EMI Video and Orion Home Video versions only).

Canada: *Planet of the Vampires*, Astral Films, 1967
France: *La Planète des Vampires*, 3/29/95, TV premiere
Germany: *Planet der Vampire*, Mercator Film Verleih (35 mm), 1/17/69, 86m, Atlas (16 mm); *Schrecken im Weltall*, "Terror in Space," TV
Mexico: *El Planeta de los Vampiros*, Paramount Pictures, 1967
Spain: *Terror en el Espacio*, "Terror in Outer Space," C.B. Films, 4/10/66, 88m. Reissue: Nou Films, S.A, 1978
UK: *Planet of the Vampires*, Anglo-Amalgamated via Warner Pathé Ltd., 4/68, 86m 28s, Certificate "X," passed with no cuts
US: *Planet of the Vampires*, American International Pictures, 10/27/65, "Colorscope" [Pathé Color], 87m. AIP-TV: *The Demon Planet*

Mark (whose brother Toby is aboard the Galliot on his first space mission) decides to land the Argos as well, but the craft's natural descent is suddenly and powerfully overridden by an immense gravitational force, far stronger than Aura's natural pull. Mark manages to save the Argos and effect a safe landing, but as soon as the smoke clears, he is physically attacked by fellow crew members Sonya and Brent, who have been possessed of some violent controlling force after being knocked unconscious by the hard landing. Panicking, the ship's doctor, Dr. Karen, flees the Argos without a helmet and discovers the Auran atmosphere to be quite breathable. He is calmed by Mark and Wess, the second-in-command, and the three of them marvel at the eerie landscape of Aura, a frontier of strange luminescent rocks and arabesques of fog. Once everyone is back in their right mind, Mark calls for an exploratory patrol to locate the Galliot.

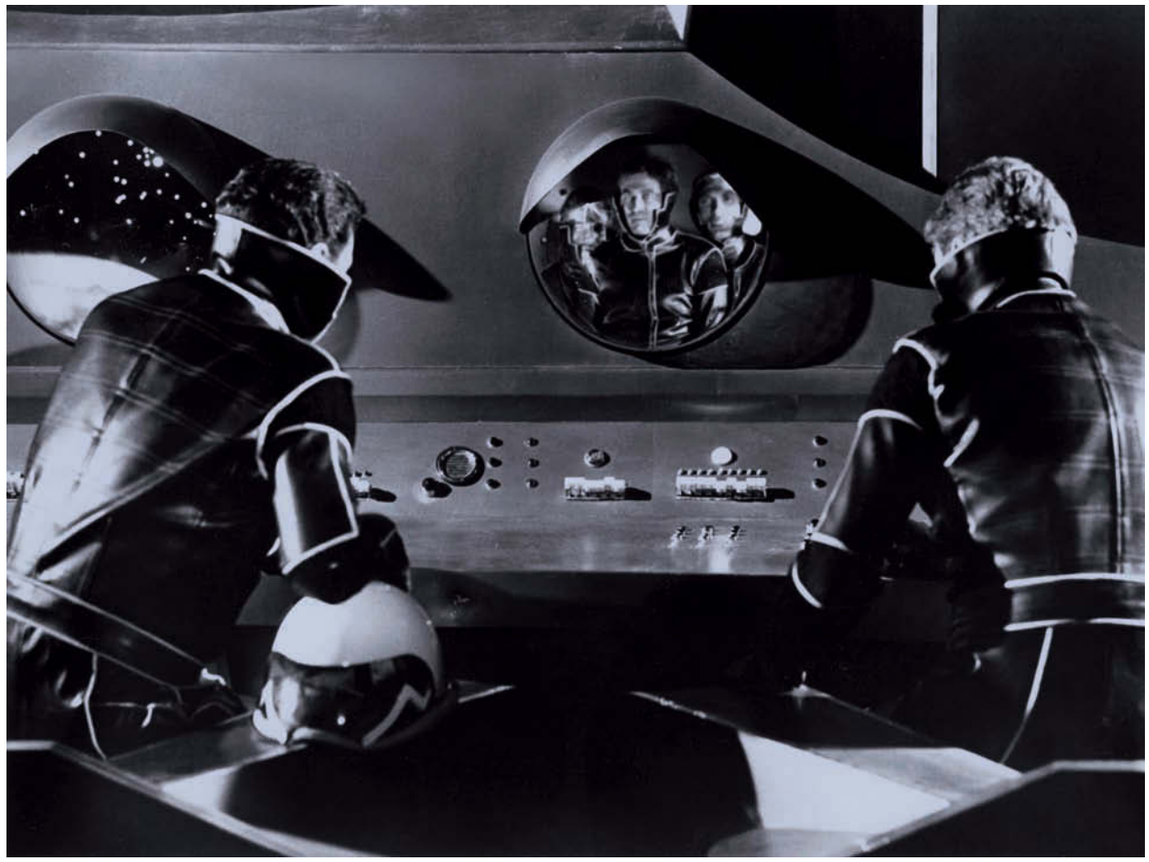
The Galliot is soon found. Lying on the ground outside the ship are two officers who have literally fought to the death, their bloody faces beaten to pulp, their bodies still locked in combat. Looking through a bulkhead window into the control room, Mark and his crew see their Galliot counterparts arrayed on the floor, dead and disfigured. Inside the ship, Wess estimates that the ship's meteor rejector is damaged beyond repair. The Galliot will never fly again—nor will its crew. With the exception of Capt. Salas and his second-in-command, Keir, the bodies of the Galliot crew are all accounted-for and promptly buried, placed under headstones improvised from the twisted wreckage of their ship.

The stress of the forced landing has damaged the Argos, which must remain stranded on Aura until repairs are effected—if they can be effected. After ordering his crew to get some much-needed sleep, Markary begins to record a confession of his own fears into the ship's log, but he is interrupted by the spectacle of Wess, creeping into his quarters and crossing the room with a bizarre, halting, unbalanced gait. Mark follows him to the control room, where he begins to sabotage the Argos' meteor rejector. When Mark interferes, Wess snaps out of it—he claims he knew what he was doing, but was powerless to stop himself. Intuiting that everyone aboard may be susceptible to possession when they lose consciousness, Mark orders that no one should sleep without being watched over by someone else.

As the night passes, the planet's ubiquitous fog begins to move mysteriously, as if possessed by a will of its own. Then, unbeknownst to anyone, the improvised graves of the Galliot crew open from within, their dead bodies rising and tearing themselves free of their polythene shrouds. Meanwhile, Carter and Burt are standing on guard outside the Argos when Carter notices out of the corner of his eye a series of flashing colored lights, visible only when viewed indirectly, as if originating from another dimension. He reports his finding to Mark, who takes the report quite seriously. Burt is suddenly nowhere nearby, and Mark and Carter follow his cries to find him near death, one side of his face horribly disfigured. When Mark asks him who did this, Burt replies with his dying words, "Capt. Salas"—the captain of the Galliot!

In search of tangible answers, Mark, Sonya, and Carter venture out into the Auran landscape, where Sonya spies something shining in the distance. Mark sees it, too. ("Finally! There's something that doesn't disappear when I look straight at it!") They trace the glimmer to the wreckage of an ancient spacecraft, its hull scarred and pitted by the centuries, where the enormous skeleton of an alien pilot lay half-buried in the ground. With Carter left to stand guard outside, Mark and Sonya enter the spacecraft, where they are dazzled by room after room of incomprehensible alien technology. As they enter another area, the portal slams shut behind them and they find themselves trapped in a chamber where second gigantic alien skeleton sits at a large control station, as though in a position of authority. After literally shocking themselves with a small glowing orb that Mark speculates might be an electric torch, they trigger a recording device and the chamber is filled with the echoes of a long-dead alien language. Then, as though triggered by their bungling about, a vent in the wall begins to suck all the air out of the room. On instinct, Mark forces himself to withstand the shock of the orb and uses it to reopen the portal.

Back at the Argos, Tiona—another female officer—tends to the corpse of Burt, which awakens and escapes. The excitement over this mystery is suddenly tempered by the sighting of Capt. Salas and Keir, making their way across the desolate landscape toward the Argos! Upon their arrival, Mark



MARK *communicates with the crew of the Galliot. The "televised" image was created live on-set by placing the actors behind the set front with special lighting.*

1 These two films were actually somewhat contemporaneous, as *La decima vittima* was released in Rome in December 1965, only three months after *Terrore nello spazio*.

interrogates both men, who look much worse than tired and hungry. Salas explains that they were knocked unconscious by the landing and were out of commission until they regained consciousness. Mark accepts them and orders them to bed, one standing watch over the other as he sleeps. A short time later, Tiona reports to Mark that neither of the Galliot men are in their bunks. They are quickly traced to the equipment room, where they are found sabotaging the meteor rejector! In the ensuing scuffle, Salas' coat opens, revealing a mortally ravaged chest. He admits that he is not Salas, but an Auran spirit which has taken refuge in Salas' body. He explains that his disembodied race needs to flee this exhausted planet and require living bodies as hosts; they are inhabiting the dead only to communicate. Salas then proposes "sharing" the bodies of the Argos crew. When Mark replies that everyone on his crew would be willing to die to protect their own race, Salas falls dead to the ground. In the meantime, Keir has absconded with the meteor rejector and taken it back to the Galliot, where it will enable its crew of living dead to return to the crew's home planet to stage a more expansive invasion.

Mark and the others arm themselves with plutonium bombs and traverse the treacherous landscape to the Galliot. They trap much of its zombie crew behind locked bulkheads while making off with the stolen meteor rejector, but are pursued by others outside. In the battle between the living and the dead, all the Argos crew are killed and left behind except Mark, Sonya, and Wess. As the Galliot's final explosion lights up the horizon, the Argos blasts off into space.

Wess has made the necessary repairs to the ship and reinstalled the meteor rejector, but he is later awakened from his sleep by the stealthy creepings of Mark, whom he intuits is secretly possessed by an Auran and means to harm him. He takes his speculations to Sonya, who agrees to go with him and confront Mark with his suspicions. When the three of them are together in the same room, Sonya turns her gun on Wess and admits that she, too, is possessed. In order to save his planet from their invasion, Wess races to the equipment room and destroys the meteor rejector, electrocuting himself in the process.



AFTER *landing on Aura, the crew of the Galliot are discovered dead—murdered by each other.*

Unable now to return to their planned destination, Mark and Sonya decide to land on the nearest world—the third planet from the sun, our Earth. Malevolently surveying the "puny" skyscrapers of New York City from deep space, they chortle over the primitivism of the planet and hope its people will not put up too much resistance to their arrival, for their own sake.

Una notte di 21 ore

It is safe to assume that Bava's recent, uncharacteristic excursions into the Old West left him aching for a return to the fantastic. One of the books that Bava consulted during this period for possible material was a 1963 science fiction anthology titled *Interplanet No. 3*. It was in this collection, compiled from the best Italian science fiction short stories of recent years, that Bava discovered



MARK *and Wess (Angel Aranda) explore the mist-laden terrain of planet Aura.*

an atmospheric, impressionistic story entitled *"Una notte di 21 ore"* ("One Night of 21 Hours") by Renato Pestriniero.

One of Italy's "first generation" science fiction writers, Pestriniero was born on July 9, 1933, in Venice. Asked to explain how he arrived at what was then an unorthodox career for an Italian, Pestriniero explains: "I have always been interested in everything concerning the sky and space. As a result, I first specialized in the aviation field and then in astronautic development, but I had a great interest also in writing. During my military service (Air Force, of course!) I wrote my first science fiction stories."

He published his first story in 1958, in the pages of *Oltre il Cielo* (literally "Beyond the Sky"), a tabloid-sized journal divided into two sections, devoted respectively to science fact and science fiction; it ran for 155 issues, from 1957–1970. His earliest stories were published under the pseudonym "Pi Erre"—based on the Italian pronunciation of his initials when reversed—in order to keep his writing hobby separate from his professional career in the Venetian branch of an international import/export firm. "Science fiction was my hobby," he admits, "but a very important one. All of my free time was devoted to writing science fiction."

Pestriniero describes his personal struggle, and the overview of his work as a science fiction novelist: "You probably don't know how hard it was for an Italian SF writer to be published [in those days]. As soon as American science fiction began to reach Italy, the main publishers considered the material coming from the States as the only acceptable kind, and they refused any story or novel written by Italians, chiefly because our works reflected our classical roots; the humanistic side was more present than the technological gadgets found in space operas. In my opinion, it was more interesting to speak about the psychological effects on man, as a result of his impact with technology and the unknown, instead of wars against green Martians or other fantastic alien beings. This point of view represents the largest part of my SF production. I'm more and more convinced that science fiction, particularly social science fiction, is the best way to investigate and reflect any moral, ethical, religious, political, and psychological situation of the common man, today and tomorrow—his difficulties in facing and overcoming the gaps between his knowledge, his normal way of life, and the negative sides of the technological fallout."





THE COVER *of the Italian science magazine in which Renato Pestriniero's source story first appeared, and the opening page of that story.*

Once Pestriniero felt confident that his stories were being well-received, he began publishing under his own name. In his 40-plus year career, he has written several novels, all in the *fantascienza* genre—including *Quanti quadri* ("Many Pictures," 1972), *Il villaggio incantato* ("The Bewitched Village," 1982, co-written with American author A. E. van Vogt), *Le torri del Eden* ("The Tower of Eden," 1983), and *Una voce dal futuro* ("A Voice From the Future," 1996)—and over 150 short stories, which have been collected and anthologized in many different languages. He has also published his own genre magazine, *Dimensione cosmica.* He is married and has one daughter, and continues to live in his birthplace of Venice.

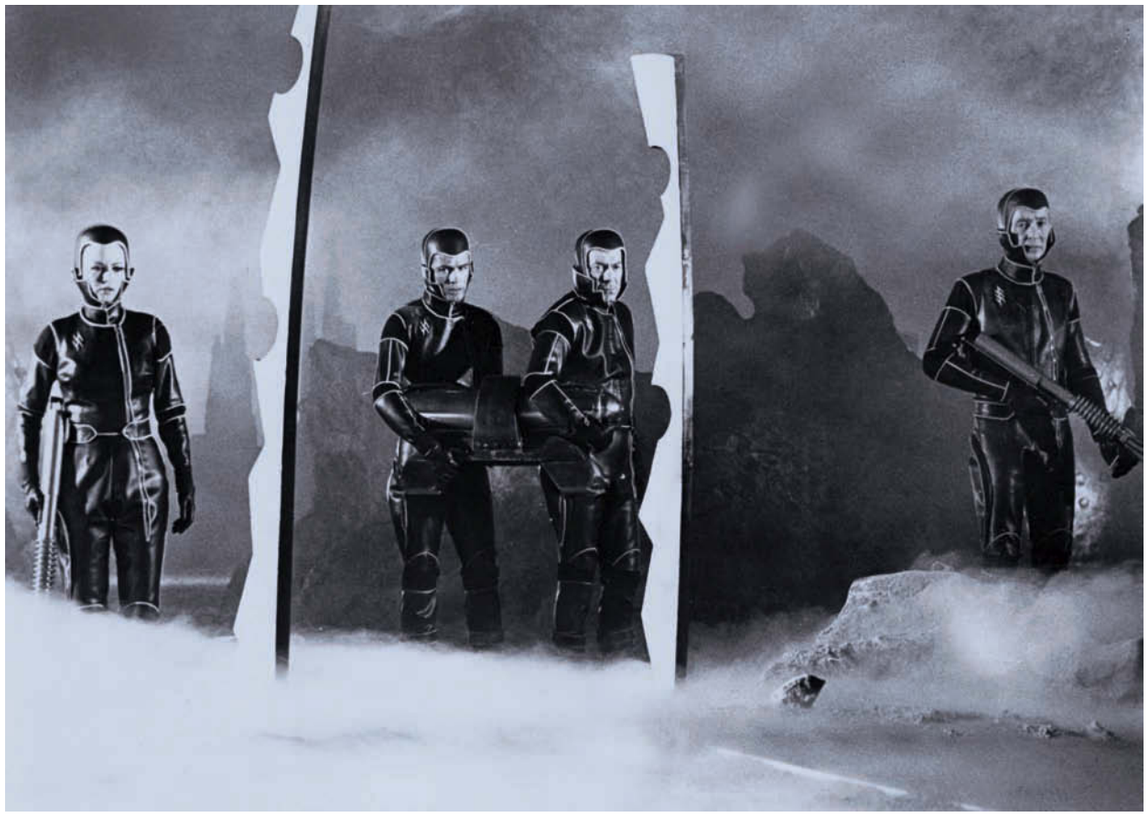
"Una notte di 21 ore" was originally published in the June 1–15, 1960 edition of *Oltre il Cielo.* It tells the story of the crew of the starship Vega, which lands on the surface of a gray, barren planet with three moons, following the crash of its companion ship, the Orion, on its surface. One of the Vega crewmen, Dudley Hustin, loses his brother Peter in the crash, along with four others. The Vega's captain, Pat Wheaver, supervises the salvaging of materials from the wreckage and notices among his crew "the nervous, furtive glances toward the alien sky." In a passage that was certain to captivate Bava's imagination, Pat ponders their emotions: "Millions of years have passed since Man was born, and with his capacity and ingenuity he has dominated all of the known universe. But leave Man alone in an abandoned house, alone and at night, and he will find himself completely vulnerable to the assaults of a thousand imagined enemies: incubi, the fear of the unknown . . . Every few minutes the men would raise their eyes toward the reddish spheres above them, lower them to the grey sands surrounding, and listen deep into the immutable silence of the planet. Once again, they were all locked in an abandoned house, alone and in the dark, surrounded by the unknown."

The crew of the Orion are extracted—in whole or in part—from the wreckage and grimly buried in the alien soil, with burned and twisted fragments of the ship serving as grave markers. Pat Wheaver and his men are concerned about their own safety because no single ship has returned to Earth from such a distance with their crew intact, and only one has made it back at all. Pat determines to take as much usable material from the Orion as possible and leave the planet the next morning. First, the crew must endure an alien night lasting twenty-one Earth hours, so Pat assigns a night watch to be shared by four crewmen: Dudley Hustin, Lorry Anderson, Cliff Donovan, and finally, Eb Doyle. The men initially rebel, complaining that the environment is too empty and monotonous to contain any dangers, and also arguing that it is very unlikely they will survive the return flight, but Pat stands firm and insists that they collectively live out their patrol according to the rule book.

During Dudley's watch, after the descent of the first moon, the alien environment begins to thicken with fog. Plagued by mounting fears of the unknown, Dudley takes a few tentative steps into the fog and hears the sound of shifting sand . . . Aboard the Vega, Pat Wheaver cannot sleep. Hearing a noise in the corridor, he sees Lorry Anderson, apparently sleepwalking toward the navigation room. He follows at a distance and sees Lorry moving stiltedly toward the ship's controls, like a puppet being manipulated by an outside force, his face "showing signs of a desperate internal struggle, only to change unexpectedly to a serene expression of happiness." Pat decides to wake him, but is startled by the sudden arrival of Eb Doyle, also sleep-walking. To Pat's astonishment, Eb opens a toolbox, removes a heavy wrench, and uses it to pummel the ship's radio apparatus. Pat screams to awaken both men, neither of whom once roused have any idea of their recent actions. Unable to absorb the truth of the damage he has caused, Eb faints.

When Lorry and Cliff trade shifts during the night watch, only two more hours of night remain. The two men sit together, talking, and ponder what has transpired aboard the Vega, and whether the absence of a sun in this alien sky is responsible for accelerating the crew's feelings of fear and dread. As they talk, the sky grows redder.

Inside the ship, Pat prepares to get some sleep when he is approached by Dudley, who explains that he heard strange noises and saw shadows during his turn on watch. "I couldn't see





AFTER *the Galliot dead have been buried by the crew of the Argos, they claw their way free of their shrouds, inhabited by the disembodied spirits of ancient Aurans.*

any details because of the fog," he says of the shadows, "but they seemed to be humanoid shapes. I saw them twice; they were approaching my watch station. I called out to them, but no answer came. I just heard a sort of laugh, as though someone or something was chuckling out of contentment." Dudley explains that he would have kept the whole thing to himself, written it off as an hallucination, if not for the earlier incident on board the Vega. As Pat ruminates on the story, Dudley confesses one more, withheld detail. One of the shadows resembled his dead brother, Peter.

At this, Cliff's voice bursts through the ship's speakers from his watch station—it sounds like Cliff, but also not like Cliff. He is in hysterics, stammering about how he and Lorry were besieged by phantoms, ghosts, and spirits in the likeness of the Orion crew. "Don't you understand, Pat?" he cries. "All of our friends were there in front of us, all of them dead, just as we pulled them out of the wreckage! Vasco Ramirez had only half of his head, and his body was torn to pieces . . . Peter missing an arm . . . They were all covered in blood . . ." Pat inquires as to Lorry's whereabouts and Cliff confesses that he fled the scene in fear, leaving his partner behind "with an unimaginable expression on his face."

In search of answers, or at least confirmation, Pat and Eb race to the burial site where they laid five of the Orion crew to rest. To their horror, the plots are indeed empty, and they are startled by sheets of free-floating plastic, the shrouds peeled off by the reanimated dead.

Pat and Eb return to the Vega and await word from Cliff and Dudley, but none comes. Instead, through one of the ship's windows, they watch in horror as the brightening, reddening fogscape is illuminated to reveal all the missing crew of the Vega and the Orion—all "holding each other's hands and dancing, shouting with merriment; all as happy as children playing Hide and Seek." Dudley is with

them, a bullet wound in the center of his forehead. Cliff and Lorry also appear to have been mortally wounded. Pat overcomes his terror long enough to explain his theory, that something on this planet that "acts on the human psyche and removes the inhibitory Ego, letting the Id rise to full control of the mind," even when the body has been incapacitated—in sleep, or even in death. "After death," he supposes, "this mysterious force finds a free field to recall the Monsters of the Id to the surface. I don't think our friends will ever die completely."

Unable to cope with the scene any longer, both Pat and Eb cradle their heads in their hands and succumb to sleep. Pat awakens later to find Eb missing and much of the Vega's interior wrecked, as though torn apart by some childlike, exuberant display of glee. "Eb, too," he realizes; "now I am the last."

Pat takes a gun from the ship's armory and goes outside, entering into the thick, red fog. He begins to see the dancing shadows of the dead through the haze, and the nearer he comes, they slow to a receptive halt.

"Wait, friends," the captain says. "I'll be with you in a minute."

A shot echoes across the alien desert. Joyous shouts sound from the fog, and their shadows begin to dance, like those of children, once again around the fallen body of Pat Wheaver. Another shadow joins their merry procession as the light of a white sun peeks over the edge of the horizon.

With its descriptions of a space crew being overtaken by a controlling alien presence, *"Una notte di 21 ore"* would appear to be influenced by John W. Campbell's novel *Who Goes There?* (the basis of Howard Hawks' 1951 production *The Thing From Another World*)—and likewise, by MGM's classic film *Forbidden Planet* (1956) in its evocation of a space patrol that falls prey to an invisible menace related to the subconscious Id. Yet Renato Pestriniero insists: "I did not base my story on other works. I have read the titles you've mentioned, but only successively." He also points out that his psychological approach to science fiction predated by two years J. G. Ballard's groundbreaking 1962 essay "Which Way to Inner Space?" which proposed a more humanistic and psychological approach to the genre.

He explains his motivations in writing the story: "I've always been attracted to human nature and, above all, what happens when a man encounters the *perturbante,* the *unheimliche,* which represents—according to Sigmund Freud—all that cannot be revealed. I imagined a group of highly specialized men landing on an unidentified, foggy planet where a mysterious and invisible power drew out their true, original nature, but only after they succeeded in freeing themselves of their material life." He argues against any interpretation that a childlike Evil triumphs in his story. "I didn't represent evil when the crew people, after their material deaths, are dancing like children. They represent freedom from materialism and joy of spirit. And a pure joy belongs only to children, who are not yet contaminated by the world's problems. The crew find their way back to infancy."

It is easy to see why Mario Bava was so attracted to this material. First of all, in his story, Pestriniero the author puts his finger squarely on the fusion point between science fiction and horror—fear of the unknown, which could be multiplied a million-fold in the boundless void of outer space—and he frankly analogized the barren landscape of his alien planet to the darkest corners of a haunted house. Also, Pestriniero's descriptions of the planet were extremely limited and non-descript, which may have helped Bava to envision how the film could be achieved with minimal art direction. All that was needed was a fairly empty set, some sand, his battery of color gels, and a lot of fog. Everything else could be filled-in by the fears of his characters, and suggested with tricks of the camera. Lastly, the concept of Evil as mischievous and childlike also strongly appealed to Bava, who was captivated by stories like Henry James' *The Turn of the Screw* and its highly cinematic adaptation, *The Innocents* (1961, released in Italy under the generic title *Suspense*). This latter aspect would be de-emphasized in this project, but Bava would explore it repeatedly in subsequent features.

Bava himself acquired the film rights to the short story before securing a producer. "Both the contract and check were signed by Mario Bava," Pestriniero confirms. "The total amount, against transfer of any right, was 200,000 *lire* . . . about 125 US dollars today!"

Preproduction

In the early months of 1964, Bava showed the Pestriniero story to his friend Fulvio Lucisano of Italian International and proposed *Il mondo dell'ombra* ("The Shadow World") as a possible retitling. Lucisano was receptive to the idea; he was on the lookout for new commercial projects, having recently entered into a partnership with Castilla Cooperativa Cinematográfica, a Madrid-based company whose previous productions—*El Sol en el Espejo* (1962), *Pacto de Silencio* (1963), and *Un Tiro por la Espalda* (1964)—had all been directed by Antonio Román as vehicles for his wife, actress Yvonne Bastien. Lucisano was also actively courting a similar arrangement with American International Pictures, and knew that Samuel Z. Arkoff and James H. Nicholson were eager to make another horror movie with

DR. SALAS *(Fernando Villeni) and Mark check the graves of the Galliot crew, confirming that they are now empty.*



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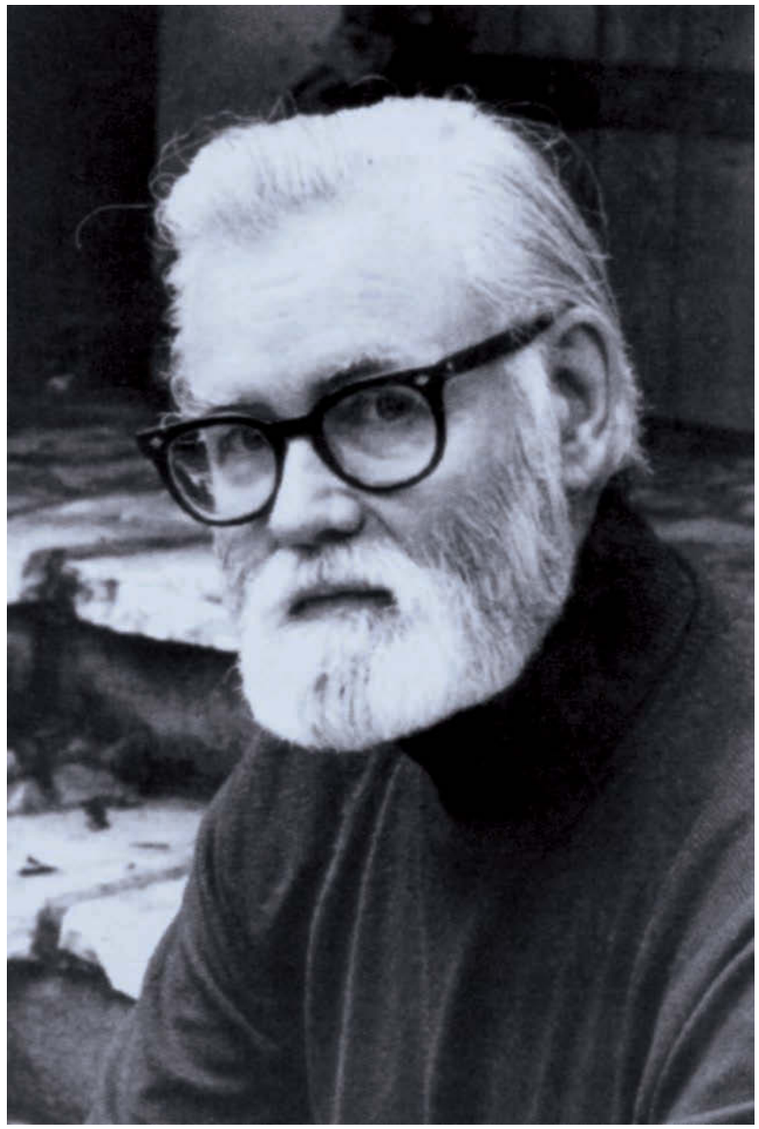
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Mario Bava. Lucisano sent a copy of Pestriniero's story to Antonio Román, who hammered out a rough screenplay with the help of Rafael J. Salvia (1915–76), a screenwriter (and occasional director) best-known for writing Westerns and comedies for such accomplished Spanish filmmakers as León Klimovsky and Julio Coll. Once the script was translated into English, Lucisano sent a copy to Arkoff and Nicholson at AIP, who turned it over to Louis M. "Deke" Heyward—the head of their London office—for evaluation. The script did not translate well, to say the least, and Heyward recommended a complete rewrite.

Jim Nicholson, the creative partner, took the job to Ib J. Melchior. Born in Copenhagen in 1917, Melchior had scripted several science fiction films distributed by AIP—the American-made *The Angry Red Planet* (1960) and *The Time Travelers* (1964, which he also directed), and the Danish-made *Reptilicus* (1961) and *Journey to the Seventh Planet* (1962). He had additional experience writing science fiction and horror scripts for such television series as *Tom Corbett Space Cadet, 13 Demon Street,* and *The Outer Limits.* The son of popular opera tenor Lauritz Melchior, Ib's most recent credit at the time was the original screenplay for *Robinson Crusoe on Mars* (1964), an outstanding Paramount release directed by Byron Haskin.

"I had done several films for AIP and they called me one day and said that they had a story that they wanted me to turn into a screenplay," Melchior recalls. According to a May 1964 profile, Melchior "put his name on the dotted line without even knowing what the story was about."[2] He explains: "Sam and Jim and I, we had such a good working relationship that they paid me my full salary up front, before I wrote a single word. I read the first script, which was a disaster, and then I asked to read the original story. There wasn't enough there, so I had to come up with some other things."

Early on, it was reported by one industry journal that Melchior would also direct the project, but he insists that he approached his job from the beginning with the understanding that it would be a Mario Bava film. "When



AUTHOR *Ib J. Melchior, screenwriter of the American version of the film, PLANET OF THE VAMPIRES.*

I first got involved, Sam wanted me to see what kind of director Mario Bava was, so he gave me a personal screening of his work. He showed me *Black Sunday* and I came away very impressed by Bava's visual sense and his command of atmosphere. So that's what I played up in my screenplay, the atmosphere, which was also present in the original story."

It was during this period of preproduction that Renato Pestriniero received a phone call from Fulvio Lucisano's offices, informing him that *"Una notte di 21 ore"* was about to become a movie—in fact, an international co-production. The pittance he had accepted for the screen rights did nothing to dampen his excitement. "You can imagine what this meant to me, and to Italian science fiction—it was the first science fiction movie based on an Italian science fiction story!"

Melchior annotated his copy of the story—which AIP had crudely translated for him, as it had never before appeared in English[3]—and rejected the talkier passages as well as the depiction of the dead Orion crew as impish and childlike. He renamed the characters, and the Vega and the Orion became the Argos and the Galliot in acknowledgment of the movie's Italo-Mediterranean origins. A 4-page outline became a thirty-nine-page screen treatment entitled *The Haunted World.* Melchior had no knowledge at the time that one of Bava's earlier films had been released in America (by Woolner) as *Hercules in the Haunted World,* which is presumably why AIP later rejected the moniker. They loved the treatment, however, and Melchior was told to proceed to the script stage.

In Melchior's personal scrapbook are two remarkable letters, written in response to his treatment. The first—dated June 22, 1964—is from the desk of Samuel Z. Arkoff:

Dear Ib:

Here are the comments of Mario Bava on "Haunted Planet," which he persists in calling "The Shadow World," for some reason.

As you will note, Bava's comments about your abilities are so laudatory, that I am frankly a little remiss to send it to you, lest you feel that you have no further goals to achieve and simply stop work.

Sincerely,
Samuel Z. Arkoff

Attached to this wry cover sheet is a detailed document written by Mario Bava, entitled "Comments on *The Shadow-World.*" Before reading it, it is important to know that Melchior's treatment ended differently than the film. In it, Mark and Baia (later Sonya) escape Aura in a battered Argos, which is not strong enough to return them to their (surprise) home planet of Mars. Instead, they are forced to land on the third planet from the sun—our Earth in prehistoric times, thus becoming our Adam and Eve. Upon landing, they realize that they were not victorious, that they have been possessed by the disembodied Aurans, after all. The treatment ends with the revelation that this resulting conglomeration of two beings—one exterior, the other interior in nature—provided the foundation for the "human" components of body and soul.

Though similar correspondence no doubt exists pertaining to the production of other films made in tandem between Bava and AIP, the following is the only letter actually written by Mario Bava that has come to light. Evidently translated into imperfect English by Bava's production secretary Rosalba Scavia, it is one of the very few letters he ever wrote in English. The letter is printed here verbatim, with Melchior's permission, and the imperfections of the translation have been retained to preserve the authenticity of the document.

Great compliments to Mr. Ib Melchior. The subject is really fine, full of surprises, suspense, and situations. It is obvious that he knows what the cinema is all about. The finale where we suddenly learn that the two leads are possessed by the Ariani. Reed's death by his own hand and not through the work of Mark is excellent. The very final scene of the protagonists becoming Adam and Eve is extremely well done.

1) I would clear up the materialism of our astronauts—that is, they do not have, or have lost, their souls; and that when possessed they are happy, because being possessed by the Aurians means possessing something spiritual internally that permits life to be looked at with different eyes.

2) With the thought in mind that we want to make a "Fantasy-Science-Terror" sort of thing, I would have the dead of the Galliot buried . . . in order, later in the night, to see the ground swell out, and see the dead ones walking out one by one with their ghostly faces, while strange clouds whorl around them. I would show the wonder and the terror of those who find the empty graves.

3) I would like at some point to see the spectral faces of the dead spying on the crew.



ORIGINALLY *scripted as lovers, Tiona (Evi Marandi) and Wess have a more platonic relationship in the final cut.*

4) When Brad and Wes fall into the sleep to break the cords of the commands that either the empty holes of the Galliot crew is found, or that the dead crew themselves be seen. Or we see that the spectres of Nordegg and Kay are staring at Brad and Wes after which the latters go and rip the commands up. Or else, and I think maybe the best of all, have Nordegg and Kay themselves to break the commands, get discovered by Mark, and then have the battle, the flight of Kay and the crumpling to the ground of Nordegg, which as it stands now comes in the daytime outside the astronave [spaceship]. Or, Nordegg and Kay could get hold of Wes and Brad in their sleep, and go all four together to wreck the plants—thus getting the two relations (I say this because it seems that otherwise there is night in which the cadavers are on board and nothing happens).

5) I would not have any rivalry between Mark and Wes because it does not lead to any conclusion and is hard to explain script-wise.

6) I don't think it's very good to have Mark and Baia kiss in the room of the ship—that is, I don't think they should clinch at that moment, it seems a bit frivolous—perhaps he should just press her to him, and then just a little kiss after the door has closed—it would be a refuge to his arms for her, and when they discover their love.

7) When Tiana says that she's sure Garr is one of the dead men she saw in the night, Mark orders the tomb opened—resulting empty. I suggest that if we have already shown the tombs opened and empty, it would be a repetition and we should have the tomb show this same Garr, or for a shock, Mark's brother or someone else.

8) If the hour-glass shaped continent is America, it seems a bit thick to have Adam and Eve there.

9) I thought I understood that the atmosphere of the planet was breathable—therefore no use for the gasmasks.

Again, vivid compliments to Mr. Melchior, and let's hurry up with this because it seems just the right time for a "Fantasy-Science-Terror" sort of idea.

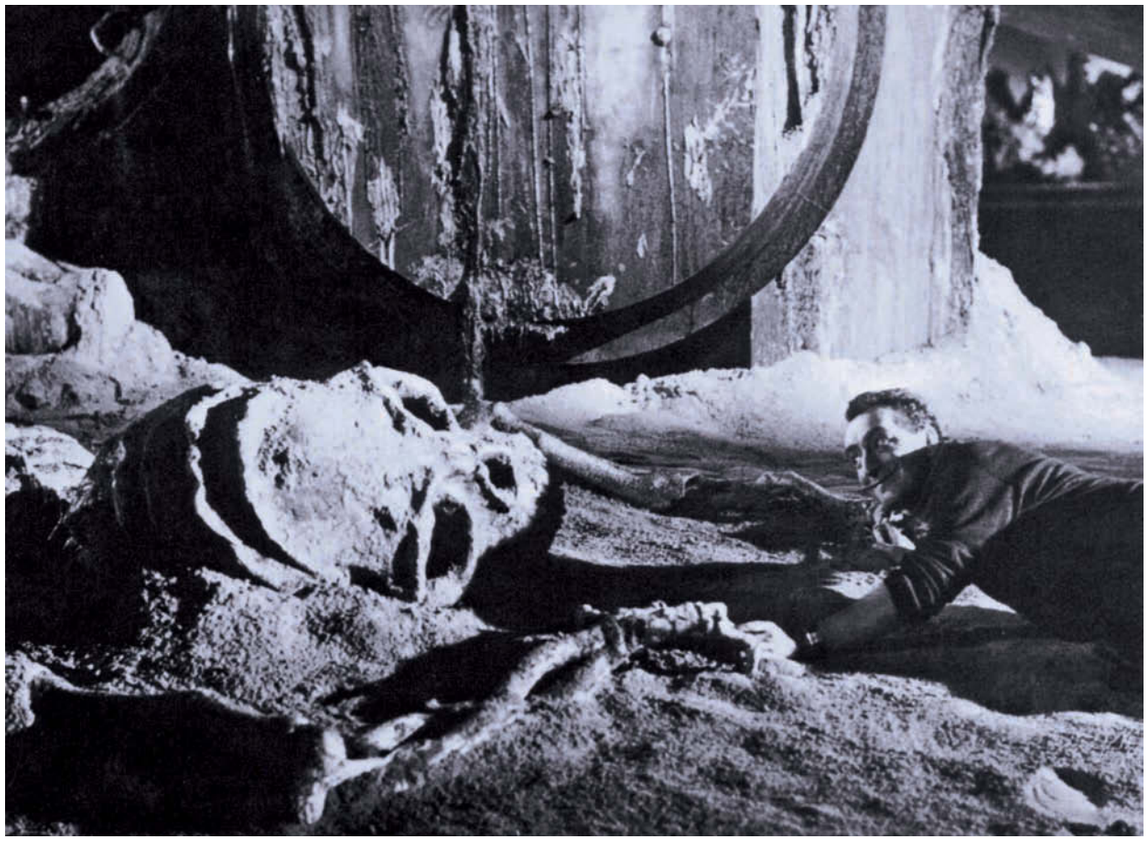
Thank you very much.
Mario Bava

As the aside in Arkoff's cover letter indicates, Bava's preferred title of *The Shadow World* did not meet with the approval of AIP. Melchior's *The Haunted World* was formally announced on February 14, 1964, in the pages of the industry journal *The Hollywood Reporter*. When it came to AIP's attention that this title evoked the memory of one of Bava's films for another distributor, it was withdrawn and formally changed to *Warlords of Planet 7* on January 7, 1965.

Melchior completed his "final draft" screenplay, titled *Warlords of the Outlaw Planet*, on January 18, 1965. It differs from the final production in many ways. Here, the crew of the Galliot are killed when the ship crashes on Aura—by the crash, not by each other. When the Argos lands, Capt. Mark Markary and "communications technician" Baia (later Sonya—and here, something of a romantic interest) cross the alien terrain to the wreckage via a special "land crawler" or space Jeep (which Melchior designed at no extra charge, providing a sketch inside the script). The Argos crew proceed to bury the Galliot dead and patrol the fog-laden planet. While exploring, three members of the Argos

2 Sven Rye, "Spotlight on Hollywood Scandanavians," *Pacific Coast Viking*, May 1964.

3 *"Una notte di 21 ore"* would remain unpublished in English until it appeared as "Night of the Id" in the December 1998 issue of *Different Realities* 4, translated by Joe Randolph. Renato Pestriniero reports that the story has been published five times in Italy, and once in Germany, the Czech Republic, and America.



MARIO BAVA *strikes a humorous pose with friend on the set.*

crew—including Tiana (later Tiona), another female officer—are bullied by green puffs of fog that eventually recede, leaving them covered in "an iridescent sticky green fluid," requiring their decontamination once they return to the ship. The experience leaves Tiana ultra-sensitive to the phenomena of this alien world and she begins to suffer visions of her dead compatriots—blue-skinned, smeared with gore. Also well-served by her feminine intuition, Baia happens to notice out of the corner of her eye a towering structure built by the Aurans, which is absolutely invisible when she looks at it directly. She guides Mark toward it via her wrist communicator, and after moving cautiously toward a field of apparently empty space, the captain encounters a patch of invisible resistance that forces him to move in slow motion like "the molasses movement of a nightmare." He soon emerges, and likens the experience to "moving through dry water." Baia tells him that she could see him passing through the solid object, but only peripherally—out of the corner of her eye, when her gaze was averted. Later, when they discover the wreckage of the other alien craft, they become trapped inside as the air is drained from the control room through an unreachable vent in the ceiling. After their lucky escape, they are approached by disfigured emissaries of the dead Galliot crew, who explain their possession by the disembodied Aurans. They can occupy dead bodies, but they want to take over the bodies of the living Argos crew and escape their dead planet, which is possible if the crew will only allow it. When Markary refuses, the dead suggest another option: cohabiting the bodies of the living with equal control; this would result in a new hybrid that might even prove mutually beneficial. Again, Markary refuses. The Aurans decide to take the Argos by force, initiating a siege by the living dead—not only the *J'Accuse*-like procession of the Galliot crew, but reanimated corpses of other alien races lured to the planet over the years by the Auran pulse signal. After a battle in which all their crew is lost, Mark and Baia blast off from Aura in the damaged Argos, and the script concludes with the aforementioned "Adam and Eve" finale.

Once it was turned in, Bava turned Melchior's draft over to *I tre volti della paura* screenwriter Alberto Bevilacqua and a new collaborator, Callisto Cosulich, a film journalist turned screenwriter. "I first met Bava on the set of *I tre volti della paura*, where I went to interview Boris Karloff," recalls Cosulich, who was working at the time as a reporter for the publication ABC. "I made friends with Bava and saw how he shot, in this peculiar way—a bit detached, very matter-of-fact, let's say, and with an almost cynical attitude. I also spoke with Mario's father, Eugenio, who was an old movie pioneer and had solved many problems for his son. Mario Bava was a cameraman and had a lot of expertise in his work, but the special effects solutions in his earliest films were often suggested by Eugenio. In this first meeting, I discovered the incredible craft of these two men and the team they had assembled."[4]

When the Melchior draft arrived, it was passed on to Bevilacqua and Cosulich for further development. "We basically read it and then ignored it, and we went on to do a different thing, which was *Terrore nello spazio*," Cosulich says. "Our screenplay was much trimmed down by Bava, for budgetary reasons. You know how it is when you write: we wanted rain, we wanted this, we wanted that, and then . . . but Bava was very clever: he could take a rock and persuade you that it was an entire planet." Some sources list Spanish writer–director Antonio Román as one of the screenwriters, to which Cosulich responds: "Since it was a Spanish co-production, I think a Spaniard put his hands on it a little bit, but what he did, or if he did something only for the Spanish version, I don't know. Bevilacqua and I didn't have any contact with him."

As the screenplay approached the production stage, the number of visible female crew was cut from four to two, and the male crew was also downsized, with the actions of one omitted crew member, Reed, reassigned to Wess. The character names were also fine-tuned: Baia became Sanya (the name of one of the deleted female characters), and was finally changed to Sonya; Wes (given the surname Wescant in Melchior's script) became Wess; Garr became Brent; Derry became Carter; the ship's doctor, Lannon, was renamed Dr. Linden for a short time before he finally became Dr. Karen; and finally, the undead Nordegg and Kay became Salas and Martin (later Keir).

When Sam Arkoff became aware that additional changes were being made to the screenplay that AIP had already approved, they took measures to protect their interests. Deke Heyward was sent to Rome to represent AIP on the set, performing the same functions that Salvatore Billitteri had performed on the set of *I tre volti della paura*.

Born in New York City in the 1920s, Heyward started out as a magazine

editor and as a writer for various radio series, only to have his career interrupted by six years of Air Force duty during the second World War. After the war, Heyward became a writer for the Associated Press but was quickly wooed into the burgeoning television industry, where he spent eight years as the chief writer for *The Garry Moore Show.* He also wrote skits for *The Ernie Kovacs Show,* created the hugely successful *Winky Dink* (the first interactive television program) and published two popular comic novels, *Grandpa and the Girls* (1960) and *My Son, the Doctor* (1963). After working in New York City for nearly two decades, Heyward relocated to Los Angeles and worked for 20th Century-Fox and MCA before joining AIP in 1963. His first job for the company was to write a comedy script on demand, *The Maid and the Martian,* which became *Pajama Party* (1964), starring Annette Funicello and Tommy Kirk; after this, he became AIP's director of project development, while continuing to write. After adding one more script to his list of credits—*Sergeant Deadhead* (made in 1965)—Heyward was promoted to managing director of AIP's new London office. One of his chief responsibilities in this post, as he put it, was "to supervise everything that took place in Europe [regarding] casting. It was always important to get a balanced casting for the American market; if you left it to the Italians, they would have gotten Ciccio Ingrassia for everything!"

Heyward—who considered Mario Bava "a genius"—traced their earliest meetings to a series of social dinners where they were joined by Fulvio Lucisano. "It had nothing to do with business," he clarified. "Bava was a friend of Fulvio's, and it had to do with eating—eating and drinking Italian wines. Bava was a good eater and a good drinker and he liked to show off Italian wines. I had a good number of dinners with him and Fulvio in obscure little *trattorias.* He knew which ones specialized in various types of good food and he was invariably right about it. He and Fulvio . . . I don't know how close they were, but at the time I'm talking about, they were eating together a lot and they invited me along."

Asked what the topics of conversation were at these get-togethers, Heyward ventured: "Me being the type of creature I am, I would avoid [discussing] business. I remember Bava trying to give me a frame of reference and describing himself as 'The Roger Corman of Italy.' Whether or not that was a true frame of reference, I cannot tell you. We talked mostly about wines, which I like, and the knowledge of wine, which he liked to show off. We did not go to restaurants in the city, but out on the Appian Way. Bava loved that—working man's food. I enjoyed being with him, and I enjoyed making fun of Bava's slight command of English, as much as he enjoyed making fun of my slight command of Italian."

Bava had always been trim, even extremely thin in his youth, when he joked about carrying stones in his pockets so that he wouldn't be carried away by the four winds. However, photographs of Bava dating from the period of *Terrore nello spazio* show that he had added conspicuous weight to his frame. It wasn't just "middle-aged spread," but the kind of auspicious gain that occurs when one forsakes home-cooked meals in favor of regular dining out, or when people try to stop smoking. Both explanations may suffice in this instance. With both of his children now grown and on their own, Mario and his wife Iole were living more or less separate lives, with Bava eating most of his meals in Lucisano's company. Furthermore, Bava's mother Emma was dying of cancer, and it would fit a common enough profile if Bava had responded to this traumatic news by trying to give up cigarettes, which he had smoked for most of his adult life. Naturally, when people quit smoking, they no longer have nicotine to serve as an appetite depressant, and invariably rediscover the pleasures of food and drink.



LOUIS M. "DEKE" HEYWARD *with comedy legend Buster Keaton on the set of AIP's PAJAMA PARTY (1964).*

The news about Emma Bava's illness coincided with other news that brought her family great joy, one which would have given her son good reason to be celebrating with great meals and fine wines. On January 11, 1965, Mario Bava reached one of the great milestones in a man's life when his son Lamberto and daughter-in-law Fiamma presented him with his first grandchild—a granddaughter named Georgia, who instantly became one of the great loves of his life. The feeling was mutual.

"He was a great man," says Georgia Bava, today an art scholar, wife, and mother of two. "He was also the center of our family, and especially for me, he was like a second father because my own father was so young at the time."

In his 1971 interview with Ornella Volta, Bava mentioned his granddaughter (who would have been 6 years old at the time) in a revealing way, when he detailed the grotesqueries of his inner life. "All of my fantasies, hallucinations, nightmares and daydreams are horrific in nature," he confessed. "I adore my little granddaughter, but she always appears in my dreams crippled, mutilated, or with a foot missing. Would you like to hear about a persistent character who frequently appears in my nightmares? He's a violinist who serenades his sweetheart using the bared nerves of his skinned forearm as strings! I also worry, for example, that I might discover that my house in the country was formerly owned by a werewolf well-known throughout the region. My whole life is overcast by my hyperactive imagination."[5]

The examples Bava cites are at once tragic and highly romantic, and we can infer from this account that Bava's own fearful nature responded to his love for

4 Manlio Gomarasca and Davide Pulici, "Il Talento di Mr. Bava," *Nocturno Dossier* 24, July 2004, 6–32. All quotes of Callisto Cosulich are translated from this article.

5 Ornella Volta, "Conversation avec Mario Bava," *Positif* 138, May 1972, 44–48.





those he held dear, like his granddaughter, with perpetual worry for their safety and well-being. There is also a superstitious ethic that holds that, by imagining the worst, one may prevent it from happening; it is possible that Bava, consciously or subconsciously, accepted the burden of such fantasies because a part of him believed that—knock wood—it might help to circumvent misadventure. With this interior scenario in mind, the savage violence in his films could almost be interpreted as a perverse expression of his sympathetic feelings for his fellow man.

Deke Heyward remembered that one of the principal ways in which the script was changed by the Italian writers was to introduce opportunities for nudity, which was acceptable—indeed, commercially advisable—in certain continental territories.

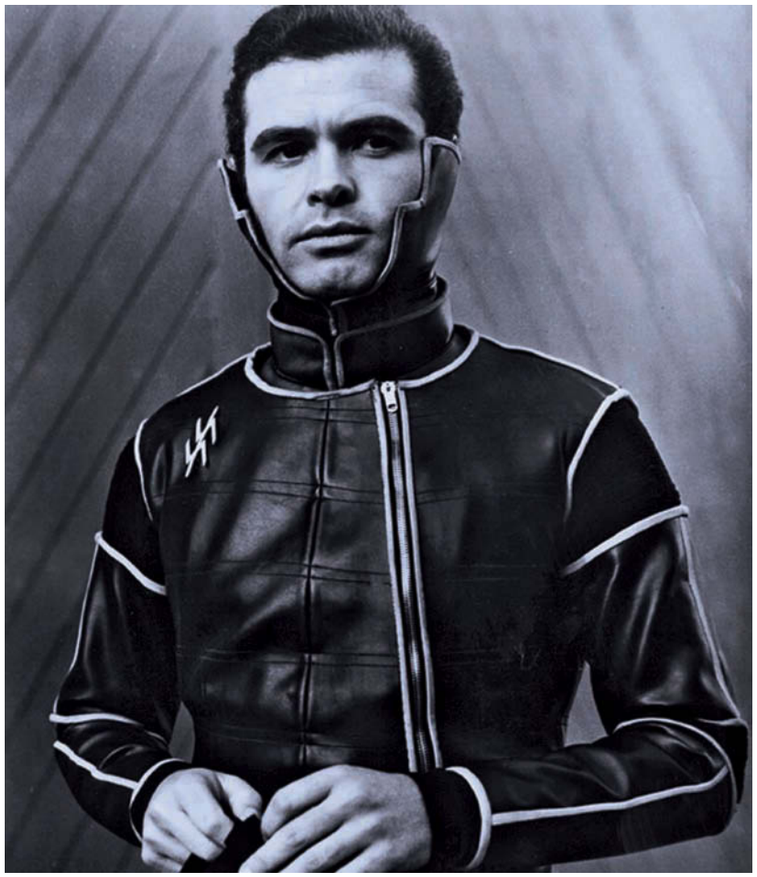
"I would go to Fulvio Lucisano and say, 'Look, the lady is standing behind the man naked. What is the sense, what is the motivation?'" laughed Heyward. "And Fulvio would look at me sagely, rub the side of his nose and say, 'She's a-wanna have something to do with him!' Well, that I could have figured out, I think—given time! But it was not good writing. So we had to get rid of these extraneous things which appealed then to the Italian market and the Japanese market, where they wanted to see as many naked ladies as they could see at one time. I was busy taking naked ladies out and he was putting naked ladies in!" [6]

On January 25, the film's title was changed once again, to the Western-sounding *The Outlaw Planet*. At this time, it was also announced that the picture would begin shooting in February, with Susan Hart in the lead. Hart—born June 2, 1941, in Wenatchee, Washington—was discovered by AIP's Jim Nicholson in the supporting cast of Don Taylor's *Ride the Wild Surf* (1964), in which she played the Hawaiian-born love interest of Tab Hunter. Nicholson is said to have fallen in love with Hart the moment he witnessed her torrid hula dance in the film, and promptly declared his intention to find and marry her. He kept that promise, signing Hart to an exclusive AIP contract. She made her AIP debut in *Pajama Party* (1964, in which she reprised her hula dance, setting off a volcano), which was followed by a co-starring role in Jacques Tourneur's vaguely Poe-inspired swan song *War-Gods of the Deep* (1965). By the time *The Outlaw Planet* was announced as her third AIP picture in the trades, Susan Hart had become Mrs. James H. Nicholson. It was the producer's second marriage, and Hart's first.

On January 26, it was reported that Ib Melchior had completed the English script, now entitled *The Haunted Planet*. It was back to *The Outlaw Planet* when Barry Sullivan and Tod Windsor were announced as the film's male leads on February 22. By March, it became *Warlords of the Outlaw Planet*; by April, the Warlords' frontiers were expanded to infinity with the title *Warlords of Outer Space*. After this point, press releases no longer carried Tod Windsor's name.

Cast

Born in New York City on August 29, 1912, Patrick Barry Sullivan loved the movies. It was a passion that led him to take his first job as a movie theater usher. He soon after found the courage to audition for—and win—a few roles in New York-produced films. Encouraged by his good luck, he moved West and made his Hollywood debut in the 1943 Western, *The Woman of the Town*. Sullivan came to specialize in Westerns and crime pictures, but also contributed some remarkable work to Elliott Nugent's 1949 filming of *The Great Gatsby* (as





PORTRAITS *of cast members Barry Sullivan, Norma Bengell, Angel Aranda and Evi Marandi.*

Tom Buchanan), Vincente Minnelli's *The Bad and the Beautiful* (1952), and in Sam Fuller's *Forty Guns* (1957). Though never a romantic lead in his prime, Sullivan began finding roles in middle-age which presented him in this new light in the early 1960s. He made his first film in Italy in 1962, *Light in the Piazza,* and the following year, he played a more twisted romantic lead in the interesting Spanish thriller *Pyro* (1963), opposite Martha Hyer. *Pyro* was produced by Ib Melchior's former colleague, Sidney Pink, and it was distributed in the US by American International—which may explain why he came to be top-billed in *Terrore nello spazio.*

Despite his successful American career and previous work on the continent, neither Mario Bava nor Fulvio Lucisano had apparently ever heard of Barry Sullivan. Nevertheless, Sam Arkoff recommended him enthusiastically for the role of Mark Markary, and the two Italians were obliged to take Sam's word on good faith. "We were expecting somebody . . . younger," Lucisano says, gingerly. "When we got Sullivan's photo, we called Sam and said, 'Well, he doesn't look very young.' Sam said, 'Oh no, no no! He's wonderful!' So that was a big crisis at the beginning!"

Melchior's original treatment described Capt. Mark Markary as "a ruggedly handsome man in his middle thirties." Sullivan was 53, with a receding hairline, deeply lined skin, and features that were frankly more cold-blooded than romantic. Melchior's screenplay substituted Mark's age with that all-purpose, flattering word "mature." Following his work in *Terrore nello spazio,* Sullivan would make many other films, including the important Westerns *Tell Them Willie Boy Is Here* (1969) and *Pat Garrett and Billy the Kid* (1973), but the majority were made for television. He died of respiratory failure on June 6, 1994, in Sherman Oaks, California.

"*Planet of the Vampires*—that's a great one!" Sullivan remembered in a 1975 interview with Bill Kelley. "No, really—it is, although there was certainly no indication when I accepted it that it would turn out that way. I was under contract to AIP to do three pictures: *Pyro*, *Planet of the Vampires* and . . . I don't think we ever made the third one; I can't remember what happened. I thought the script for *Planet of the Vampires* was an abomination, very confusing and heavy with dialogue that was difficult to bring any emotion to, and I couldn't imagine how they were going to do the intricate special effects on our schedule and our budget, which was—frankly—no budget. But that wasn't really my department and science fiction isn't my thing anyway. I just thought, 'Well, I've got the lead and it's a feature, so I'll just do what I can and hope for the best.

"I was introduced to Mario Bava and found him to be a cuddly yet somewhat inscrutable little man, very polite and deferential, but not very communicative in terms of acting. There was a language barrier—that was part of it; he spoke almost no English—but I also felt that the actors were, in a way, almost like props to him, who had to stand precisely in a certain place so that he could arrange the cameras for the special effects. Well, that's not the greatest environment for any actor to find himself in. But, at the same time, I knew the movie was very reliant on special effects, and I also noticed that many members of the crew, who had worked with Bava on

6 Louis M. Heyward interview in Tom Weaver, *Science Fiction Stars and Horror Heroes* (Jefferson NC: McFarland & Co., 1991), 165.

earlier films, were devoted to him and not only had total faith in him, but were overjoyed to be working with him. That intrigued and impressed me—that kind of dedication and affection is rare anywhere in this business—so I thought, 'He must know what he's doing. This might be interesting.'"

The first actress to be announced in the trades as Sullivan's co-star was Susan Hart, who travelled to Rome on April 15 after honeymooning with Jim Nicholson in Mexico City. Mario Bava began directing his latest feature on Stage 5 at Cinecittà one week later, on April 22, when the clapboard read *Planet of Terror*. According to *Variety*, after one week of shooting, the title was changed yet again to *Terror in Space*.[7]

"I was in Italy for two weeks the summer we were going to shoot that [film] at Cinecittà Studios," Hart told interviewer Tom Weaver.[8] "I felt that it was going to be a very low-budget, very yucky picture. And I remember Barry Sullivan got into a giant, violent argument with somebody, maybe Mario Bava. Why I didn't end up doing it, I can't remember, but I do remember being in Rome for a couple of weeks, meeting Mario Bava (a charming, colorful man); that the plot was explained to me in some fashion, and flying back to London! That's all I recall and I'm shocked that it ever got made, because to the best of my recollection, Barry Sullivan had some sort of major problem, either with the director or the producer."

The chronology of events shows that the film began shooting shortly after the arrival of Mr. and Mrs. Nicholson in Rome. According to Deke Heyward, their arrival also coincided with the release of a communiqué from the desk of Sam Arkoff, announcing a new company policy—something to the effect that "No members of, or relatives of, AIP will ever appear as performers in any AIP production—in the US or abroad."[9] Consequently, the production lost its lead actress while she was waiting in the wings, leaving Barry Sullivan to begin filming under extremely stressful circumstances which must have seemed to him highly unprofessional. He was the only English-speaking actor on the set, he was working from a script that was still being revised and which had no set ending, and he had no idea who his eventual co-star and love interest was going to be. The trades would not announce Hart's replacement until halfway through the production, meaning that Sullivan was undoubtedly put in the position of playing at least some of his dialogue scenes in tight close-up, opposite the script girl.

WHILE *visiting the production at Cinecittà, Ib Melchior snapped this souvenir photo of Barry Sullivan and Mario Bava.*



When the film was next mentioned by *Variety* on June 1, Susan Hart had been replaced by Brazilian starlet Norma Bengell—who spoke very little English and would play the role of Sonya phonetically. Born Norma Benguell on January 25, 1935, in Rio de Janeiro, she had entered show business as a singer and dancer, making her first Brazilian film in 1959. She won the Best Actress Award at the 1962 Cannes Film Festival for her performance in Anselmo Duarte's Brazilian film *O Pagador de Promessas/ The Spoken Word*, which itself won the coveted *Palme d'Or* as Best Picture. Riding high on the publicity she received for her award (and her nude scene in the picture), the shapely (35-23-35) Bengell relocated to Rome, where so many other sex symbols had been successfully launched. Her Italian movie career began with Roberto Mauri's *Il mafioso* (1962), which also starred *I vampiri*'s Wandisa Guida. Not only was Bengell attractive and a talented actress, but in Italy her name was helpful to producers hoping to attract Spanish co-production funds. Amusingly, AIP publicity (out of its head, as usual) issued a stateside press release describing Bengell as "a successor to the late Carmen Miranda."

Today an award-winning film director in her own right, Bengell remembers that the role in *Terrore nello spazio* was secured by her agents at William Morris. She came to the production with absolutely no knowledge



ACTOR *Federico Boido (sometimes billed as "Rick Boyd") had a striking look that inspired Bava to cast him more than once.*

of Susan Hart's prior casting in the role of Sonya. She remembers Mario Bava as "a nice man and very funny," but she did harbor one complaint about him: "He had three or four basset hounds that were on the set every day. They hated us [actors] and peed in our black work boots all the time!"

As Bava's letter to Ib Melchior implies, a love story was originally planned for Mark and Sonya, but when the roles were finally cast, Bava decided to drop this idea. Sullivan was more than twenty years Bengell's senior, and there was absolutely no chemistry between them. "Barry was nice," Bengell hedges, "but he was not very polite at the table where we ate our food." More than this she declines to say. According to Melchior, who paid a brief visit to the set, there was noticeable tension between the stars and, in conversation, Sullivan ungraciously referred to his co-star as "Norma Bang Well."

Cast as Wess was Angel Aranda. A Spanish actor born in Jaén on September 18, 1934, Aranda found the Italian film industry receptive to him when he made his first bid for stardom there in 1956. A number of his earlier Italian roles were played for former associates of Bava: Steno (*Susanna sutta panna* and *Femmine tre volte*, both 1957), Sergio Leone (*Il colosso di Rodi/The Colossus of Rhodes*, 1961), and Sergio Corbucci (*Il giorno più corto/The Shortest Day*, 1962). Aranda also played the role of Antonius in Mario Bonnard and Sergio Leone's *Gli ultimi giorni di Pompei*, to which Bava also contributed. Darkly handsome, with looks that could be equally boyish or brooding, Aranda was sometimes billed as Angelo Aranda or Angel Miranda.

By the time she appeared as Tiona in *Terrore nello spazio*, Evi Marandi had also appeared in movies under different names, including Evy Mirandi and Evy Harandis—and just as many features in which she was not billed at all. Among her early credits were Giuseppe Vari's *La vendetta di barbari/Revenge of the Barbarians* (1960), José Benézeraf's erotic *Cover Girls* (1963), and an impressive number of US productions lensed abroad, including Michael Curtiz' *Francis of Asisi* (1961), Paul Wendkos' *Gidget Goes to Rome* (1963), and Richard Quine's *Paris—When It Sizzles* (1964).

Also visible in the cast are Massimo Righi as Salas, Alberto Cevenini as Toby, Ivan Rassimov (who would have a cameo role as Daria Nicolodi's psychiatrist in Bava's final feature, *Schock*) as Carter, and as Keir, Federico "Rico" Boido. Though he would appear in only three Bava films—the others being 1968's *Diabolik/Danger: Diabolik* and 1970's *Roy Colt & Winchester Jack*, in both of which he plays gunmen—Boido is perhaps the most memorable supporting actor of Bava's middle period. Tall, blonde, and gaunt, almost scarecrow-like, Boido gives such an execrable

AS BARRY *Sullivan waited for AIP to supply him with a leading lady, he took solace in temporary publicity shots such as this one with Evi Marandi.*



7 A report in *Famous Monsters of Filmland* 34 erroneously reported that filming of *The Outlaw Planet* began on March 10.

8 Tom Weaver, *Attack of the Monster Movie Makers* (Jefferson NC: McFarland & Co., 1994), 140.

9 Nicholson's own daughter Laura had been among the supporting players in AIP's *Beach Party* series, which grew out of an original screenplay written by Lou Rusoff, Arkoff's brother-in-law.

reading of his one phonetic line that he was given no other dialogue, but he makes a most convincing space ghoul. In later Spaghetti Western roles, he would adopt the screen name "Rick Boyd," but he mostly sticks in the memory as Toby Dammit's (Terence Stamp's) sombrero-wearing stunt double in Fellini's episode of *Histoires Extraordinaires/Spirits of the Dead* (1967).

Curiously unbilled in the film is Giuseppe Mattei as Brent. Mattei had entered the film business in the early 1960s as a master of arms, and he continued to appear in Italian exploitation films through the 1970s under the pseudonym "James Harris," including Luigi Batzella's decidedly Bava-influenced metaphysical gothic, *Nuda per Satana/Nude for Satan* (1974).

Production

As *Terrore nello spazio* approached its start date, Mario Bava was feeling paternal concern about his son, Lamberto. Already a husband, and now a father, at age 21, Lamberto Bava had not yet shown any inclinations toward a specific career. "It was never my wish to become a filmmaker when I was growing up," he explains. "Then, around the age of 18, I found myself visiting my father's sets more and more often, simply to observe. I became fascinated by the sets, the lighting, the presence of actors—and soon, I found myself called upon to assist." [10]

Asked to remember the circumstances of why he became his father's assistant, Lamberto claims, "I don't remember"—but it surely had something to do with his personal circumstances, and with Mario feeling an imperative to instruct his unfocused son in a useful trade, as his father had done with him.

Lamberto did not—and never did—serve his father in the role of a traditional assistant director: the person who serves as the "voice" on-set, calling the scenes and breaks, rounding up actors, and maintaining a controlled environment on the director's behalf. "To assist in the making of horror films was, for me, always more of a pleasure than a job," he says. "I always used my heart more than my head . . . Working with my father came very naturally to me. Moreover, I had known all of his crew regulars since I was a little boy; they were the same people who came to visit him at our house. Even before I went to work with my father, Franco Prosperi—his previous assistant—sometimes turned to me, to explain exactly what my father expected of him. There were times when I was the only person who could understand him." Asked if, by working with his father, he learned anything important about him which he had not known before, Lamberto replies: "It is one thing to live with your father, and something else entirely to work with him. By assisting my father, I discovered his inventiveness, his self-confidence, and his passion."

Two other "assistant directors" are also credited on prints of *Terrore nello spazio:* Serena Canevari and Manuel San Roman, the second of whom was very likely not present and listed only to satisfy the Spanish investors. As for Serena Canevari, Lamberto explains the differences of their responsibilities succinctly: "She had the text, I didn't. She was a professional, whereas my primary role was to help invent something."

Canevari was not only an experienced continuity worker, but a member of an Italian family that was central to the Italian film community, much like Bava's own. According to Mel Welles, "The Canevaris were a family of artists; everybody in that family, going back generations, was either a painter or a sculptor or both." Serena's father Angelo had been a production designer in the early days of Italian cinema; her brother Cesare was an actor, writer, and director; her brother Sergio followed in his father's footsteps as a production designer and art director (he would later work in this capacity on Bava's *Ecologia del delitto/Twitch of the Death Nerve*, 1971), and Serena herself had worked previously as an actress (in Martin Ritt's *Five Branded Women*, 1960) and before and after *Terrore nello spazio* on such important films as Antonioni's *Deserto rosso/Red Desert* (1960), Leone's *Il buono, il brutto, il cattivo/The Good the Bad and the Ugly* (1966), Francis Ford Coppola's *The Godfather Part II* (1974), and Mario Bava's final work in the cinema, Dario Argento's *Inferno* (1980, on which Lamberto served in a more traditional assistant director role). Since 1987, Serena Canevari has worked primarily as a first assistant director on the films of Bernardo Bertolucci.

As the saying goes, "Some men are born great, and others have greatness thrust upon them." In the case of Lamberto Bava, he became his father's assistant, in essence, to ensure their mutual security. Now a father, Lamberto needed steady employment and apprenticeship at a trade; but his presence on the set also promised a greater sense of security for Mario, who was embarking on a new picture that was to be his first with a new camera crew and editor. Replacing Ubaldo Terzano as the head of Bava's camera team was Antonio Rinaldi, who was assisted by Saverio Diamanti and Giorgio Aureli. Bava's usual editor of choice—



LAMBERTO BAVA, *age 21, on the set of his first collaboration with father Mario.*



SPANISH *lobby card featuring Barry Sullivan, Norma Bengell, and newcomer Ivan Rassimov as Carter.*

Mario Serandrei—had been unable to sign on, as he was busy juggling important assignments from Giuseppe De Santis, Gillo Pontecorvo, and Sergio Corbucci. Bava turned to Renato Cinquini, who had served him so well on *La frusta e il corpo*, only to find him preoccupied with the cutting of Barbara Steele's latest horror picture, Mario Caiano's *Amanti d'oltretomba/ Nightmare Castle* (1965). Cinquini recommended his assistant Romana Fortini, who had recently begun editing films in her own right, starting with Antonio Margheriti's *I giganti di Roma/ The Giants of Rome* (1964), an impressive *peplum* retread of *The Guns of Navarone* scripted by Ernesto Gastaldi. Fortini was the true editor of *Terrore nello spazio*, though some sources list Antonio Gimeno as editor and American prints list no editor at all. Gimeno was an experienced editor, active in Spanish cinema since the mid-1940s, but with the possible exception of some fine-tuning done prior to the Spanish release, he did not edit the picture; his name was attached to the production for quota purposes only.

Lamberto Bava may have had his position thrust on him by circumstance, but once the production was underway, he realized that he had found his place in the world. "By paying close attention to [my father's] movements and his expressions, I was able to intuit precisely what he was thinking," he says. "It was beautiful. I understood him innately and tried to surprise him by anticipating his every demand." [11]

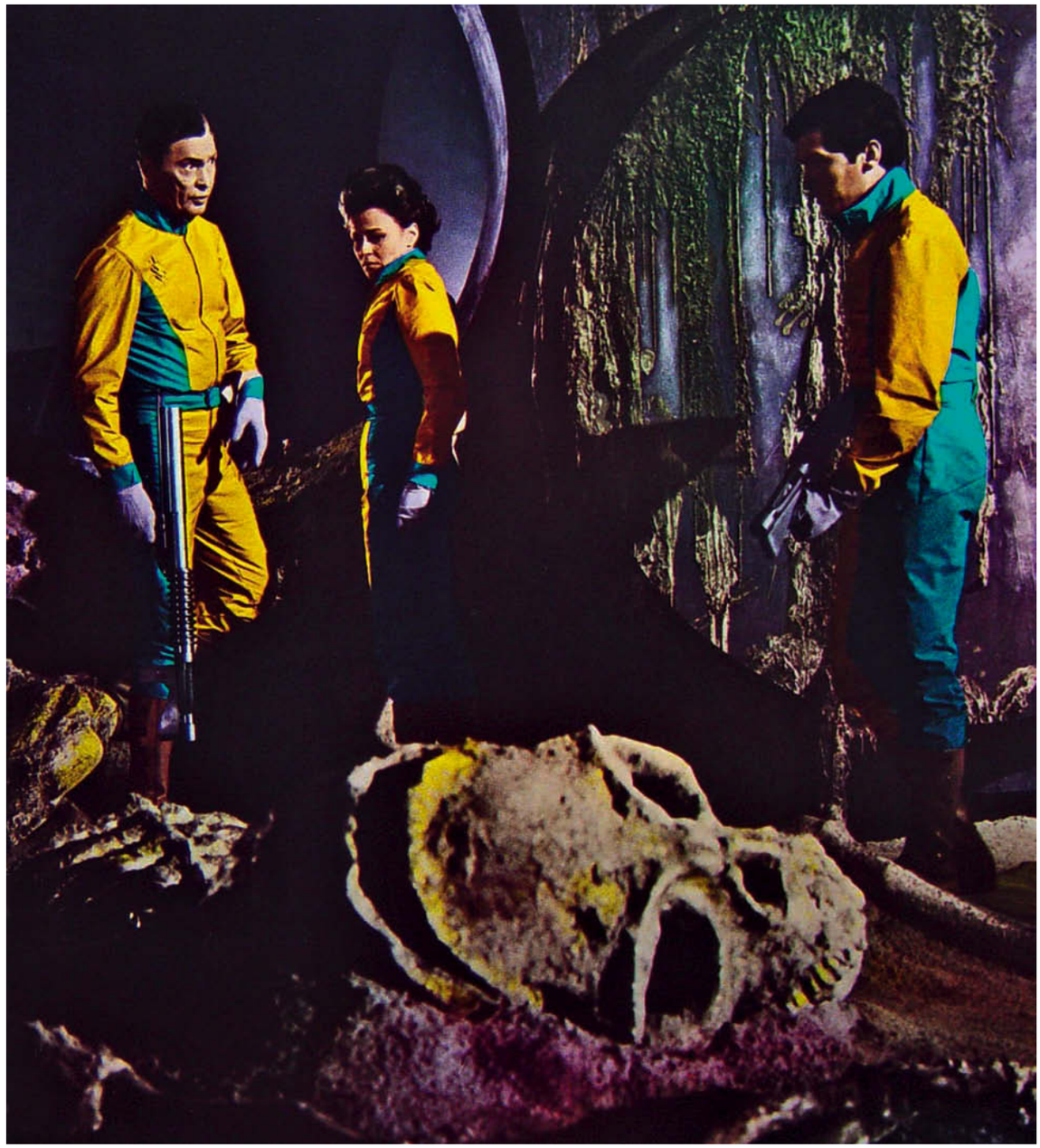
Also joining the Bava squad for the first time was the aforementioned Rosalba Scavia, a young *segretaria d'edizione* (production secretary) who evolved into something more akin to a personal assistant and confidant to Mario Bava. Long retired from the film business and now an established psychoanalyst, she looks back on this earlier phase of her career with tenderness:

"I don't really remember how I met Mario Bava. Through the production of a film, certainly—I was the *segretaria d'edizione* for the most part. He knew what he wanted, so I was mainly there in name only, but he was a pleasure to work with. My own background in all this was very tenuous. As you

10 Lamberto Bava interview, "Mario Bava, Mio Padre" in Luigi Cozzi, *Il Cinema Gotico e Fantastico Italiano Vol 1—Mario Bava, I Mille Volti Della Paura* (Rome, Italy: Mondo Ignoto/Profondo Rosso, 2001), 149–56.

11 Ibid.

know, in Italy, some people wake up in the morning and say, 'I want to be an actor' and others say 'I want to be a director' and they get their friends and family together and make a film. But others are genuine artists. Our friend Mario was a genuine artist. I always felt that he would have been a greater success as a painter. He seemed to know what he wanted, but he was never quite able to attain it because the people around him worked against that. Mario was quiet, polite, and respectful, yet also troubled, from what I can remember. He would talk to me—and to other people from time to time—yet he always held something back. At times, I would want him to open up, to understand him better—but he seemed to have various personas—one for me, one for you—but they were all good, kind, and gentle. I know he put a lot of himself into his work. Sometimes I would look at him and see a sad soul, but he always tried to hide it."



MARK, *Sonya, and Carter arrive at the wreckage site of an ancient alien spacecraft.*

The production of *Terrore nello spazio* coincided with AIP's announcement that they were "abandoning all second features to concentrate on 'quality pictures.'" According to Fulvio Lucisano, *Terrore nello spazio* had a budget of "about $200,000" and was shot on a six-week schedule at Cinecittà. This figure sounds a bit inflated; in all honesty, *Terrore nello spazio* doesn't look half as resplendent as *La maschera del demonio,* which was made for half as much money, and despite Bava's obvious ingenuity with the visuals, it remains a movie about a toy spaceship facing invisible terrors on a planet of smoke and mirrors.

It must sound like overstatement today, but at the time it was first released—and until Ridley Scott's Bava-influenced *Alien* arrived many years later—*Terrore nello spazio* was widely praised as containing one of the most convincingly alien environments ever filmed. To understand this, we must remember that Hollywood science fiction films—the most widely seen variety—had been influenced in their design by the brightly colored pulp covers of the 1940s and '50s; the strange and unknown worlds they visited were always brightly lit, and most were either shot on location at Bronson Caverns in Los Angeles, or on obvious studio sets with static painted backdrops. *Terrore nello spazio* took the unusual approach of making its environment mysterious, of accentuating its shadows, and animating it with curling smoke and changeable colors. As usual, Bava shrugged off any suggestion of his own ingenuity, claiming that he did what he could to mask an appalling lack of provisions.

"Do you know what that mysterious planet in *Terrore nello spazio* was made of?" he revealed, years later. "A couple of plastic rocks—and I mean 'two': *one* and *one!*—that were left over from some mythological picture made at Cinecittà. To assist the illusion, I had to fill the set with fog!" [12]

Bava was exaggerating the challenge placed before him, but not by much. The same vaguely lunar rocks can be glimpsed inhabiting different shots, sometimes increased in number by mirrors and multiple exposures, their sameness camouflaged by different positioning (upright, horizontal), varied placement within the frame, and alternating splashes and intensities of color. The jagged mountain terrain providing the planet's horizon was

a painted cyclorama originally executed for Hades in *Ercole al centro della terra*—it literally cost the production nothing.

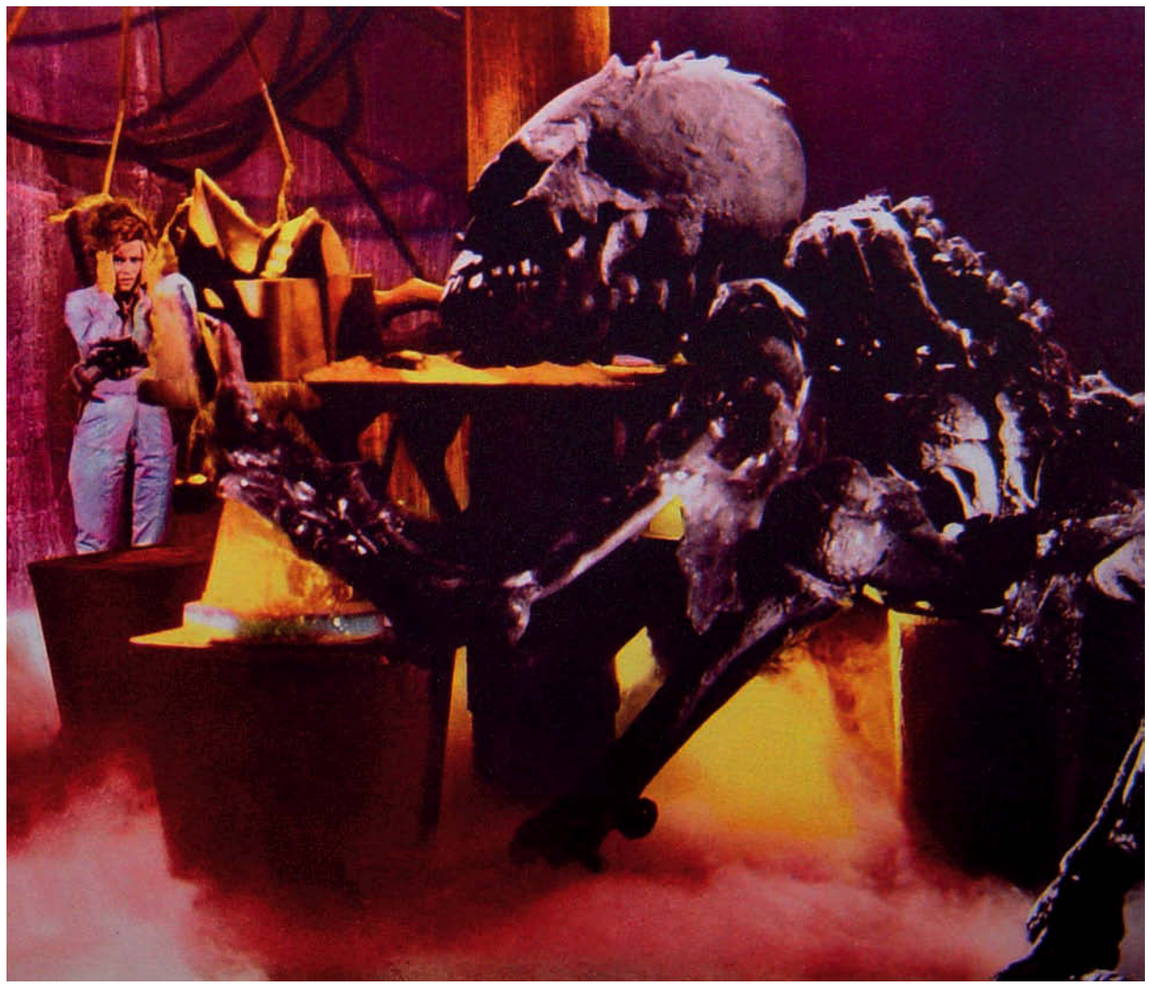
"They had a set of the planet exterior and there was smoke all over the damn place, a combination of dry ice and actual smoke," according to Ib Melchior, who visited the set one day late in the production. "The dry ice stayed down and the smoke rose up; it was a very interesting effect. They had little smoke pots, normal things. They had many places and little fans, that made the dry ice move as it clung closely to the ground. It was all set up like the lights; it was very controlled." For the planet exteriors, Bava used *fumone*, a kind of smoke formerly used by the military for camouflage purposes, and he also gave atmospheric density to some interior shots with church incense.

Bava's total control over the otherworldly atmosphere of these studio-bound "exteriors" exceeded the boundaries of special effects into the province of art direction. According to the film's production manager, Mario Silvestri, Bava called all the shots in regard to the film's art direction, while the credited art director, Giorgio Giovannini, essentially put his concepts into effect. "Mario Bava would make all the suggestions for design," Silvestri explained. "Giovannini, at that time, was not a well-known designer; if he had been a well-known designer, he would have been calling all the shots, not Bava, and there would have been no discussion. And this is the reason [Bava] used Giovannini—he was young, unknown, but very clever." [13]

Just as Bava's contribution to the film's "exterior" art direction is evident due to its almost complete reliance on special effects and optical illusion, many of the interiors also incorporate elements which deceive the eye. For example, one of the great design conundrums posed by the film's spaceship setting was how to convert a large, square sound stage at Cinecittà into a more concave-walled enclosure that would match the boomerang shape of the Argos. By studying the Argos interiors closely, we can see that the walls appear to curve, but are actually flat; their concavity suggested by cleverly positioning a series of tall, silver-framed, gun-metal colored flats in a domino arrangement. When reverse shots had to be filmed, the same flats were moved to the other side of the set. The bare studio floor was disguised by rolls of similarly colored plastic floorguard, the criss-crossing outlines of which are clearly visible during the fight that breaks out after the landing on Aura.

Among the most interesting features of the Argos set were the so-called "ionosphere" screens used by Capt. Mark Markary to communicate with other areas of the Argos, and with the crew of the ill-fated Galliot. Bava could have easily left these shots to be optically inserted later, but he took complete responsibility for them by faking the televisual communication on the set. He did this by having Giovannini's crew build a couple of small sets—only slightly larger than a telephone booth—behind a pair of large convex "screens" on the Argos control panel, separated by an exterior view of Aura on the middle screen. These two screens were opaqued by shining a pair of lights in their direction from backstage. When communication was opened, these lights were dimmed as other backstage lighting was raised to illuminate the two respective groups of three actors crammed into their little set, which literally sandwiched them between the screen and a background wall of flashing lights. To enhance the illusion of a broadcast image, the actors were illuminated from one side by a blue light inside a zoetrope-like cyclodrum, which projected onto them an oblique series of rolling horizontal lines.

In some ways, Bava's greatest visual *coups* in *Terrore nello spazio* are the miniatures he devised to supply the interiors of the Galliot and the derelict alien spacecraft, where entire technologies are suggested with little more than the careful arrangement of miscellaneous pieces of junk plastic. When Mark and the others visit the engine room of the Galliot, for example, Bava's camera pulls back to encompass a foregrounded miniature collage of odds-and-ends, the two largest pieces of which appear to be the



SONYA *is shocked by the sight of an ancient alien skeleton at one of the interior control panels—a moment echoed by the "Space Jockey" scene of Ridley Scott's* ALIEN.

12 Volta.

13 Robert Skotak, *Ib Melchior Man of Imagination* (Baltimore MD: Midnight Marquee Press, 2000), 238–47.

emptied frames of a portable electric fan. Assembled elsewhere in the mostly dark shot are what appear to be a black plastic vacuum cleaner hose, sticks or straws, and shadows that may be enhanced with daubs of matte paint. Photographed through a small window at the bottom of this conglomeration are the huddled cast members, standing on the other side of a negative lens that reduced them in size, correcting their scale in relation to the miniature landscape around them. Even more astounding is the interior of the alien vessel, with its entrance of dark, concentric circles that lead to a foregrounded, emerald-green beacon that seems mired in centuries of soot. The ceiling of the craft appears to be wholly composed of desk lamps and plastic cones, some combined (or placed against mirrored surfaces) to form peculiar hourglass configurations, all strobing with mystery and light, and viewed through a thin foreground of incense smoke. Another shot depicts Mark and Sonya silhouetted against a green spherical entrance, viewed from between the diverging inclines of two parallel orange cones; without moving from its base, the camera then moves to the right, reporting a ceilingworks of other colors and shapes. Viewed without sound, we can see how meager these set-ups really are—but viewed with Gino Marinuzzi Jr.'s electronic sound effects in place, they become extraordinary in their ability to provide our senses with every distraction needed to fill the gaps of this sequence.

Bava had equal input into the wardrobe design, which was one of the first film assignments for costumist Gabriele Mayer, who was only twenty-five years old at the time of production. Although the film was completed long before AIP's publicity department came up with the title *Planet of the Vampires*, the black uniforms worn by the Argos crew are somewhat vampiric in design, with high jagged neckpieces that suggest bat wings while also evoking memories of the high collar of Count Dracula's cape. Likewise, the leather headpieces lend the appearance of a widow's peak. It isn't known whether Bava was using the wardrobe to underscore the vampiric nature of the parasitic Aurans, but Mayer remembers having somewhat different aims.

"My initial idea—my favorite one of all the designs—was that the costumes should resemble the bodies of insects; the seams should mark the segments of the body of the animal, like that of the mantis," Mayer told Robert Skotak. "The idea was accepted and taken forward to completion, even though the time at our disposal was very short—at most about twenty days, plus one week for conception. And the budget was very tight, so much so that we had to do somersaults to get it all finished." [14]

One of the film's peculiarities is an extended sequence in which Barry Sullivan, Norma Bengell, and Ivan Rassimov visit the derelict alien spacecraft while wearing other, rather ordinary, orange-and-lavender jumpsuits, which only serve to emphasize the brilliance of the main costume design seen elsewhere in the picture. The change was necessary for two reasons: to make the actors' movements inside the dark spacecraft interior easier to see, and for another reason, which Lamberto Bava explains: "The costumes were changed so that we didn't always have to use the same ones. We were obliged to dress Norma Bengell with some variety, above all." To make the transition more acceptable, an extra dialogue scene was added later, showing Mark and Sonya in these jumpsuits, prior to departure, meeting with Wess and Tiona—who are wearing their standard black uniforms—to leave them in charge.



SONYA *tends to a severely injured crew member, as Dr. Karen observes.*

At some point during production, it was decided to emphasize the participation of Norma Bengell and Angel Aranda, perhaps to satisfy the interests of the Spanish investors, after their original screenplay was rejected by AIP.

"It was a Tower of Babel," Deke Heyward told interviewer Tom Weaver. "There'd be one [actor] talking in Portuguese, another in Italian, another in German, and there was no communication, just a lot of facial writhings. Barry Sullivan was the star of the American version, [but] each company [involved in the co-production] star-billed the player that was important to their country. In fact, we had to try for line balancing: 'Your star has got more lines than my star!' 'Okay, I'll trade you two of my star's lines for one of yours.' Which ain't the way pictures should be made. And they ain't never gonna be made that way again!" [15]

Consequently, Evi Marandi's character of Tiona lost a number of



TIONA *screams in response to a surprise encounter with a re-animated dead crew member.*

her scripted scenes, which would have depicted her as so traumatized by her encounters with the living dead that she became a sort of Cassandra figure—driven mad and subject to prophetic visions of the faces of the dead. Tiona was also originally planned to be the love interest of Wess. In a fairly late draft of the screenplay signed by Melchior and Louis M. Heyward, Wess decides not to leave Aura after Tiona is killed and possessed by an Auran. "It makes no difference to me what she is," Wess explains. "She is Tiona. Still." Despite the severe reduction of Marandi's role, she had the last laugh: it is her face alone that was pictured, screaming in fear, on Spanish posters for *Terror en el Espacio.*

Angel Aranda likewise lost some screen time as Marandi's complementary role was diminished, but his role had already gained in prominence as a result of Wess becoming an amalgam of other deleted characters. As for Norma Bengell, she is clearly the unrivalled female presence in the movie, which is due not only to her generous screen time, but also the changes she effected in her character. In the script, Sanya/Sonya is a weepy communications officer, forever leaning on Mark for support. Bengell does a little of this, but generally she plays Sonya as a more serious, independent, and capable young woman.

The inevitable result of all this line-for-line bartering was a lot of improvised paraphrasing of Ib Melchior's original dialogue, which dumbed it down considerably. Through no fault of Melchior's, the English version of the picture, *Planet of the Vampires,* contains what is by far the worst dialogue of any Bava film—much of it reserved for Barry Sullivan's Captain Mark Markary: "Okay, let's not stand around—we've got work to do" . . . "If he moves, shoot first—ask questions later" . . . and, most memorably, "If there are intelligent creatures on this planet, they're our enemies." When Markary first sets eyes on the skeletal remains of the dead alien crew, he makes this hilarious assessment: "Judging by the deterioration of the calcium, it must have been here a long time"—never mind that it's not only a skeleton, but buried up to its shoulders in dust!

Dialogue was only one of the ongoing problems. By the last weeks of filming, when Bava was primarily occupied with special effects photography, the matter of the film's ending had still not been resolved to everyone's satisfaction. Bava actually detested Ib Melchior's "Adam and Eve" stinger, as he later confided to Luigi Cozzi: "This screenwriter wanted the man and woman astronauts to land on Earth—in the United States, naturally—in Missouri!—and to discover Eden there, becoming Adam and Eve! Naturally, I refused to film it." [16]

With the possibility for further divergences from the script looming large, Deke Heyward summoned Ib Melchior to the set at Cinecittà, to meet Bava and Lucisano, to look at the dailies, and to work with them to arrive at a conclusion that would be acceptable to all.

Melchior: "They wanted a different ending. I wanted to go right, and they wanted to go left. I remember sitting with the script and talking with the producer, Lucisano, and with Mario, deciding how were we going to do this and that. And I think, at one time, Barry Sullivan was in on it too, telling us what he thought. l came up with different ideas and we finally settled on one that worked to everybody's satisfaction."

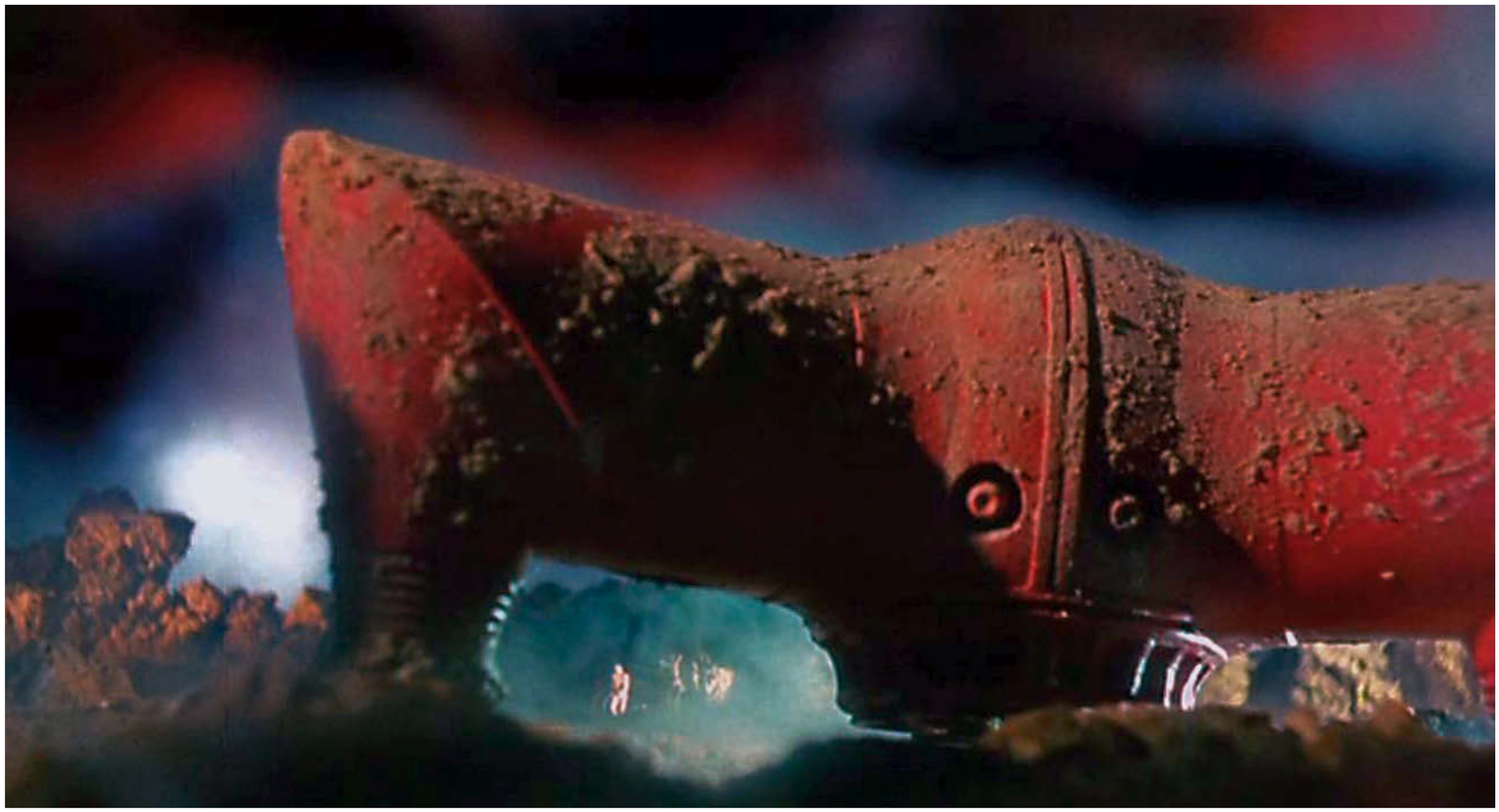
In later years, Bava put a less courteous face on the matter of Melchior's visit to Cinecittà. "While I was filming *Terrore nello spazio,* there was an American screenwriter on the set, rewriting the script, changing the scenes and the dialogue . . . Eventually, I stopped paying any attention to him." However annoyed he might have been by the intrusion into his domain, he was outwardly quite charming, treating Melchior with the utmost cordiality.

"I found Bava to be a very friendly, easygoing man," Melchior describes. "He was very reasonable and very calm, as far as I was concerned. In other words, there was none of this 'C'mon, let me see what you've got . . . No, that's terrible work!' It was more like, 'Okay, let's see what we can do here; this doesn't quite work.' Actually, it was quite unusual because the writer's work isn't usually respected that much. People just go ahead and rewrite whatever they want to, and it usually turns out lopsided or halting in some way. I was impressed with the fact that they had no problem with taking a couple of days with the writer to find out how best a problem could be handled."

14 Ibid.

15 Weaver.

16 Luigi Cozzi, *Il cinema dei mostri* (Rome, Italy: Fanucci Editore, 1987), 249–60.



A STRIKING *view of the derelict alien spacecraft discovered by the Argos crew—one of Bava's marvelous tabletop miniatures (with airbrushed clouds in mid-field and live actors receded by forced perspective and a negative lens).*

Melchior spent only one day on the set itself, but what he saw there pleased him. An experienced writer–director of low-budget science fiction films in his own right, he was impressed by Bava's seemingly effortless grasp of atmosphere—and by his ease in supervising the cast and crew. "What was he like as a director? Well, the little that I saw him direct—he told the people, 'I want this, I want this, I want that,' and it was all done in one take. Another one, maybe, was done in two takes, and that was that. The set seemed very relaxed—no tension. Everything seemed to be running very, very smoothly."

Barry Sullivan agreed with Melchior's assessment: "We shot very quickly, which at least kept our energy level up. There were some rewrites done on the script to improve the clarity of the storyline, although they didn't help an awful lot. Producers always tell you they're going to 'fix' the script, but it rarely happens. Through it all, Mario was totally focused, and there was no technical problem that he couldn't either work out on the spot or have a solution for when he arrived at the studio the next morning."

Renato Pestriniero, author of the source story, was not able to witness the film of his story being made, though Fulvio Lucisano did extend to him an invitation to come to Cinecittà. "I never met Mario Bava and never visited the set," Pestriniero regrets. "Of course, I had no right to intervene in the screenplay, so my presence was not necessary. It would have been a pleasure for me to meet Bava—a man famous for his professionalism and his ability in special effects, but the check in my hands was too small to cover my expenses!"

Special Effects

Despite its limited resources, *Terrore nello spazio* is a *tour de force* of special effects wizardry, which Bava supplied almost entirely with deceptively primitive, in-camera techniques dating back to the silent era. By the mid-1960s, even the crudest American science fiction films had achieved a certain level of sophistication in regard to special effects; it was not uncommon to see fairly accomplished optical effects or animation shots in low-budget, independent releases, even if used only sparingly. The polish of such effects led audiences to accept them as facets of storytelling, almost unthinkingly, but there is something about the soulful, handcrafted look of Bava's special effects in *Terrore nello spazio* that is not so familiar, adding to the film's complexion of otherworldliness and mystery. Trick shots of this nature had seldom been seen by contemporary audiences, and had never before been utilized in such a colorful setting. Eugenio Bava acted as an unofficial technical advisor to the production, Fulvio Lucisano reveals: "Many times, Mario went to his father for advice. Eugenio gave him some suggestions about how to do things, in the camerawork particularly."

The main titles sequence unfolds incrementally, opening with a shot of a star field in space, then adding the blue orb of Aura, followed by the sister ships Argos and Galliot, before using a slow zoom into the pulsing light on the belly of the Argos as a segue to the first interior. The star field was made in the most elementary way: it was a sheet of black velvet, punched full of small holes, with multi-colored gels covering some of the holes on the opposite, backlit side. Carlo Rambaldi built the Argos from Bava's own design; it was a boomerang-shaped miniature about 50 centimeters in diameter. He built only one model, and the shot of the Argos and Galliot together was accomplished with a double exposure. The planet seen in the shots from space was a styrofoam ball, carefully mottled with an airbrush.

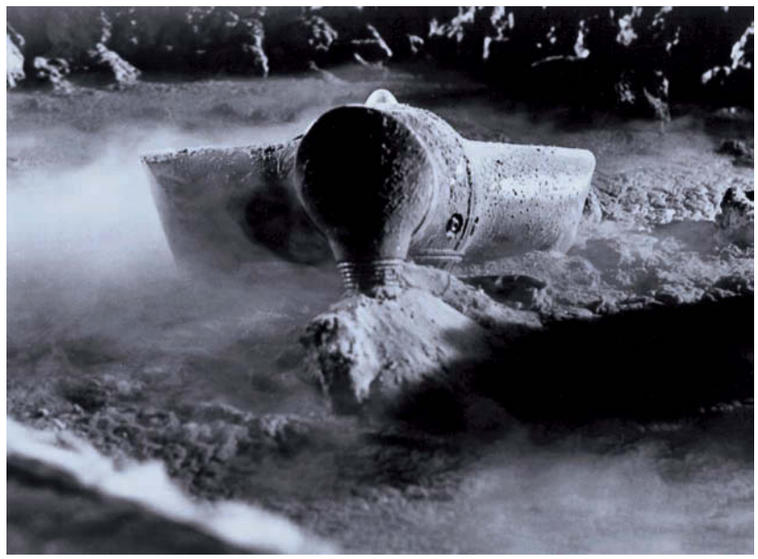
The first major special effects shot in the picture is the landing of the Argos. (It is preceded by a brief shot of the Argos descending through the Auran atmosphere, which was done by filming the model at rest on a glass surface from below, and double exposing the shot with scrolling shadows projected from a cyclodrum, creating the illusion of ascending clouds.) For the actual landing, Rambaldi's Argos model was lowered—and later raised, for the take-off shot—inside a large aquarium filled with water. Inside the aquarium, the floor was covered with sand and the background pane was painted with streaks of cloud and a replica of the jagged rocky cyclorama that forms a backdrop to later exteriors in the picture; the rear was further diffused with what appears to be opaque tissue paper, backlit with soft crossbeams of blue and green. Placed between the camera and the front panel of the aquarium was a glass matte of air-brushed clouds, which lent an illusion of depth to the shot while also concealing the means by which the model was lowered into the tank. As it descended, the light-strobing hollow on the bottom of the ship released a gust of air and white leaded powder, which plumed underwater to provide an illusion of braking exhaust.

As Bava later confided to the host of the Italian television talk show *L'ospite dalle due*, while screening this sequence, "We had to be careful so that little bubbles didn't show up on the spaceship, otherwise everything would have been revealed."

The filming of this shot happened to coincide with Ib Melchior's visit to the set. "When I was there, they were filming spaceship take-offs or landings in water, using the bubbles as exhaust," he recalls, smiling at the memory. "It was really quite interesting. I don't know how they did it, but it was a combination of bubbles and smoke and it really looked fine."

Viewed on a large screen, in sync with Gino Marinuzzi Jr.'s electronic sound effects, the shot is a staggering success—not just the landing, but the subsequent exterior of the Argos powering down in the midst of Aura's densely alien landscape. It is one of several shots in the picture that was a blatant influence on Ridley Scott's approach to *Alien*, many years later.





OTHER *illusions: an exterior view of the Argos on planet Aura (a foregrounded miniature landscape, with Rambaldi's scale model at rest behind it), and another view of the alien ship that suggests its legs may have been built up over ordinary light bulbs.*

The next major effects sequence occurs about twenty minutes into the picture, when Mark, Sonya, Wess, and another crewman venture across the primordial surface of Aura to reach the Galliot. After Wess diagrams their procedure and Mark replies, "Let's try it," the studio scene cuts to an effects shot, showing the four actors in the lower right hand corner of the screen, in the foreground of a vast, smoking, red-hot landscape that lies between them and the Galliot, shining in the distance.

With this shot, Bava was reclaiming an invention of his father's, which had come to be known as "the Schüfftan shot," a process of inserting actors into a miniature set or effect, which Eugenio first innovated during the making of *Cabiria*. In short, everything in the shot—except for the actors—was a miniature, tabletop "set" consisting of little more than rocks, dry ice, and potent red lighting, with Rambaldi's model positioned at the far side. This miniature set was then reflected on a mirror positioned at an angle in front of the camera, and a jagged, rock-shaped area in the lower right hand corner of the mirror had its silvering scraped away to permit a window-like view of the actors, who were perfectly aligned to "inhabit" the shot at a distance that lent them believable scale. The actors appear to enter the miniature landscape by walking toward it, crouching down as they exit their window of visibility; the shot then cuts to a studio shot of the actors venturing down a treacherous hillside, and the illusion is perfect.

To make their trek appear more hazardous, Bava supervised the construction of what Mario Silvestri has described as "a giant frying pan . . . fifteen meters in diameter," in which a partial replica of the Auran landscape was built over bubbling pots of polenta, or corn meal, which was doused with strong red light to create the appearance of lava pits. After Sonya edges past one of these, she looks up and the camera cuts to another exterior of the Galliot, positioned atop a diffuse mountainscape behind heaps of smoldering rocks.

This is the sort of trick shot that not only works on its own behalf, but also to confuse the issue of how the previous illusion was achieved; in this case, what appears at first to be another miniature landscape surprises us when the actors actually walk through it! Examined closely, the shot appears to be a double-exposed matte shot with a particularly tricky, zigzag matte line that separates the lower half of the screen (studio) from the upper half, which shows the spaceship model mounted behind a large glass matte painting of the mountain, behind which a wall of smoke is shown rising, shot through with blue, red, and lavender light. (The blue source light can actually be seen just behind the matte line on the right side of the screen.) In the following shots of the crew reaching the site of the Galliot, the model was cleverly foregrounded to enhance its size in relation to the actors.

The later exteriors of the derelict spacecraft were, of course, also miniatures. Curiously designed, with almost humanoid features, this model appears to have been constructed out of papier maché, built up around ordinary household lightbulbs. [17]

No one was more surprised by the quality of the film's special effects than its star, Barry Sullivan. The actor remembered his final meeting with Bava and his first look at their collaboration: "Toward the end of shooting . . . I [still] wasn't convinced that *Planet of the Vampires* would look like anything that anyone would want to see. Our budget was so low, I thought it would take a magician to create anything within it. We left the studio one day at the same time and, through an interpreter, [Bava] complimented me on my performance in *The Bad and the Beautiful*. It was clear that he loved Hollywood movies and respected the actors in them. So I told Bava, 'Maybe we'll work together on something *good* someday." This was relayed to him in Italian and he looked at me with surprise, genuine surprise. Then he said, 'I think you may be pleasantly surprised.'

"When I showed up [later] for the dubbing session, the first images came on the screen and I couldn't believe my eyes! It was the most beautiful use of color, composition, framing, *everything*, that I had ever seen! It looked 100 times more expensive than it was; it didn't resemble the studio conditions at all. The thing I remembered most about the studio was how hot it was in those rubber spacesuits under the studio lights, and how they kept the studio cool so we wouldn't sweat in those 'wet suits,' which we did anyway—and yet, there we were up on the screen, in these spectacular settings that Mario Bava somehow fashioned out of nothing. I couldn't look away from the screen, couldn't look down at my script long enough to read my lines! I finally asked the dubbing producer to just run the footage for me, so I could see it all, to take the surprise away, before I did my dubbing. It was so beautiful, it nearly brought tears to my eyes. It looked like an MGM Hollywood picture!

"I thought, 'I said it would take a magician to make this movie look like something special, and I guess we got one!' [Bava was] an absolutely brilliant artist—incomparable, and I mean that, really. And the funny thing is, I don't think all the effects and the art direction were completed at the time I dubbed it, because several years later, *Planet of the Vampires* ran late at night on the ABC station here in LA, and I watched it—and I was even *more* knocked out by it! An amazing film. If only the script had been better, it might be a minor classic. Because, visually, it certainly is."

SONYA *comforts Tiona after her encounter with the living dead.*



Music

Terrore nello spazio wears on its sleeve the influence of Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer's science fiction classic, *Forbidden Planet*—it can be seen in the distinctive uniforms worn by its space crew, the premise of a starship responding to a signal emanating from an alien planet, the discovery and exploration of extinct and unimaginable alien technologies, and finally, it can also be heard in its use of electronic music.

Forbidden Planet was scored by the husband-and-wife team of Louis and Bebe Barron. The Barrons were protégés of music experimentalist John Cage—who, in 1951, became the first musician to stage a live concert of electronic music, performing a composition written for twenty-four live musicians and half as many radios. While *Forbidden Planet* was not the first science fiction film to employ electronic instrumentation—Bernard Herrmann's theremin-suffused orchestral score for *The Day the Earth Stood Still* (1951) predates it—it was the first of its genre to be scored entirely electronically. The Barrons' "electronic tonalities"—performed on a synthesizer they built themselves and produced in their own home studio—challenged the traditional definition of film music; the score was not used to punctuate the drama of the story but to accentuate its exotic and alien settings with an accompaniment more appropriate to the uncharted mysteries of space. It was music as atmosphere.

The score for *Terrore nello spazio* was composed by Gino Marinuzzi Jr., who—like the Barrons—had his first motion picture experience composing for short films. Son of the great opera conductor and composer Gino Marinuzzi (1882–1944), he was born Luigi Marinuzzi Jr., on April 27, 1920, in New York City. His earliest film score was written for Guido Guerrasio's documentary *La leggenda di Verona* (1949), and through the middle 1950s, the bulk of his film assignments was in the realm of arts and travel documentaries. Torn between the cinema and academia (he also worked as an instructor at the Conservatorio di Santa Cecilia), Marinuzzi's feature assignments were comparatively rare, but they were distinguished: Jean Renoir's *Le Carosse d'Or/The Golden Coach* (1952), Vittorio Cottafavi's *Nel gorgo del peccato* (1954), and *Ercole alla conquista di Atlantide* (1961, with Armando Trovajoli), and Pasquale Festa Campanile and Massimo Franciosa's *Le voci bianche/White Voices* (1964, featuring Barbara Steele), to name a few. Though his father was purely a classicist, particularly renowned for his devotion to the works of Giuseppe Verdi, Marinuzzi Jr. was one of the first Italian composers to seriously explore the new frontiers of electronic music.

During the production of Bava's earlier science fiction feature *La morte viene dallo spazio,* the model of *Forbidden Planet* led composer Carlo

Rustichelli to provide the film with a hybrid score—half-classical, and half-created by crude electronic means, including various home appliances. Seven years later, Marinuzzi—who first dabbled in electronica onscreen with his contribution to *Ercole alla conquista di Atlantide*—would take generally the same approach to scoring *Terrore nello spazio;* that is, by composing traditional orchestral cues as well as some wholly electronic ones, such as the very Barronesque main title piece. More ambitiously, Marinuzzi created nearly all of the film's sound effects electronically, and it is in this area that his contribution is most impressive. In fact, never before or since would Mario Bava relegate as much responsibility to a composer for the final success of a film.

There is no dialogue for the first 2½ minutes of the picture, leaving Marinuzzi an open canvas in which to use sounds to make the opening model shot and stagebound Argos interiors feel persuasively real and starborne. The first cue—an ostinato of high-pitched tweets repeated over a deep, distorted tolling, as other sounds (like sheets of metal being scraped and rubbed together) tease the periphery—is fascinating, and as a whole and in various individual components, the piece would be used as a library track in other pictures for the next twenty years. Marinuzzi also provided all of the ambient sounds heard aboard the Argos until the first line of dialogue is spoken: the flaring hum of the central orb, the subtle drone of machinery, as well as a windy sound to suggest the ship's acceleration through space. His first sonic *tour de force* is the scene of the Argos being pulled into the gravitational field of Aura. Here, literally everything on the soundtrack besides the actor's voices was provided by the composer, and the sound collage works not only in its functional application, but also as music. We hear the ship's equipment as it is overridden by exterior forces and fails, the whoosh of passing meteors deflected by the rejector, the increasing rapidity of descent (evoked by raising the octaves of the sound effects), the emergence of the landing gear, the landing itself—indeed, the entire character of the spacecraft and its environs, followed by the character of the alien planet.



ITALIAN *locandina, art by Averardo Ciriello.*

The first orchestral cue occurs immediately after the landing, as the Argos crew are knocked unconscious and thus rendered vulnerable to possession by the Aurans. As the camera pans from Mark across the floor to the sprawled Sonya and Brent, the music builds in layers from a worrying woodwinds part to a spooky, sinuous viola ostinato, which—as Brent recovers consciousness—gives rise to a third complementary part consisting of dangerous short thrusts of muted brass and an element of the uncanny suggested by xylophone. As the camera cuts to Sonya waking, a full string section enters with a high arpeggio, the fullness and eerieness of the sound expressive of the alien presence gaining strength in numbers. As the scene explodes in actual violence, the fisticuffs are accented with short, furious tattoos on a snare drum. And sublimated below these instruments, for the entire length of the cue, is an airy electronic tone sustaining the essential ambiance of the spacecraft in a musically complementary key. If one pauses to analyze it, this cue tells us in musical terms what is happening to the crew well before Mark explains it theoretically. Whereas the woodwinds underscoring Mark's medium shot are breathing instruments, and thus indicative of his human condition, the viola underscoring Sonya's unconscious writhings are at once more sensual and spiritual in tenor. Brent's sudden consciousness, as emphasized by his cryptic facial expressions and menacing body language, is a source of danger (brass) but not yet rational, and the presence of xylophones brings to mind the dancing skeletons of Saint-Saens' *Danse Macabre,* the most famous use of the instrument in the annals of classical music.

Later, as Mark and the others explore the surface of Argos, the music becomes more fully orchestral, but at the same time, more amorphous and shapeless; it seems to throb and drift rather than progress, enveloping the action in fugues of instrumental fog—

17 For further verification see the MGM Home Entertainment DVD, 46:19—another foregrounded miniature shot, with the studio set visible in the background.

glacial Hammond organ, owl-like woodwinds, baleful oboes, all wallowing in an electronic backwash of sound. On occasion, an orchestral cue may be visited by electronic accents, as when Marinuzzi accompanies the zoom shot that introduces the blue-faced dead of the Galliot crew with a whooshing, dart-like sound effect for the action of the zoom itself. The howling winds heard at the burial of the Galliot crew were also created by Marinuzzi, and though generated by artificial means, their use recalls Bava's careful attention to silences and ominous winds in *La maschera del demonio* and *I tre volti della paura*'s *"I wurdalak."* Even more crucial to the film's atmospherics are the sound effects provided for the sequence inside the alien spacecraft, which sell the illusion of various pieces of plastic and strobing lights assembled by Bava into a vast, unpredictable, Krell-like technology. (The Krell being the extinct, technologically advanced race who formerly occupied *Forbidden Planet*.) The score's only concession to tradition is the accompaniment to the final battle, which unfolds against an anxious orchestral backdrop reminiscent of James Bernard's action music for various Hammer films: fretful ostinati for strings, odd and fluctuating time signatures, spurts of machine-gunning percussion—with electronic overdubs to accompany the blasts of futuristic weaponry and the final take-off.

Marinuzzi's electronic score is easily accepted on first viewing as a signpost of the film's futurism, much like the characters' peculiarities of language ("circuits" instead of "hours," and so on); however, on second viewing, we can begin to appreciate how it also subtly confirms, from the film's very outset, what is revealed in the final scenes: that the Argos crew are not of our earth—and, in a sense, the film's audience is invited to take possession of them like the disembodied Aurans, identifying with them and becoming involved in their plight, because fear is universal.

When AIP released the film as *Planet of the Vampires* in December 1965, they made the startling decision to leave Marinuzzi's score intact. However, AIP skimped on the quality of their lab work, as usual,



ORIGINAL SPANISH *poster, art by Mataix.*

and the sound mix that was subsequently released to theaters and television was extremely dull and unflattering to the work the composer had invested in his soundscapes. The lower frequencies were muffled and the higher frequencies were either flattened out or broken up, so that Marinuzzi's remarkable contribution garnered little notice or appreciation. The ultimate indignity came in the early 1980s, when Orion inherited the AIP catalogue, whose independent acquisition contracts did not cover the future likelihood of video rights. Rather than go through the considerable legal expense of tracking down the various composers involved, updating their contracts and paying them off, Orion opted to hire a fledgling, young Los Angeles-based musician—Kendall Schmidt—to rescore a dozen or more AIP acquisitions, including Tigon's *Witchfinder General*/*The Conqueror Worm* (1968), Amicus' *Scream and Scream Again* (1970), and *Planet of the Vampires*.

Schmidt rescored all of the films in a very short time, using a Synclavier synthesizer keyboard capable of reproducing dozens of different instrument sounds, melodic and percussive. He did not have the necessary time to compose new cues for each picture, so he used the existing music for each film as a template from which to extemporize his own variations. In cases such as *The Conqueror Worm*, Schmidt's rescoring was disastrous; to rescore a 17th century historical drama with a late 20th century instrument was a betrayal to every effort the original film had made to remain true to its time frame. However, in the case of a futuristic film like *Planet of the Vampires*, the rescoring was not so disadvantageous; in fact, Schmidt's more traditional approach to film scoring gave the action scenes more energy than they had in their original form, and changed the whole dynamic of the film's electronic approach from ambient to musical. In essence, the new score gave *Planet of the Vampires* a greater sense of vitality, and the clarity of its production made the film seem almost contemporary—suddenly, it was possible to discern in this 1965 picture the musical influences of Vangelis and Tangerine Dream. Schmidt's rescoring was neither as brilliant nor as original as Marinuzzi's work, but it mainstreamed the picture in some ways; that said, like Les Baxter's rescoring of *Black Sunday*, it made the picture seem untrue to its own place in time.

At the end of the 20th century, after the Orion film library was acquired by Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer, a number of titles from the AIP collection—including *Planet of the Vampires*—were restored and digitally remastered for overseas television distribution and for domestic release on home video. In 2001, *Planet of the Vampires* was released to home video for the first time with its original score intact, and its digital remastering was of such outstanding quality that Marinuzzi's long-underrated contribution to the picture was suddenly much easier to appreciate. [18] Unfortunately, the composer did not live to witness the reemergence of his work: Gino Marinuzzi Jr. died in Rome on November 6, 1996, at the age of 76.

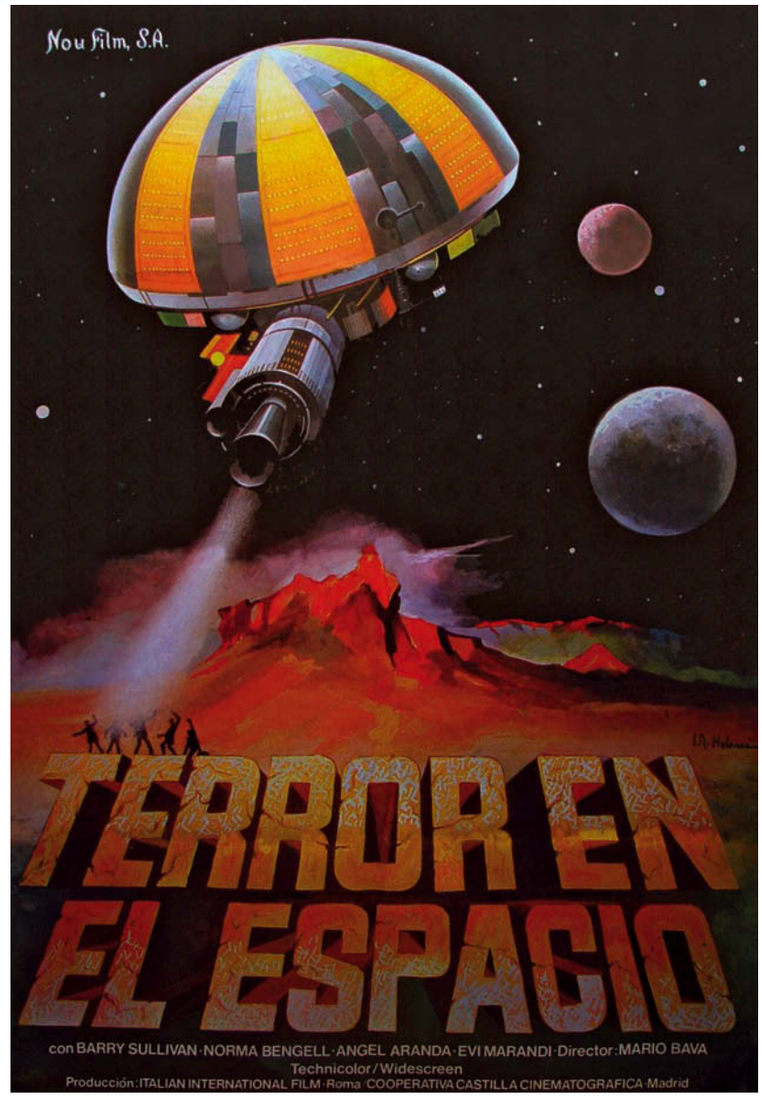
Release

Terrore nello spazio had its premiere in Rome in September, earning only 90 million *lire* [$56,000]—less than a

third of what Mario Bava's most popular films (*Gli invasori*, for example) had earned in initial release. Fulvio Lucisano blamed its low earnings on its middle-aged star, Barry Sullivan. "I'm afraid to say that, if the picture had a younger actor like Mario wanted, it would have been a big success in Italy," he told Robert Skotak. "It did okay, but not enough to write home about. [Mario didn't make any more science fiction films] because it didn't do that well here." [19]

When Renato Pestriniero finally saw the film made from his short story, his reaction was favorable, if somewhat philosophical: "A movie and a story have very different languages, and I felt sure that some changes would be necessary. When I saw *Terrore nello spazio*, I could hardly recognize my story. Bava decided to avoid the 'inner space' and underline the horror component. At any rate, he did a good job. I liked it, and many favorable opinions were expressed by the critics and fans. Today, it is still considered one of the best Italian science fiction films, all the moreso because it is one of the few actually based on an authentic work of Italian science fiction."

AIP had originally intended Bava's film to be ready for a late summer drive-in release, but its initial production difficulties caused it to be postponed. Then, when the film performed poorly in Rome, AIP reevaluated their marketing plans for the picture, which was subjected to one final, desperate flurry of title changes. AIP's earliest publicity stills were stamped on the back with the title *Planet of Blood* (first announced in *The Hollywood Reporter* on July 20), which was eventually dropped in favor of the eventual US release title, *Planet of the Vampires* (first announced in the same publication on August 20). Not a company to let the expense of a Writers Guild of America title registration fee go to waste, AIP subsequently released Curtis Harrington's 1966 movie *Queen of Blood* to television as *Planet of Blood*, while *Planet of the Vampires* was included in the same syndication package newly renamed *The Demon Planet*—a phrase which showed up on AIP's theatrical poster art ("Are they beings of the Future or of the Past these 'men' who rule the DEMON PLANET?").



SPANISH *poster for the post-STAR WARS reissue of 1978.*

The American version was not rescored by Les Baxter, which may have had more to do with the film's delayed release than with AIP's actual liking for the Marinuzzi music. However, Bava's original cut was re-edited—primarily to assist the effectiveness of the English-language dub produced at Titra in New York. To give the voice artists adequate time in which to follow the dialogue script, sometimes cutaway shots had to be extended or inserted, thus upsetting the intended editing rhythms. Four instances of substantial footage were cut: (1) the interruption of Mark's ship log confession by Wess, walking across the room in bizarre, possessed, alien strides; (2) a high angle view of the dead Brent, wrapped in a polyethelyne shroud plastic and nestled in the ground before the metallic lid is lowered over his grave; (3) a short line of dialogue from the confrontation between Mark and the undead Salas; and (4) a shot, following Wess' destruction of the Argos' meteor rejector, showing him fall to the ground, fried by the explosion, his uniform in tatters from the explosion, and dying after a moment's hesitation. Each of these count among the most dramatic moments in an often dramatically stilted picture. [20]

Although Arkoff and Nicholson had earlier issued a press release vowing to abandon second features, it was decided at the last minute to play it safe by combining *Planet* with AIP's other new "A-picture," Daniel Haller's *Die, Monster, Die!*, starring Boris Karloff. The pairing was ballyhooed as an "All-New All-Color Horror Scope" double-bill, with both pictures trumpeted as being in "Colorscope," though of the two, only *Die, Monster, Die!* was lensed anamorphically. *Terrore nello spazio* was shot in a hard-matted 1.66:1 ratio, while the in-camera effects shots—photographed with Eugenio Bava's Mitchell camera—were hard-matted to 1.85, the intended release ratio. Relegated to the bottom tier of the program, in deference to horror king Karloff, *Planet of the Vampires* also suffered in its US incarnation by having its color processed at Pathé, reducing much of its original Technicolor luminosity.

The double feature scheme ultimately paid off, helped in large part by the fact that, in those days, drive-in theaters in many regions stayed open all year 'round, providing their patrons with in-car heaters. Of the twenty-two Los Angeles area theaters where the two films premiered on December 15, 1965, eight were drive-in venues. Ultimately—and this is very surprising considering the film's ongoing popular appeal—*Planet of the Vampires*' split income from 7,023 playdates amounted to no more than $251,000. AIP loved Mario Bava, but through no fault of his own, each of his films since *Black Sunday* had generated about half as much profit as the one before. It was a sign of dwindling interest in the horror genre itself, as the generation raised on *Famous Monsters of Filmland* magazine were now becoming adults and putting

18 The complete story of the MGM disc's restoration process can be read in Glenn Erickson's article "Restoring Mario Bava's *Planet of the Vampires*," which appeared in *Video Watchdog* 76, October 2001, 36–39.

19 Skotak.

20 The first and third of these instances would not be seen in America until the release of a restored version on DVD in August 2001; the other two shots exist only in the original Italian cut, which was briefly released on DVD in France by Studio Canal Video in November 2001, only to be quickly withdrawn from the market due to a rights snafu.



US *half-sheet poster, art by Reynold Brown.*

away childish things like scary movies. Roger Corman's boxoffice receipts reflected the same trend, which explains why 1965's *The Tomb of Ligeia* was the last of his Edgar Allan Poe films. In 1966, Corman would take the maturing age and interests of his audience into account with *The Wild Angels*, a harrowing account of revelry within the ranks of the Hell's Angels motorcycle club, starring Peter Fonda and Nancy Sinatra. Bava, as an Italian working for hire, had fewer options for survival at AIP; it was an uncomfortable situation, considering that AIP's five-year contract with Italian International was nearing its expiration. As Lucisano brainstormed with Arkoff and Nicholson about new properties that might be good candidates for producing on Italian soundstages, *Planet of the Vampires* went directly from theaters into television syndication, under the title *The Demon Planet*.

The unprofitable film was withheld from British release until the latter months of 1968, following close on the heels of the recently permitted *La maschera del demonio* (there retitled *Revenge of the Vampire*). The reviewer for *Films & Filming*, Richard Davis, couldn't help comparing the two: "Color in this context is less effective than black-and-white. And [Bava] is tied to a grossly synthetic studio set which doesn't for a moment convince us of its extraterrestrial reality. A planet inhabited by evil spirits who take over the bodies of spacemen seems to me a plot full of intriguingly imaginative possibilities . . . but the piece on the whole is poor stuff." [21]

The unsigned critic at *Monthly Film Bulletin* (likely Tom Milne) was more receptive: "This might be described as the triumph of mind over matter, or of Bava over a shoestring budget and appalling dubbed dialogue. Given little more to work on than a handful of wooden actors peering agitatedly at papier-maché rocks and muttering 'Quick! Let's get out of here!' (or, for variation, 'Let's get out of here quick!'), he does atmospheric wonders with pastel-shaded ground-fogs and cunning camerawork." [22]

Commentary

One of Mario Bava's most influential films, *Terrore nello spazio* shares much in common with his earlier *Ercole al centro della terra*. Both films are about characters who venture into utterly strange, unfathomable worlds where the shadows hold up mirrors to the phantasmagoria of their deepest fears. In both cases, Bava used these stories as an excuse to create, project, and explore phobic imagery with the intangibles that were his favorite tools: color, smoke, and illusion. With these few things, and the able assistance of Gino Marinuzzi Jr.'s electronic score and sound effects (which gives them substance), Bava devised one of the films that best embodies the essence of his particular genius—though it is, ultimately, not one of his finest works.

Both *Ercole al centro della terra* and *Terrore nello spazio* build to a final confrontation between the living and the dead, a literal struggle between life and death which dramatizes the tenuousness of one and the inevitability of the other. *Terrore nello spazio* was one of the first films to depict the living dead in a state of physical corruption—earlier films tended to say "zombie" by showing stiffly walking characters with dark circles painted under their eyes—and it was also one of the first to confront the most painful extensions of such a fantasy, particularly the ways in which our defenses are weakened as death claims those closest to us. Bava had already addressed this topic definitively in *I tre volti della paura*'s *"I wurdalak,"* in which the need for family finally proves stronger than the will to survive. Mark's discovery of his dead brother Toby among the enemy dead of the Galliot is not nearly so potent, yet it anticipates similar tensions that George A. Romero would address to more extreme effect in his horror classic *Night of the Living Dead* (1968)—in which an hysterical woman is trapped inside a barricaded farmhouse by a growing number of living dead, including her own brother.

Terrore nello spazio may dabble with these ideas, but it also abstracts them by keeping any real emotions at bay. It is an unusually dispassionate Bava film—so much so, it is tempting to imagine that the incendiary intensity of *Sei donne per l'assassino* left its director temporarily sated, though hardly at a low creative ebb. There are any number of reasons why Bava may have chosen to abstain here from a similar fever pitch, the major one being that he was working once again for AIP, who had previously discouraged him from depicting scenes of full-on, undiluted horror. It may also have been his deliberate, artistic choice to withhold as many human emotions from his characters as possible, to subtly underscore their true alien character. Another explanation is that he was simply disinclined; *Terrore nello spazio* was Bava's first extended opportunity since 1962 to immerse himself in the special effects photography that was his art, his play, and his therapy. He was also working for

the first time with several new key crew members, which also had an impact on the way things panned out.

The first thing one notices about *Terrore nello spazio*, when approached in a chronological viewing of Bava's films, is that the sensuousness and elegance of camera movement which defined his earlier work is replaced here by a colder, more mechanical visual demeanor. This may have been partly a response to the material, but it was also Bava's first collaboration with cameraman Antonio Rinaldi, and the obvious differences in the handling of the camera reflect, to some extent, the departure of Ubaldo Terzano. In Rinaldi's charge, the camera is typically well-anchored throughout—excepting the odd lateral movement or tracking shot—framing the action and keeping everything at a formal distance, rather than providing the action itself or meeting it halfway. One of the more obvious traits of Rinaldi's style is a newly accentuated use of the zoom lens, which is not employed for the usual reasons—to save time and expense of setting up detail inserts or dolly shots—but to visually analogize the subjective experience of shock. For example, when Mark sees the dead body of his brother Toby, the camera zooms not into the dead face (as happened in some of Bava's earlier films), but *away* from it, then executes a mirroring zoom into Mark's shocked expression. Consequently, the zoom-out *becomes* the zoom-in.

To a degree, Rinaldi's visual approach may have been imposed on him by the spatial limitations of the sets, and also by the film's heavy reliance on in-camera special effects scenery. However, he would continue to employ something like this specific camera stance in all of his subsequent work for Bava, so we must accept it as a matter of personal style as well as an economic imperative. It may also have been a reflection of the ascending aesthetic of the time; in the mid-1960s, Italian films were cooling off across the board, the hot-bloodedness of Gina Lollobrigida and Sophia Loren giving way to Antonioni's ennui and the hyper-artifice of Fellini.



GERMAN *half-sheet poster.*

Terrore nello spazio also exerts a different feel due to Romana Fortini's particular approach to editing. Whereas Mario Serandrei had been an old-school craftsman of the editing table, Fortini was a young woman who took a more progressive, adventurous approach to her craft. In *Terrore nello spazio,* we see things that would be unimaginable in earlier Bava features: footage is speeded-up, slowed-down, and otherwise manipulated for sheer sensational effect. When fights break out aboard the Argos shortly after its landing on Aura, Mark rescues Sonya (who is being strangled by Brent) by kicking her attacker, and the kick is felt because Fortini *removed* the single frame of impact—a trick which editor Peter Hunt had begun to exploit in James Bond action sequences of this period. Later, when the dead body of Brent is discovered outside the Argos, the zoom into his ravaged face is edited, skipping one or two frames, thus propelling us toward the image of horror faster than even the most experienced filmgoer could anticipate. Bava must have been pleased with Fortini's work because she would continue to serve as his editor through *Diabolik* in 1968.

As adept at the job as she proved to be, Fortini was not the problem solver that Serandrei had been. *Terrore nello spazio* is plagued by some terrible gaffes that would never have eluded her distinguished predecessor. For example: in the early scene of the Argos communicating with the crew of the Galliot via "ionoscope," Captain Salas is played by a handsome, uncredited Italian or Spanish actor with dark hair, who has a terrible time speaking his English lines phonetically; in Salas' later appearances as one of the undead, the character is played by blonde, thin, nervous-looking Massimo Righi, who (with two earlier Bava performances to his credit) surely would have been the director's first choice. The only plausible explanations for this astonishing breach of continuity are that Righi was either unable, or declined, to complete his performance (for what it's worth, it would be the last time he worked for Bava), or that the first actor was so untalented that he had to be replaced, and the scene already filmed (which did include a large number of actors on-set) was too expensive to reshoot.

Serandrei would also surely have drawn Bava's attention to certain points of confusion inherent in the script, before it went in front of the camera. Disorientation sets in quite early, as Mark communicates with three other uniformed officers—Eldon, Tiona, and Kell (whom we never see again)—via his "ionosphere" screen. Because he addresses them via this long distance device, which he immediately uses thereafter to speak to Capt. Salas of the Galliot, we assume those other three to also be aboard the other vessel, causing some puzzlement when they later show up alive in scenes following the burial of the Galliot crew. Serandrei was the kind of editor who would have suggested that Bava introduce Eldon and Tiona

21 Richard Davis, "Planet of the Vampires" review, *Films & Filming* 15:4, January 1969, 52.

22 "Terrore nello spazio (Planet of the Vampires)" review, *Monthly Film Bulletin*, Vol. 34, 1967, 204.

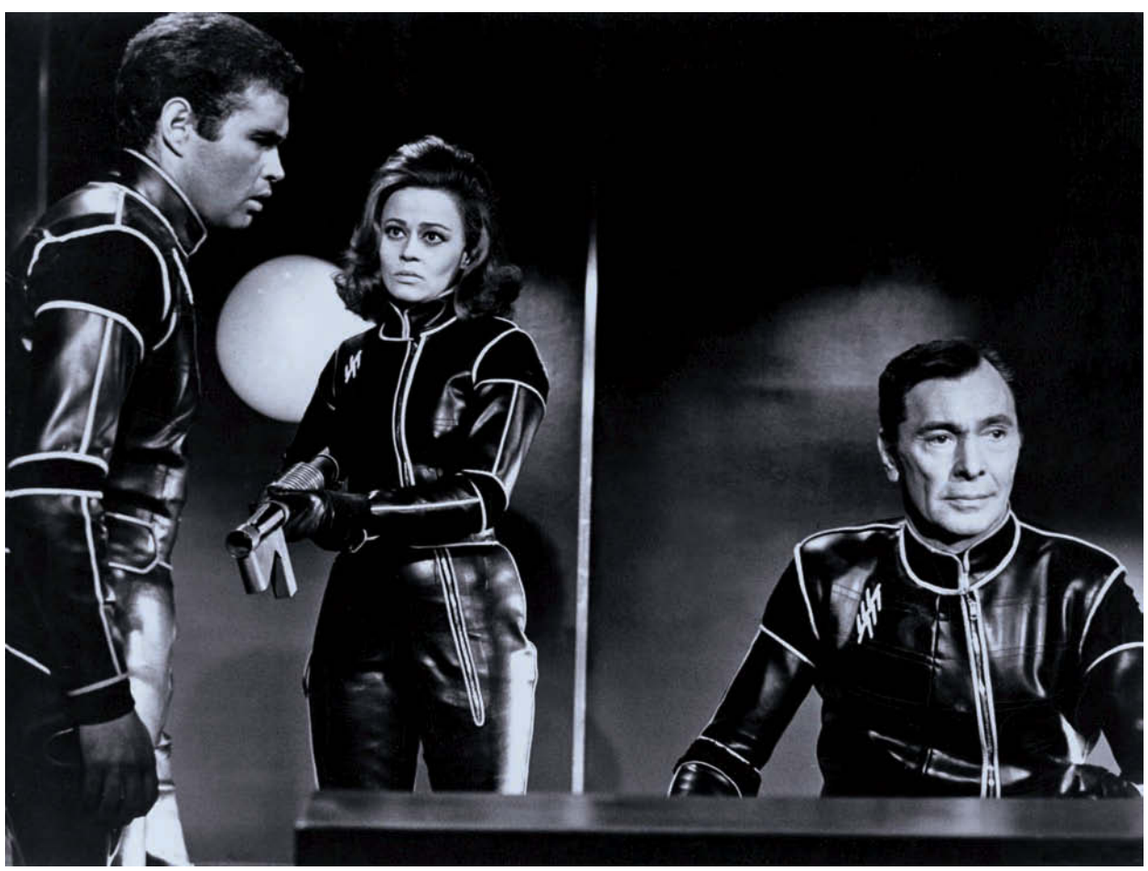


WESS, *Mark, and Carter suit up for imminent war against unknown forces.*

interacting with Mark and the others in the same room, on the same geographic plane, for the sake of clarity, rather than via a television screen. Furthermore, the name of the mysterious planet that plays host to the film's events—Aura—is mentioned only once, buried amid much other futuristic jargon in an early conversation; as a result, a later single mention of "the Aurans" is easily mistaken for a reference to the dead alien race discovered by Mark and Sonya. Adding to one's initial perplexity are the Argos and Galliot themselves, which were scripted as twin ships for economic reasons, allowing the production to use the same model and set interiors for both. However, Rinaldi's failure to provide distinctive establishing shots for each craft makes it often impossible to tell geographically where anyone is, as the Argos crew venture perpetually back and forth from one ship to another.

Nowhere else in the Bava canon do we get quite so many intimations of shots missing. The greatest oversights occur during and following the climactic battle, as we are prepared for pyrotechnics which never take place. Prior to the final showdown, there is a painstaking introduction of grenade-shaped plutonium "detonators," which are carried into battle but never thrown—and finally, there is no effects shot of the Galliot and its spectral crew being blown (as Wess says) "to smithereens." Instead, we get a close-up of a gloved hand setting an explosive timer and—after a bewildering interlude in which the Galliot crew (last seen trapped inside their doomed ship) is suddenly hot on the heels of their saboteurs—several immense flashes of light are shown bombarding the horizon. It isn't satisfying, and on a planet whose atmosphere has been demonstrated to be breathable, a fireball would not have been out of place.[23]

As for the much-revised "sting-in-the-tail" finale, Ib Melchior's



WESS *discovers that Sonya and Mark are possessed by Auran spirits bent on colonizing other planets in the surprise finale.*

emergency visit to the set wasn't enough to save it. It was ambitious of Bava to aim for a "triple-whammy"—(1) Mark and Sonya are possessed, (2) they were alien to begin with, and (3) they are about to invade our Earth—but it is not supported by the actions leading up to it. Nowhere during the climactic scuffle are Mark or Sonya given opportunity to die or lose consciousness, nor are they offscreen long enough for these eventualities to occur without us knowing. (A later line of dialogue was introduced, stating that "All you have to do is want it," but this explanation also would not apply to either of them.) Since Mark and Sonya, and even Wess, are ultimately revealed to be of extraterrestrial origin—not specifically Martian, as in the script—the weirdly obvious "cat-and-mouse" games following the ship's take-off serve no real purpose, other than to make Wess rebel against his companions by destroying the meteor rejector. Yet even this aspect is gratuitous, given the fact that—in a dialogue scene just before the sabotaging of the Galliot—Mark informs Wess that there won't be enough time to install the meteor rejector before take-off. The finale would have been just as effective—and perhaps moreso, in its greater simplicity—had the surviving Argos crew fled into space unprotected, been faced with an approaching meteor shower, and thus forced to make an emergency landing on the nearest planet: Earth. The only reason to eliminate Wess, under the circumstances, is to arrive at the twosome necessary for the rejected "Adam and Eve" ending.

Despite its jumbled and overcompensatory qualities, the ending nevertheless packs a certain *frisson*, especially when one regards *Terrore nello spazio* in its historical context. In 1965, science fiction was still largely a genre of optimism, about the triumph of imagination over adversity. After the cataclysmic devastation at Hiroshima and Nagasaki in 1945, the Japanese used the genre to purge some of their national feelings about life after the Bomb in Ishiro Honda's *Gojira/Godzilla, King of the Monsters!* (1954), which ended in victory but left the victors too benumbed by personal and national losses to feel truly victorious. In the meantime, American and British science fiction films held onto their happy endings, although the main thrust of many such movies during this period was a growing sense of alienation from our loved ones (*Invaders From Mars*, 1953), ourselves (*Invasion of the Body Snatchers*, 1956[24]), and our governments and other institutions (*Quatermass 2*, 1957). Other key influences on the darkening of science fiction cinema were the twist endings of several sci-fi-oriented episodes of Rod Serling's successful television series, *The Twilight Zone* (1959–65), and the arrival of "near future" cautionary tales such as *Fail-Safe* (1964).

Terrore nello spazio differs from these other examples in that it has no social statement to make, no political axe to grind; it simply points out, as Bava's films are wont to do, that we have taken appearances for granted and have been thoroughly deceived by what we thought we saw. The effectiveness of the finale has nothing to do with the revelation of Mark and Sonya's possession, which is painted in the broadest strokes possible with Sullivan smirking like a Siamese cat and Bengell glowering at the ship's viewfinder like a zombie; it has everything to do with what this twist implies: that we have spent the entire running time of the picture, without knowing it, becoming "attached" to the plight of alien beings









EUROPEAN *versions of the film follow Wess' ultimate self-sacrifice with a close shot of his death not found in the American version.*

23 Still other faults assert themselves in the American version, which are rooted in the dubbing track recorded at Titra in New York City. Dr. Karen is sometimes called "Dr. Curran," a character introduced as "Doral" is later called "Derek," and during the scene of Mark and Sonya taking leave to sabotage the Galliot, the supporting character Brent has a line of dialogue dubbed by a voice actor not assigned to him in other scenes—Peter Fernandez, who dubs the voice of Angel Aranda throughout.

24 Director Don Siegel had dared to film a downbeat ending for *Invasion of the Body Snatchers*, with star Kevin McCarthy staring into camera and shouting "You're next!" However, a studio "pod" intervened, forcing Siegel to add another scene showing that McCarthy's hysterical warnings of the invasion were finally taken seriously by the authorities, and leaving the audience with a secure sense that the military would take the necessary steps to contain it. At the time, audiences had no reason to suspect the military might not be victorious at any task they addressed.

who are no closer to what we are than the disembodied forces which ultimately took possession of them. What we have in common with the crew of the Argos, what enables us to mistake them as human, is the fear they experience when confronting the Unknown.

The core theme of *Terrore nello spazio* is the universality of fear. As a theme, it is wholly Bava's, having no basis in Renato Pestriniero's short story (which is truly about an Earth crew) or in any draft of Ib Melchior's screenplay. The planet Aura is depicted as a vast, suggestive nothing, a Rorschach blot onto which its visitors may project their own superstitions and insecurities. Alone in his cabin, Mark is shown making the following voice recording into the ship's log:

"A captain should not be afraid. And I confess now—to whomever may hear this—that today . . . now . . . I am experiencing fear. I must not let my crew know this. I must keep them busy. I must not let them know that the situation appears more hopeless with each passing day. Dictated by Capt. Mark Markary of the spaceship Argos, on the planet Aura, in the year . . ."

He is cleverly prevented from revealing the *annum* observed by his unearthly kind by the sudden entry of Wess, but the scene has already fulfilled its function, planting a seed that will flower later, during the scene inside the derelict spacecraft. Inside this pitted wreckage, Mark and Sonya discover the gigantic skeletal remains of a race of alien astronauts, one of them seated at the still-active controls of a bewildering, otherworldly technology. While examining these unfathomable artifacts, Mark accidentally activates something, which fills the chamber with the droning of a deep, groggy, alien language. The light pulsations of the device, throbbing in perfect rhythm with sounds, recall the strobing of Mark's own electronic log device, prompting an important parallel to be drawn. Might this enormous skeleton—when it was a fully fleshed, living being—have also recorded a confession of its fears, its own sense of dread, its intimations of mortality, as it and its crew found themselves stranded and alone on this alien planet? This sequence would have been extraordinary had it done nothing more than to consider such expansive concepts as alien language and technology within its budgetary constraints, but to also use the opportunity to slyly reflect the emotions voiced by Mark in the previous scene—to imbue these ancient bones with such tragic emotion—shows a tender, sympathetic sense that runs counter to the kind of misanthropy that some critics have detected in Bava's work. With little more at his disposal than a flashing light, Bava bonds two alien civilizations (and our own) with a common thread of terror.

In terms of imagery, *Terrore nello spazio* finds Bava working at the near-peak of his powers, and there are several sequences outstanding in his *oeuvre:* the dread exteriors of the alien planet, like none other filmed before or since; the resurrection of the dead Galliot crew, rising from their graves and tearing off their clear plastic shrouds in slow motion; and best of all, the sequence inside the derelict alien ship, which culminates in Mark and Sonya's fight for survival after triggering a device that sucks out all the oxygen in the chamber through a menacing vent in the wall. Many years later, while working on Dario Argento's 1980 film *Inferno,* Bava would add similar pick-up shots of infernal vents to a sequence in which Leigh McCloskey is overwhelmed by harmful, demonic smells through an identical vent in the wall of an apartment building run by witches.

Finally, it must be noted that *Terrore nello spazio* contains a troubling moment in which Bava, in effect, quotes himself. As Capt. Salas is questioned by Mark, his uniform briefly opens to flash a putrescent torso—a reprise of a shock effect that occurs late in *La maschera del demonio.* There are earlier instances in Bava's *oeuvre* of recurring images, or even recurring sequences of images, as in the case of the similar deathbed scenes in *La ragazza che sapeva troppo* and *I tre volti della paura*'s *"La goccia d'acqua,"* which curiously share the touchstones of the staring face, the mewing cats, and the spilled water. In a sense, the shock effect shared by *La maschera del demonio* and *Terrore nello spazio* is more at home in its second setting, because it was gratuitously used in the former; it's an effective jolt, but on close consideration, it doesn't make sense for Princess Asa to be only partly restored after draining her descendant Katia of her youth. However, because *Terrore nello spazio* is not a film of equal caliber, the shot hazards an impression that Bava's work had not conveyed till now, that the *Maestro* might be starting to run out of ideas.

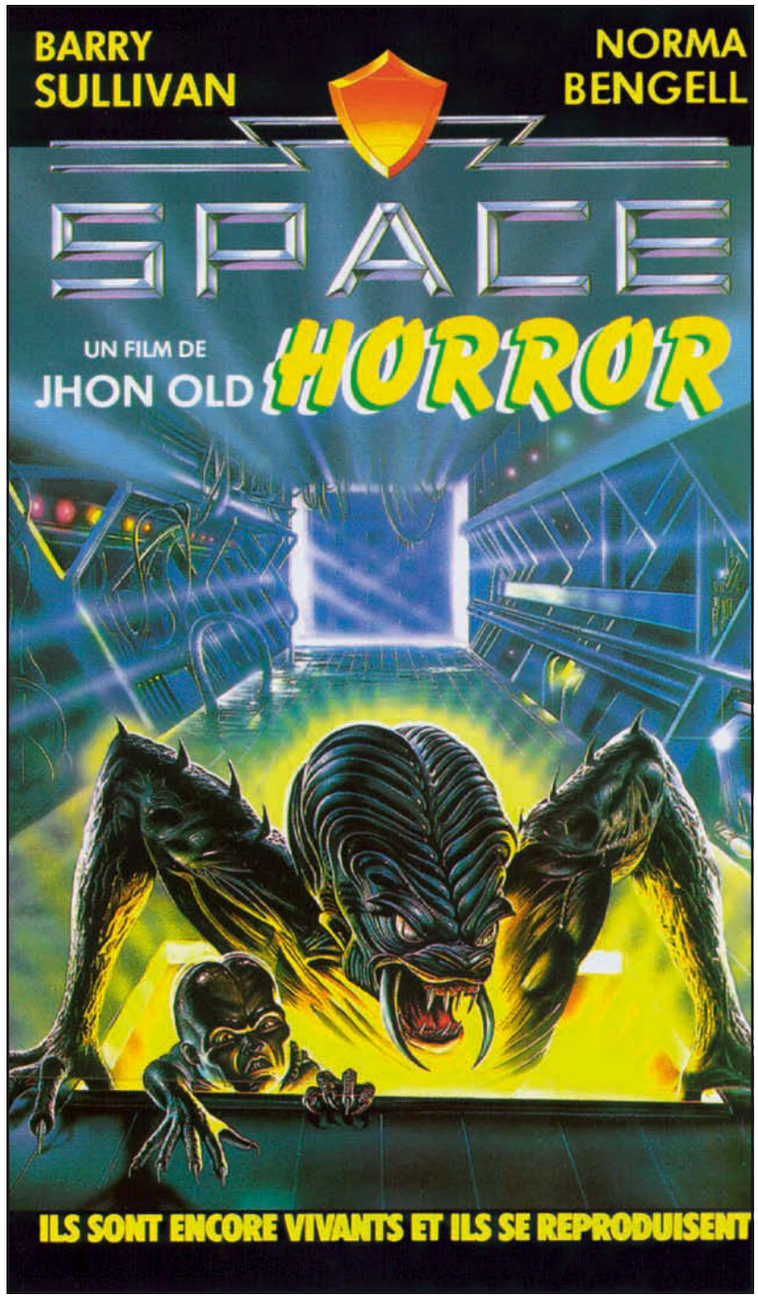


MEXICAN *lobby card shows members of the Argos crew comforting Tiona after her encounter with the alien phenomena of planet Aura.*

Influences

With *Terrore nello spazio*, Bava achieved a rare, wholly successful fusion of horror and science fiction—using imagery borrowed from his earlier *peplum* pictures—that would prove lastingly influential, thanks to the tremendous international success of one film it directly influenced: Ridley Scott's *Alien.*

Scott has never acknowledged a conscious debt to Bava's film—or to Edward L. Cahn's *It! The Terror From Beyond Space* (1958), to which it is also often compared—and it is quite possible that he never saw either movie, and that the debt was actually manifest in the original script by American film buffs Dan O'Bannon and Ronald Shusett. From a directorial perspective, *Alien* and *Terrore nello spazio* are quite different, Bava's film being extravagantly stylized pulp fantasy and Scott's being more realistic in terms of its dialogue (much of which was improvised onset) and meticulous attention to detail. What the two films share in common, specifically—besides the obvious scenes chronicling the discovery and exploration of a wrecked alien spacecraft, and perhaps the surprise revelation that one crew member is not human—is the use of an unexplored alien world as a substitute for the traditional haunted house. In Bava's hands, the haunted house is a pseudo-Nietzschean realm in which his characters peer into an abyss only to have it peer back into them. In *Alien,* the haunted house metaphor becomes more literal; Scott's alien planet is a treacherous place of hostile weather, trap doors, and jack-in-the-box threats, whose rules we don't know and where anything can happen. There *is* one concrete Bava connection, in that the alien lifeforms depicted in the film were mechanical constructs built by Bava's frequent collaborator Carlo Rambaldi, who based them on designs by the Swiss conceptual artist H. R. Giger. It isn't known whether Bava saw Scott's film, but his grandson Roy remembers seeing him read a copy of Alan Dean Foster's novelization. One can't help wondering if he noticed any similarities in the book to his own work.



FRENCH *video art acknowledges Bava's film's influence on Ridly Scott's ALIEN while retitling the picture and crediting Bava with a pseudonym never associated with it!*

Alien was an enormous boxoffice success all over the world, and following its release, numerous imitations went into production. The Italians struck first, beginning with Ciro Ippolito's *Alien 2 sulla terra* and Luigi Cozzi's *Contaminazione/Alien Contamination* (both 1980). Fulvio Lucisano was also moved to reissue *Terrore nello spazio* theatrically, printing up new skull-faced posters that retitled the film *Alien e Terrore nello spazio*, the word "Alien" appearing in an identical font to that of the 20th Century-Fox release. Meanwhile in America, Roger Corman produced two knock-offs that were released and re-released between 1980 and 1982 under various titles: *Mindwarp: An Infinity of Terror/Planet of Horrors/Galaxy of Terror* (1981) and *Mutant/Forbidden World* (1982). They may not have been so brazen as to incorporate the word "Alien" in their titles, but they were unashamed in their incorporation of aspects of Giger and Rambaldi's creation in their monsters. The trend continued for a surprisingly long time, before finally petering out with William Malone's *Creature/Titan Find* (1985)—made just before James Cameron brought the profits back home with the first of three official sequels, 1986's *Aliens.*

Postscript

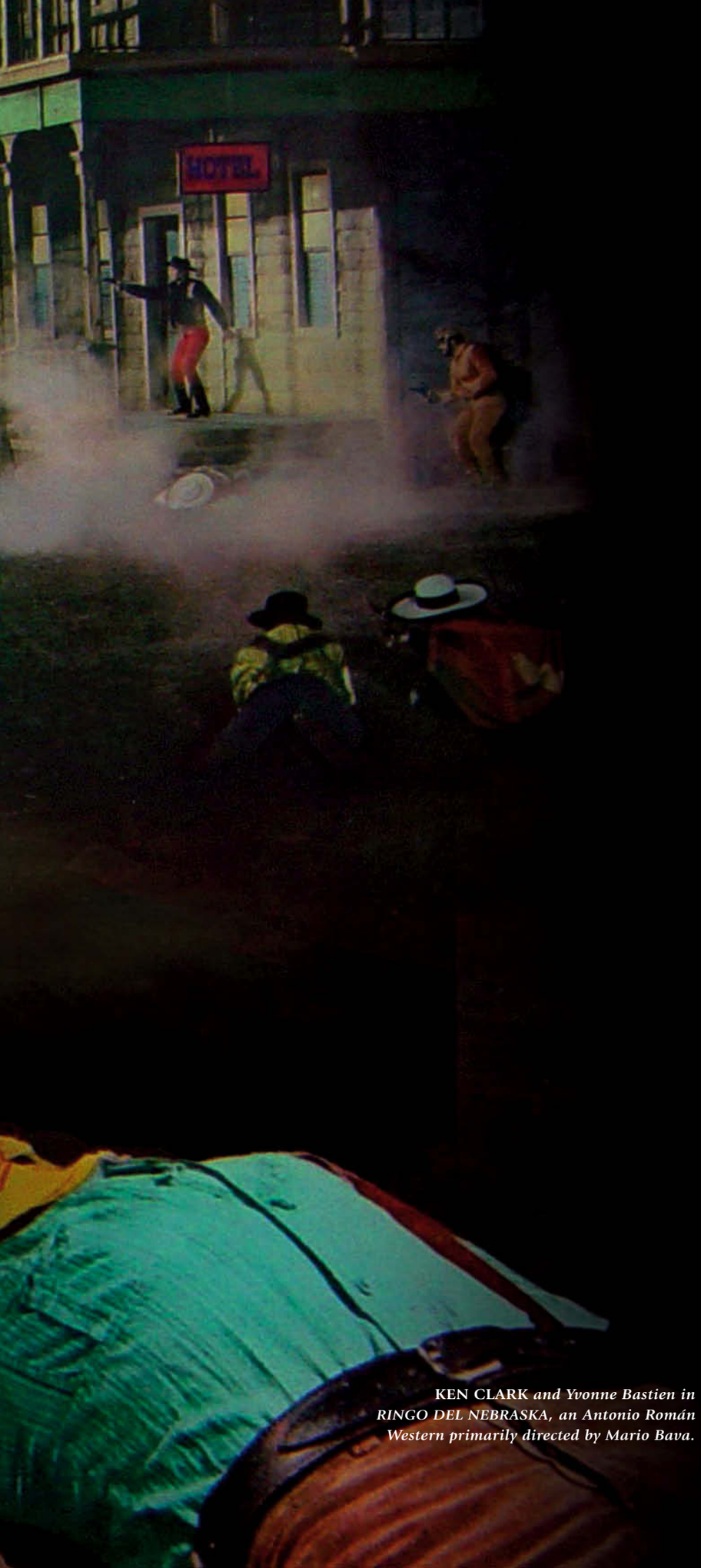
Today, Renato Pestriniero is proud of the cult reputation of *Terrore nello spazio,* which has resulted in continuing interest in his original short story, *"Una notte di 21 ore."* Pestriniero had other close encounters with the cinema after his fateful $105 sale to Mario Bava, but none of them reached fruition. In the mid-1980s, following the success of *Aliens,* he was invited by a producer to write a new screenplay, a remake of *Terrore nello spazio* that would be more faithful to his original story.

"Unfortunately, no movie was realized," he says, "but I later used the material for a novelette—*Né Ariel né Calibano,* published in 1986—which represents a sequel to *'Una notte di 21 ore.'"* The title translates as *"Not Ariel nor Caliban,"* a reference to characters in William Shakespeare's play *The Tempest* . . . the unlikely literary basis of *Forbidden Planet.*

In the early 1990s, an even more tantalizing opportunity came Pestriniero's way—in the form of a telephone call from Federico Fellini. The great director was looking for material, and he flabbergasted the author by expressing a wish to read everything he had ever written! "Fellini had the intention of making a science fiction film," Pestriniero sighs, "but, unfortunately, he died [in 1993] . . . so the project remained a dream."

But, thanks to *Terrore nello spazio* and Mario Bava's early recognition of his talent, Renato Pestriniero will always remain a seminal figure of Italian science fiction cinema.


HOTEL

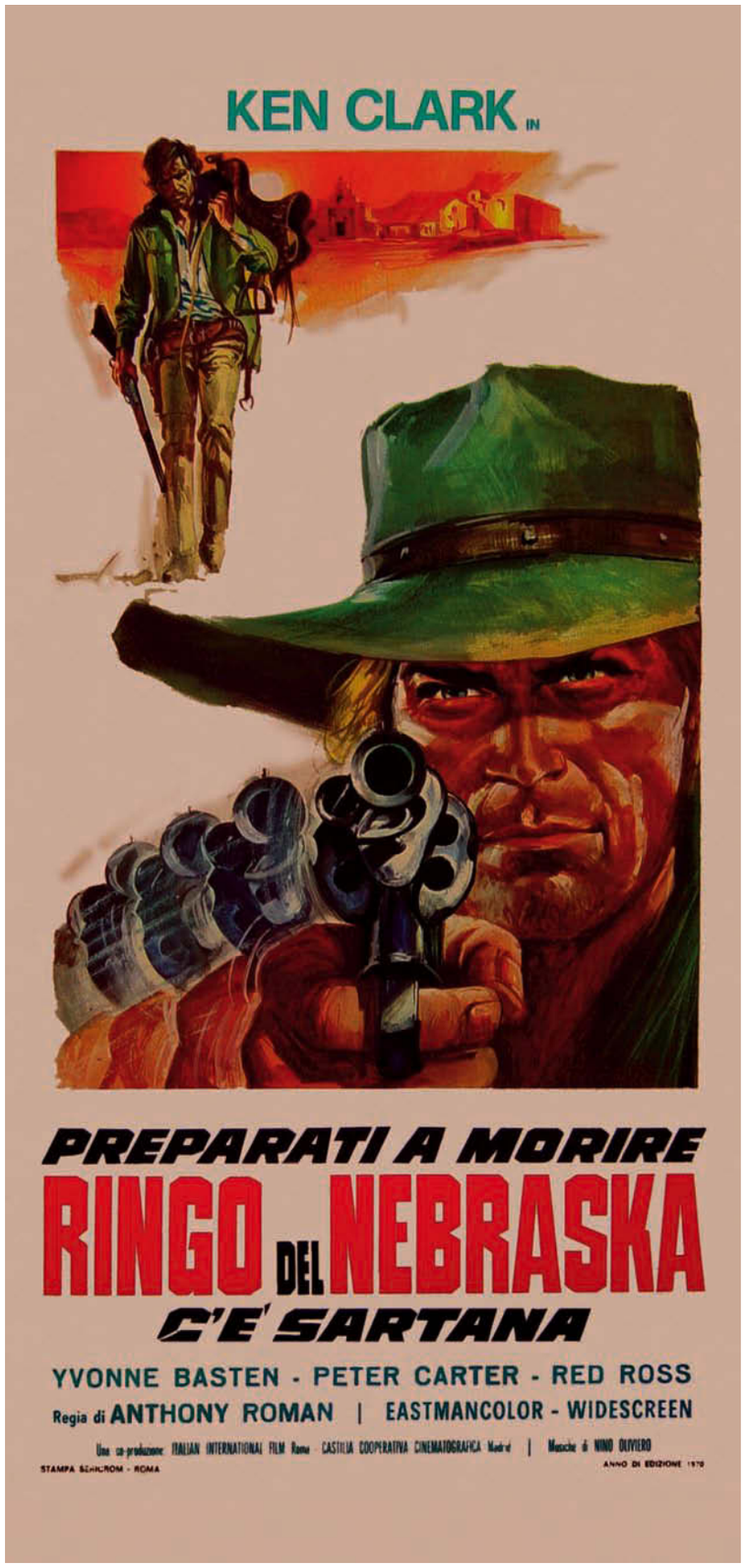


KEN CLARK *and Yvonne Bastien in RINGO DEL NEBRASKA, an Antonio Román Western primarily directed by Mario Bava.*

RINGO DEL NEBRASKA

Savage Gringo

AFTER COMPLETING *Terrore nello spazio*, Bava's interest apparently returned to the *giallo*. No film from 1965 or even 1966 survives to attest to this fact, but a two-color advertisement was placed in an Italian industry publication, *Giornale dello spettacolo*, hoping to drum up interest in another decorative body count thriller.



ITALIAN *reissue locandina.*

The film was to be called *12 bambole biondo* ("12 Blonde Dolls"), and the ad describes it as a venture between Bava, actor-turned-producer Ulderico Sciarretta, and Sciarretta's production company, Eco Film. The advertisement asks: "Who killed Gino? Who killed Linda? Who killed Paolo? Who killed Romolo? Who killed Raymondo? Who killed Emerson? When these questions are asked, Inspector Klem will answer them!" (Apparently most of the "12 Blonde Dolls" were to be men!) What is interesting about the ad—which goes on to promise "not just a Super Giallo, but a Colossal Giallo"—is that it says absolutely nothing about Bava's *Sei donne per l'assassino*, a film that was released all around the world. Instead, it proclaims that *12 bambole biondo* "follows the grand success of *Crimine a due*," Sciarretta's first and only film as a producer, which was issued earlier in 1965 and apparently released nowhere outside Italy. Nothing came of the advertisement, and Bava and Sciarretta never worked together. Their venture had the misfortune of bad timing: in 1965, Italian audiences were crazy for Westerns, not thrillers.

Though it would be two years before United Artists released it in America as *A Fistful of Dollars*, the European response to Sergio Leone's *Per un pugno di dollari* was immediate: it made a fortune. Consequently, a number of homeless Italian scripts written in response to the popular Karl May Westerns from West Germany were immediately adopted and put into production. Unlike Leone's anti-heroic "Man With No Name" (played by Clint Eastwood), his imitators were quick to name their heroes, identifying them in the titles of their films, *à la Old Shatterhand.* There was Sergio Corbucci's Django (named for the nimble-fingered jazz guitarist Django Reinhardt), Sartana (an invention of screenwriter Ernesto Gastaldi), and Ringo—to name only a few.

The "Ringo" films were the brainchild of writer–director Duccio Tessari, who had the idea of taking the star

Ringo del Nebraska

"Ringo from Nebraska"
Working title: *Nebraska il pistolero,* "Nebraska the Gunman"
Filmed at Elios Film Studios (Rome), Ballesteros (Madrid), and on location in Spain
October 4 – November 1965
First released: March 18, 1966,
Eastmancolor, "Widescreenscope," 1.85:1, 91 minutes

Production: Italian International Film (Rome), Castilla Cooperativa Cinematográfica (Madrid). Producer: Fulvio Lucisano. Director: Antonio Román, [and Mario Bava, uncredited]. Assistant directors: Lamberto Bava, Manuel De la Regilia. Screenplay: Jesús Navarro Carrión, Antonio Román, Adriano Bolzoni. Additional dialogue (Italy): Grazi Benedetti. Director of photography: Guglielmo Mancori. Art direction: Gastone Carsetti, Augusto J. Lega. Editors: Renato Cinquini, Antonio Jimeno, assisted by Romana Fortini. Music: Nino Oliviero, conducted by Robby Poitevin [CAM]. "*Quando se muere el sol*" by Oliviero/Martinez, sung by Vittorio Bezzi. Distributor: Regionale.

Ken Clark (Nebraska/Ringo), Yvonne Bastien (Kay), Peter Carter, Piero Lulli (Bill Carter), Charles K. Lawrence, [Livio Lorenzon] (Marty Hillman), Red Ross [Renato Rossini] (Felton), Alfonso Rojas, Anthony Gradwell [Antonio Gradoli], Paco Sanz, Renato Terra, Angel Ortiz, Losé Canalejas, Frank [Francisco] Braña (Dixon).

Belgium: *De Dollars van Nebraska*, Rank Organization, Eastmancolor/Scope
France: *Les Dollars du Nebraska,* Rank Organization, 12/10/67
Germany: *Nebraska Jim*, Pallas Film–NWDF–Unitas, 12/6/66, 83m
Italian reissue: *Preparati a morire, Ringo del Nebraska c'è Sartana,* "Prepare to Die, Ringo of Nebraska, I am Sartana," 1970
Spain: *El Rancho Maldito, "*The Ranch of the Damned," Columbus Film, 12/2/68, 82m
US: *Savage Gringo*, AIP-TV, 1966

(Giuliano Gemma) and tongue-in-cheek attitude of his earlier *peplum Arrivano i titani/My Son the Hero* (1961) and adapting them to a Western format. The name of the character, which dates back to John Wayne's Ringo Kid in *Stagecoach* (1939), had come back into vogue with the hit single "Ringo," a spoken-word recording by Canadian actor Lorne Greene (1915–87), star of the popular, long-running NBC-TV series *Bonanza*. The 1964 release told the story of a legendary gunfighter and his final showdown with the lawman responsible for once saving his life. Greene's rich, resonant voice—simply accompanied by a strummed acoustic guitar, finger cymbals, a male chorus, and a rising crescendo of brass at the moment of truth—combined with the manly irony of the story to touch the same nerve that Leone's film (and Ennio Morricone's now-legendary score) had touched. The song was not only a surprise #1 hit on American AM radio stations, but also in Canada and Europe, where a still more potent, alternate French language version was released. Tessari took advantage of the record's surprise success by reviving the name for a series of new Italian/Spanish co-productions. Another impetus may well have been that Ford's *Stagecoach* was in the process of being remade around this time (c. 1965 or '66), with Alex Cord as the Ringo Kid. [1]

The result was the popular *Una pistola per Ringo/A Pistol for Ringo*, which was promptly followed by a sequel, *Il ritorno di Ringo/The Return of Ringo* (also '65), which reunited the charismatic Gemma (billed as "Montgomery Wood") with original co-stars Lorella de Luca, Fernando Sancho and Antonio Cases—in different roles. The "Ringo" films would become a phenomenon of sorts: between 1965 and 1972, nearly thirty films were produced with the name "Ringo" in the title; some of the titles were direct descendants, but most were unrelated Euro Westerns gratuitously renamed to plunder Tessari's pot of gold.

One of the earliest projects to co-opt the "Ringo" name was Fulvio Lucisano's next production, *Ringo del Nebraska,* which was co-produced once again with Antonio Román's Castilla Cooperativa Cinematográfica—this time with Román directing. Born in Ourense, Spain, on November 9, 1911, Antonio Román had been directing films since the late '30s, starting with documentaries. He directed his first dramatic feature, *Esquadrilla,* in 1941. His career included a 1944 version of *Lola Montes* (preceding the celebrated film of Max Ophuls by eleven years) and *La Fierecilla domada* (1955), a retelling of William Shakespeare's *The Taming of the Shrew*. In recent years, all of his films starred his actress wife, Yvonne Bastien. *Ringo del Nebraska* originated as an original screenplay co-authored by Román and Jesús Navarro Carrión. [2]

Román was set to direct the picture (then called *Nebraska il pistolero*), but after a few days of shooting in the mountainous regions of La Pedriza, north of Madrid near Manzanares de Real (where scenes for *Minnesota Clay* had been filmed), Lucisano felt that he "wasn't working out" and shut down the production. Returning to Rome, Lucisano asked Mario Bava if he would consider taking over the picture as director. Bava agreed—as long as he could finish it in Rome. Since the majority of the cast was Italian to begin with, this was not a problem, and the film was completed at Elios Film Studios in Rome. The finished picture would carry only the original contracted credits, including a primarily Spanish crew, but as Lucisano now reveals, "To be frank with you, [Bava] directed the greater part of the picture."

The extent of Bava's involvement in the direction has been recently called into question by two quotes appearing in the Italian magazine *Nocturno*, from Lamberto Bava and actor "Red Ross" a.k.a. Renato Rossini. As Rossini notes: "I know this film very well, but I really can't remember Mario Bava involved in it. The director was a Spaniard, Antonio Román, a rather old man, a tall one. Lucisano was the producer and the film starred Ken Clark, Piero Lulli and Antonio Gradoli. The girl, Yvonne Bastien, was the director's wife. We shot it almost entirely in Spain. I was on the set from the first to the last day, but I really can't remember Mario Bava there . . ."

Rossini continued to emphasize that his memory was good and that he knew perfectly well who Bava was: "I met Bava when I was doing Francisci's *pepla*, for which he was the cameraman, and then also in *La battaglia di Maratona*, although I was just an extra in that. Then we did a *giallo* together, shot in Tor Caldara and Lavinio, *5 bambole per la luna d'agosto*. He was really a gentleman on the set; the last gentleman of the Italian cinema."

As Lamberto Bava remembers, "Lucisano called my father to do something, mattes and things like that, and I went with him in Spain. Tony Román, the Spanish director, was a pleasant gentleman. I remember that my father and I were in stitches as we watched him shooting, because he always approved the first take. Otherwise, he reasoned, '*se mecaniza*'—it becomes mechanical. In other words, you risked shooting the same scene twenty times because you might never be satisfied.



NEBRASKA *(Ken Clark) proves himself adept with a gun.*

1 Other Ringos worth mentioning: Gregory Peck played Jimmy Ringo in Henry King's *The Gunfighter* (1950); there was a short-lived TV series, *Johnny Ringo,* starring Don Durand and Mark Goddard, that ran for thirty-eight episodes from 1959–1960; and, this same year (1965), The Beatles responded to the zeitgeist by releasing their only country-western single, "Act Naturally," with drummer Ringo Starr on vocals.

2 Carrión was one of the first screenwriters to specialize in the new field of Euro Westerns. His name appears on two earlier Westerns co-produced in Italy: Joaquin Luís Romero Marchant's *El Sabor de la Venganza/Gunfight at High Noon* (1963) and Primo Zeglio's *I due violenti/Texas* Ranger (1964)—both of which were co-written by *I tre volti della paura*'s Marcello Fondata.



And so, for him, the first take was always the best."

Lamberto's quote does not really contradict Lucisano's account, so much as it explains how Bava became involved in the production. It also needs pointing out that Rossini's role in *Ringo del Nebraska* would not have required him to be present on-set for every day of the production. It is possible that Román shot Rossini's role in its entirety, and that Bava maintained a low profile on the set, especially where the Italian actors were concerned, out of respect for Román's territory. Román's "easy to please" methods were perhaps one of the reasons why Lucisano opted to replace him, or possibly he wanted to move the production back to Rome for financial considerations once he had satisfied the terms for this Spanish-Italian co-production and gotten the location shooting out of the way. Lamberto Bava is credited onscreen as one of the film's two assistant directors, which would not have happened had the film been entirely shot under Román's direction in Spain.

The problems that prevented Román from directing *Ringo del Nebraska* also evidently plagued him on his subsequent picture, *Trappola per sette spie* ("Trap for Seven Spies," 1967), which was ultimately taken over by director Mario Amendola. Fulvio Lucisano faithfully kept the secret of Román's replacement until after the director's death, which occurred in Madrid on June 16, 1989.



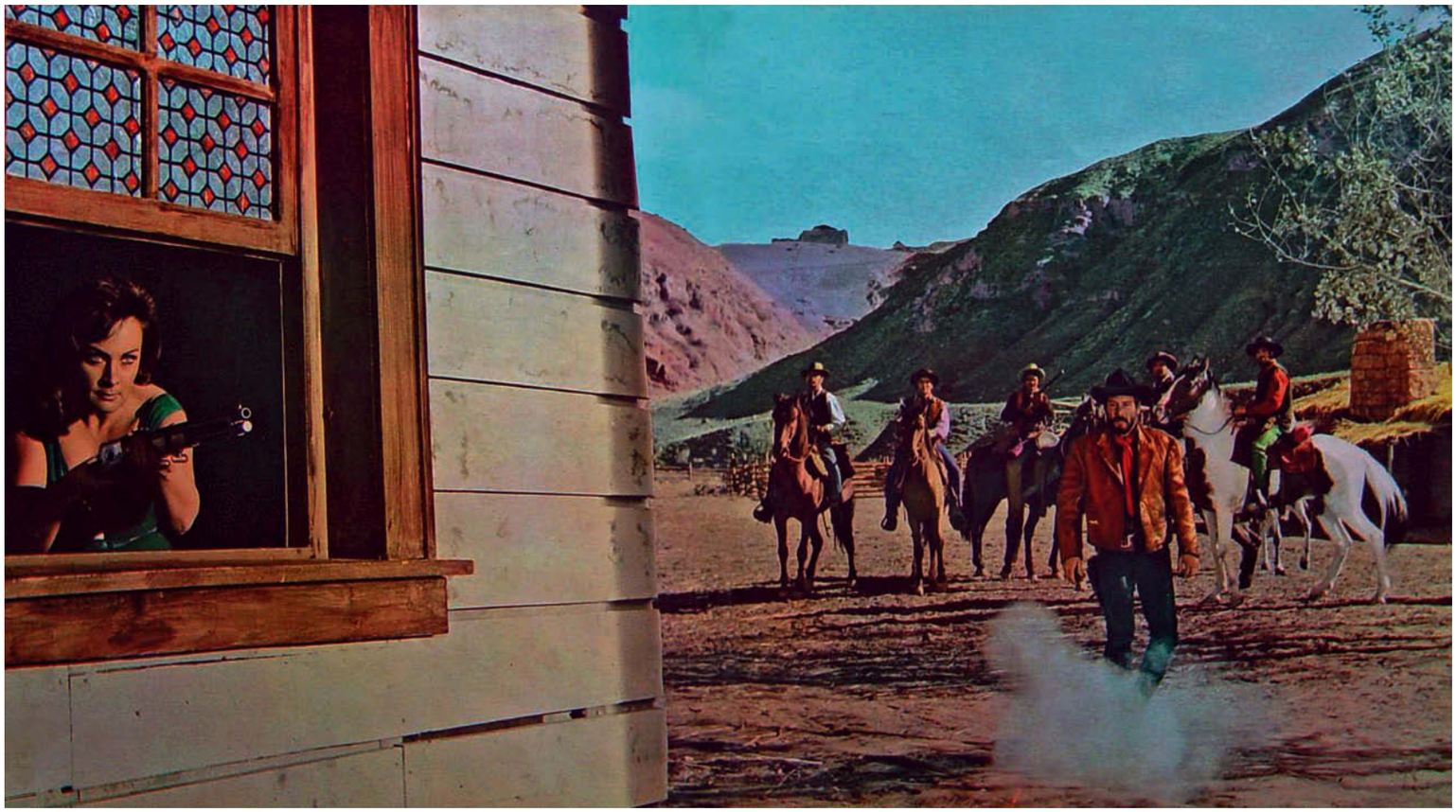
ITALIAN *reissue fotobusta.*

THE DASTARDLY *Bill Carter (Piero Lulli, left) gets his comeuppance at Nebraska's hands after his attempt to defile Kay (Yvonne Bastien).*

Synopsis

Beltan, New Mexico, the 1870s. Donato, a herdsman working for ranch baron Marty Hillman, is strumming his guitar while leading cattle to Laredo when he is shot dead by three masked gunmen. The assassins are confederates of the dastardly Bill Carter, an outlaw who covets Hillman's property—and his wife. Carter has cleverly provided his gunmen with an alibi by giving them horses owned by three other men, all of whom were plainly visible at the town saloon at the time of the murder.

Hillman returns home to find his wife, Kay, packing a trunk to leave him. He slaps her into submission. Their argument reveals that they are not actually married, but pretending to be, to protect her from Bill Carter. Hillman—whose workers have fled his employ, for fear of Carter—practices



KAY *holds Carter and his gang at bay with a loaded rifle.*

his shooting on a row of strung-up cans, and proves himself a competent marksman. As he prepares to get a closer look at the cans, the entire queue is shot down by a drifter who introduces himself as Nebraska: "Just a man ridin' a horse . . . from Nebraska."[3] *Impressed by his shooting, Hillman hires Nebraska as a herdsman—and as protection.*

After dinner, Hillman worries that Donato has not returned from his cattle drive. He and Nebraska ride into town to investigate. Halfway there, they discover Donato's bullet-riddled body. After studying the markings on the ground, Nebraska deduces that there were three gunmen who took the southern trail, shot Donato, scattered the herd, and rode off in another direction—the direction leading back to town. After taking Donato's body back to the ranch for burial, Hillman and Nebraska double back to the local saloon, where Carter and his men are sitting with the town's lawman, Sheriff Burke, who is so intimidated by Carter that he's become a pitiable alcoholic. Hillman accuses Carter of killing Donato and, in vicious response, the villain draws a gun in which Nebraska shoots out of his hand. The noble stranger explains in patient detail how the killing was accomplished. Pushed into action, the Sheriff timidly insists that Carter's men hand over their guns ("It's best to avoid trouble," he says, trembling) and come along to the jail until things are cleared up. In parting, he promises Hillman that he will visit the ranch the following morning. Carter, exonerated by witnesses to his presence in the bar, remains free.

Nebraska calmly walks over to the town doctor, who is playing a game of chess with himself, and with one well-considered move, puts him in check. The doctor is impressed: "I've been working here all my life and I've never met a chess player before!" Sidling up to the bar, Nebraska is offered a free drink and he orders milk. Carter picks a fight with him, and the saloon is soon wrecked by their violence. Carter slashes Nebraska's chest with a broken bottle, but Nebraska wins the fight. Carter openly threatens Burke and Hillman as he departs. As the bartender prepares to pour Nebraska another glass of milk, he orders whiskey instead.



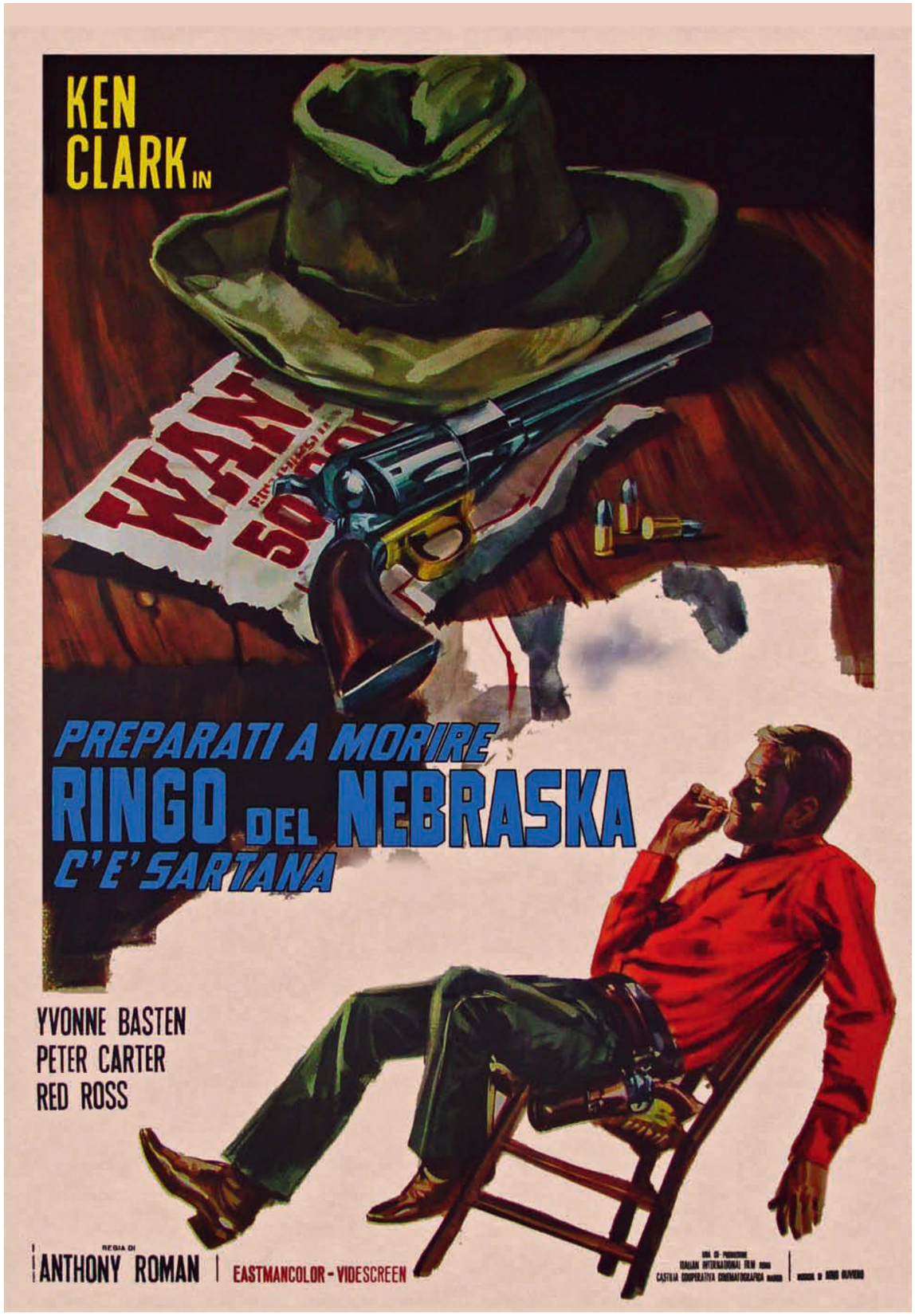
WITH NEBRASKA *far away, Bill Carter makes unwelcome advances to Marty Hillman's widow, Kay.*

3 In the Italian version, his name is "Ringo, from Nebraska," while the German version names him "Nebraska Jim."

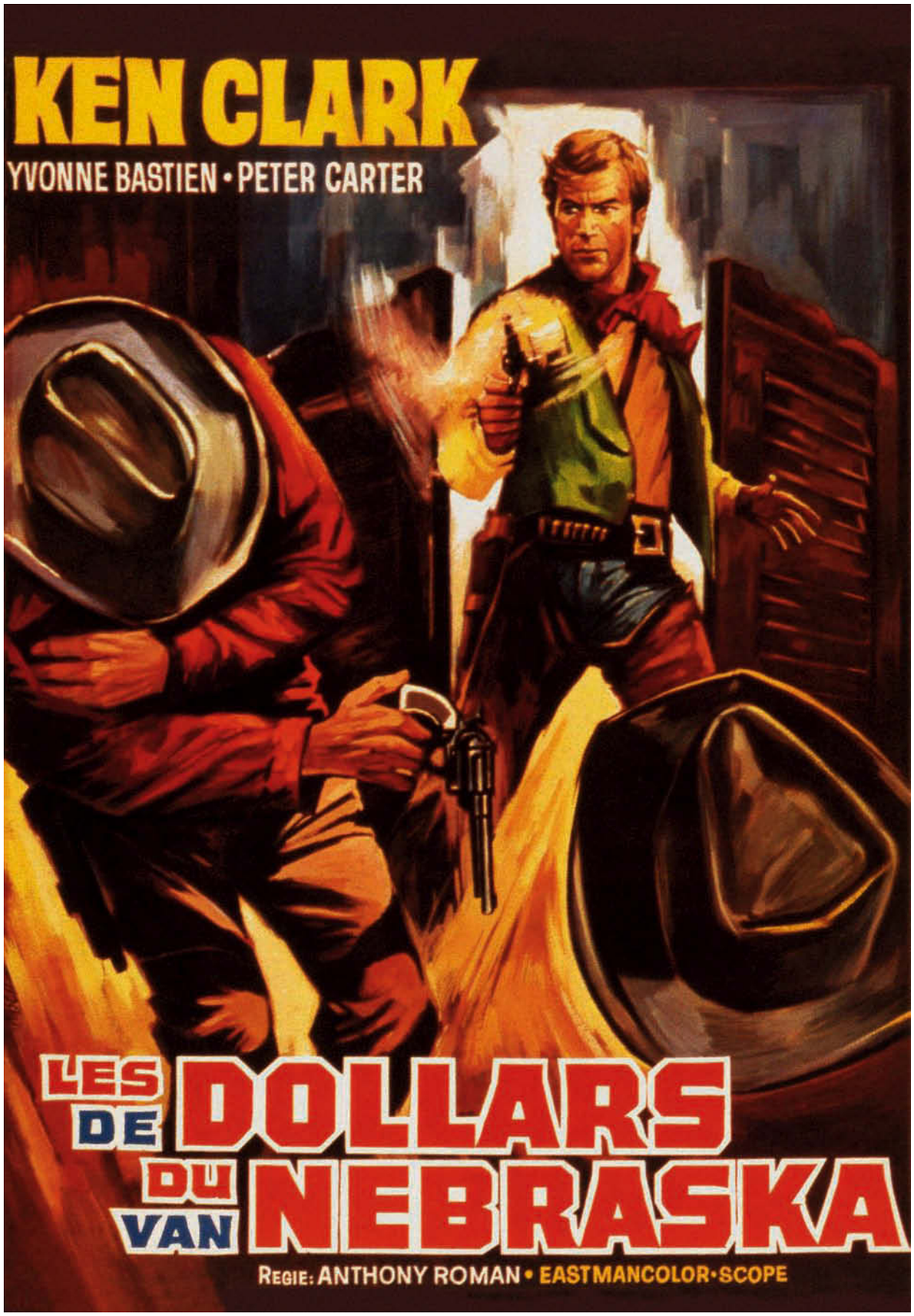
The next morning, Sheriff Burke is shot in the back by Carter and his men, shortly after arranging their release from jail. Meanwhile, at the ranch, Kay finds herself becoming attracted to the handsome stranger. Over breakfast, she tells Nebraska that she and Hillman are not really married, and that the ruse was meant to deter Carter's interest: "He thinks of me like a prize he might win in a shooting gallery," she explains. Concerned about Burke's non-arrival ("He may drink too much, but he always keeps his promises"), Hillman and Nebraska ride toward town and are ambushed by Carter's gunmen in the mountains. They shoot Nebraska's horse in the chest and Hillman in the throat. Nebraska takes the wounded cattle baron back to the ranch, where Kay cares for him, after sending their worker Manuel in search of the doctor.

Carter arranges for Sheriff Burke's corpse to be escorted back to town by his own gunmen, telling them that he was killed by Nebraska and Hillman for releasing them from jail. Bad weather floods the river, making it impossible for Manuel and the doctor to get back to the ranch. Nebraska decides to take matters in hand. He rides into the mountains, where two of Carter's men find his sleeping form and fire bullets into it. It's just a dummy, though, and the real Nebraska returns their fire with more fatal results. Elsewhere, he finds two other gunmen eating around a campfire and taunting some starving children with their food. Nebraska shoots the gun out of one man's hand, and shoots part of the other man's ear off—promising worse unless they admit Carter's responsibility for the murders.

Back at the saloon, Nebraska looks for the last of Carter's gunmen, a man named Van Hollander—who tries to shoot the hero, but again, has the weapon shot out of his hand. In great pain, Van Hollander confesses to the bartender—who has been named the town's new sheriff—that Carter was the mastermind behind all the murders. Another of Carter's men, Dixon, is present at the confession and sneaks away to inform his boss.



ITALIAN *reissue due-foglia.*



At the ranch, the doctor finally arrives—but only in time to declare Hillman dead. Left alone together with the corpse, Kay makes an overt pass at Nebraska, who decides to leave—in order for Carter to make his next move easily against the ranch. It isn't long before Carter and two gunmen—Felton and Dixon—descend on the ranch to bully Hillman into surrendering $50,000 hidden somewhere on his property. Finding Hillman dead, Carter orders his men to ransack the house until they find the cash. While Felton and Dixon are thus occupied, Carter tries to force himself on Kay, but she fights him off. Carter reasons with her to forget her romantic thoughts about Nebraska, asking her how he would feel if he ever learned that she was the daughter of Duke Kramer—"the most bloodthirsty bank robber in New Mexico"—or that Marty Hillman was actually Marty Baumann ("a murderer") or that she herself had helped to rob banks in El Paso. The questions are left unanswered by the discovery of the stolen $50,000 in one of Marty's boots.

Unbeknownst to them all, Nebraska has entered the ranch house through the bedroom window and concealed himself under the sheet beside Hillman's corpse. He manages to shoot Felton and Dixon and has a lengthy fistfight with Carter, ending in the villain's death. Kay is upset that Nebraska has learned her secrets and pleads with him to overlook her past. He makes his regrets to her, and she collapses in tears. Nebraska turns the boot with the stolen cash over to the sheriff, as he arrives with some rather late-in-coming help.

One of the sheriff's men comes out of the house, reporting four bodies—Marty's, Carter's, and those of the two gunmen. "It's going to be an expensive funeral," he says.

"Never mind," laughs the sheriff, eyeing the boot. "We can afford it!"

Cast

Unless some roles had to be recast when the production relocated to Rome, Mario Bava had nothing to do with the casting of *Ringo del Nebraska*. He had worked previously with both

BELGIAN *affiche.*



NEBRASKA*'s timely return places Bill Carter at a disadvantage, but Kay finds her needs rejected as well.*

Ken Clark (his hero in *La strada per Fort Alamo*) and Piero Lulli (who figured in some of the additional scenes he had directed for Giacomo Gentilomo's *L'ultimo dei vichinghi* in 1961), so one imagines he was fairly pleased with the actors he inherited from Román.

Ringo del Nebraska would provide the last decent starring role for Ohio-born Ken Clark, whose true standing in the world of cinema at the time can be gauged by the fact that he was being top-billed in subsequent Italian films like Sergio Grieco's *Rapporto Fuller, base Stoccolma* (1967) and Guido Malatesta's *Tarzana, sesso selvaggio/Tarzana the Wild Girl* (1969) at roughly the same time he was doing nearly anonymous walk-ons in "real" Hollywood films like Mike Nichols' *Catch-22* (1970), in which he plays the nondescript MP who arrests Alan Arkin's Yossarian.

Piero Lulli, cast as the villainous Bill Carter, was born in Florence on February 1, 1923. The younger brother of Folco Lulli, an actor and personal friend of Bava's who had played the chief villain in *Gli invasori,* Piero was a superb actor and stunt man in his own right. Much of the dramatic success of *Ringo del Nebraska* is due to his steely-eyed, lupine presence. Clad entirely in black, with a leather jacket and neckerchief, he is the true power in town; he knows it and flaunts it, waiting in the sheriff's office for the release of his men with his feet on the lawman's desk. One can't help thinking, watching him in this movie, that he would have made a magnificent Javutich, had Arturo Dominici not been available for *La maschera del demonio.*

The role of Kay was played by Argentinian singer–actress Yvonne Bastien, whose previous four films—*Me mujer mi gusta más* (1961), *El Sol en el Espejo* (1962), *Pacto de Silencio* (1963), and *Un Tiro por la Espalda* (1964)—had all been directed by her husband, Antonio Román. (*Pacto de Silencio* was in fact a remake of a 1949 film of the same name, also written and directed by Román.) Making the film must have been a trying situation for her—acting in a role written for her by her husband, who was removed from the film as director—because it mirrored, in a way, Kay's own situation of sharing quarters with a man who was not her husband. The red-haired Bastien bears a strong resemblance to Jany Clair, Clark's co-star in some of his earlier Westerns, including *La strada per Fort Alamo.* Unfortunately, the role of Kay does not give her an opportunity to demonstrate her range; she spends the entire picture either distraught or aroused, and is too aggressive to be a likeable heroine.

Commentary

Mario Bava stepped in as director of *Ringo del Nebraska* after all of the film's preparatory work had been done by others. In judging it, we must therefore bear in mind that it was cast and designed without Bava's creative input, that he was placed with little advance notice at the helm of a largely unfamiliar crew, and that some of the shooting took place—uncomfortably for Bava—outside of Rome. The film doesn't often look like Bava's work, because it would have been intrusive of him to impose his visual ideas on the film's director of photography, Guglielmo Mancori—the son of former cameraman Alvaro Mancori, now the owner of Elios Studios.

Considering that the project afforded him so few opportunities to assert himself, it is remarkable that *Ringo del Nebraska* turned out to be—discounting *Minnesota Clay*, which despite Bava's input remains the work of Sergio Corbucci—the most satisfying of Bava's traditional Westerns. While *La strada per Fort Alamo* is the Bava Western most closely allied to his horror films, with stylized look and its fascinating dark twists on standard Western situations and imagery, *Ringo del Nebraska* works as both an authentic, traditional Western (*all' italiana*) and as a wicked parody of the genre.

In the very first scene, Bava achieves a perfect note of irony by having the gentle whistle-and-strummed guitar music on the soundtrack stop cold as Donato is shot by the masked gunmen, dropping his blood-spattered guitar down the hillside to a rest under the main titles. Donato does not die immediately, and as he scrambles to a more comfortable place to die, Bava reprises a set-up remembered from *Caltiki il mostro immortale, La maschera del demonio* and *La frusta e il corpo*: the camera focuses tightly on the edge of a cliff as Donato's bloodied hand is thrust forward for a secure grip, pulling him up onto the ridge. But he is shot again, and tumbles back down the hillside, and when his blood-streaked face rolls to a halt under the lens, there is a match-cut to one of Kay's dresses—striped red and white—being pressed into a trunk prior to her attempted getaway.

Elsewhere in the movie, Bava seems to be playing the genre for laughs—again having his hero order a glass of milk in the town saloon. The hero behind that appetite for dairy goods is just as homogenized; we never learn anything about him, only where he's from and that he's good with a gun, and that his eyes don't miss a trick. Nevertheless, Bava and actor Ken Clark humanize the cypher with glimpses into his privacy, such as a scene in which the brawny, bare-chested hero rises one morning, executes a number of sitting stretch exercises that make him look like a God, and then stands up—bumping his head on the low ceiling above. His good heartedness is also very winning, as when he tells Kay why he's decided to stick around and fight this inherited battle: "Curiosity . . . that, and the fact that Marty called me 'friend' before he was wounded." It's not too far of a stretch to see in Nebraska's position a metaphor for Bava's own, on this assignment; both men have been

recruited, on the basis of shown talent, to fight another man's battle, to protect another man's ranch.

Bava's hand can also be discerned in various small details, like the extra arch painted into Bastien's eyebrows and the way makeup emphasizes not only her eyes, but also those of Lulli. Nino Olivieri's score is also surprisingly romantic, in a florid Spanish vein that anticipates Bava's use of Rodrigo's *"Concerto d'Aranjuez"* in *Lisa and the Devil* (1973): it has gentle, dulcet moments that employ only a fervently plucked flamenco guitar, and outbursts of passion and exaltation when a full orchestra—with trumpets at the fore—are added.

Ringo del Nebraska contains a number of references to Sergio Leone and his composer Ennio Morricone, particularly in the trills and whistles heard in Nino Olivieri's score. But what is particularly fascinating is that *Ringo del Nebraska* appears to be one of the few Italian Westerns made in the wake of Leone's success that may have influenced Leone himself. Throughout the picture, there are shots that anticipate Leone's masterpiece *C'era una volta il West/Once Upon a Time in the West* (1968), particularly in the sequence where the soon-to-be-widowed Kay walks outside to the well, her cleavage amply displayed in a form-fitting top baring her shoulders, and is met by the arrival of the evil Carter and his associates. Everything about the setting looks familiar, but so do the wardrobe and the attitudes of the characters, and the subsequent scene—of Carter initiating the rape of Kay, tearing her dress to expose the white cup of her brassiere—recalls the scene of Harmonica (Charles Bronson) ripping the white lace from Jill's (Claudia Cardinale's) dress, which makes her a too-tempting target for the riflemen stalking her ranch. The two films also share the plot points of a husband's hidden fortune, gunmen who disguise themselves (or swap horses) so that others will be blamed for their crimes, and a heroine who owes her pluck to an unsavory past she is struggling to forget.

Despite its qualities, *Ringo del Nebraska* fails to demonstrate an authentic feel for the material—which is somewhat understandable. Bava was unable to impose his visual sense on most of the picture—or perhaps was unwilling to do so, given the fact that it would remain, officially, an Antonio Román film—with the highly unusual result that it is the exteriors, not the interiors, where he seems most in control of the film's atmosphere. In other interior scenes, in the sheriff's office or the ranch house, windows or doorways permitting floods of bright artificial light are usually the most noteworthy feature of any composition. Generally speaking, there is very little that is remarkable about the lighting or camerawork.

Though there may be others, the film contains only one evident special effects shot, where, quoting Howard Hughes' *The Outlaw* (1943), Nebraska shoots a piece off the ear of one of Carter's men. The shot is framed in widescreen with Nebraska backgrounded on the left and the reverse of the gunman's head foregrounded at the far right; a prosthetic piece is yanked off the actor's ear by an invisible thread as Clark's gun fires. Due to the extremity of the framing, this startling effect cannot be seen in pan-and-scan television prints.



RARE *American International Television promotional card for the US release version.*

In the context of Mario Bava's career, *Ringo del Nebraska* may be little more than a footnote, but when it premiered in Rome on March 18, 1966, it earned conspicuously more money at the boxoffice than *Terrore nello spazio*—143 million *lire* [$89,000]—making it also a slightly bigger Italian earner than *La maschera del demonio!* In 1970, as distributors milked everything they had for the last trickle of Spaghetti Western profits, it was reissued in Italy by Regionale under the new title *Preparati a morire Ringo del Nebraska c'è Sartana* ("Prepare to Die, Ringo from Nebraska—I Am Sartana").

The film did not fare so well in other countries. It was generally withheld from release in other territories until Sergio Leone's "Dollars" films began to find their international cult following. The first outside country to acquire it was Germany, where it was shown in the summer of 1966 as *Nebraska Jim*—a Karl May-like title that showed no interest in jumping on the nascent Leone bandwagon. To the contrary, there was no French or Belgian release until Christmas 1967, when it opened under the revealing titles *Les Dollars du Nebraska* and *De Dollars van Nebraska,* respectively. Strangest of all, the last country to release the picture was its own native country of Spain, where it remained unseen until its February 1968 premiere as *El Rancho Maldito* ("The Ranch of the Damned").

To this day, the film remains almost completely unknown in America. Contractually prevented from exploiting Bava's secret role in the film's direction, and having turned their back on Westerns since Roger Corman's revisionist oaters of the mid-1950s (*Apache Woman, Gunslinger*), American International Pictures declined to book the picture theatrically. Instead, they included it in one of their AIP-TV movie syndication packages under the title *Savage Gringo.* It has not been shown on American television in more than two decades, and today it is next to impossible to find in a watchable, English-language copy.





I COLTELLI DEL VENDICATORE

Knives of the Avenger

LATE IN 1965, Mario Bava was touched by one of life's greatest sorrows when his mother Emma lost her battle with cancer.

"She had great pain and our father [Eugenio] suffered a great deal with her," Mario's sister Elena remembers. "He took very good, loving care of her, and he was almost alone in nursing her. Their children had families and responsibilities of their own. My Mother Superior, aware of my mother's illness, sent our doctor many times to examine her, and he told my fellow Sisters that he had never seen such an affectionate husband, who was so mindful of this sick woman. I told them that my father was also a great artist, intelligent and very charitable."

RURIK *(Cameron Mitchell) demonstrates his penchant for knife-throwing to the shock of Queen Karin (Elisa Mitchell) in* I COLTELLI DEL VENDICATORE.

"I don't know the date of my grandmother's death, or the type of cancer that killed her," admits Lamberto Bava. "She was in a great deal of pain, and it was not in her nature to let others see this; I know she worked very hard at this task. Ours was a North Italian family, and she, my grandfather, my father—they all hid their feelings, in a manner typical to the people of Northern Europe. People in the United States tend to think of all Italians as the kind who come from the South and are far more effusive."

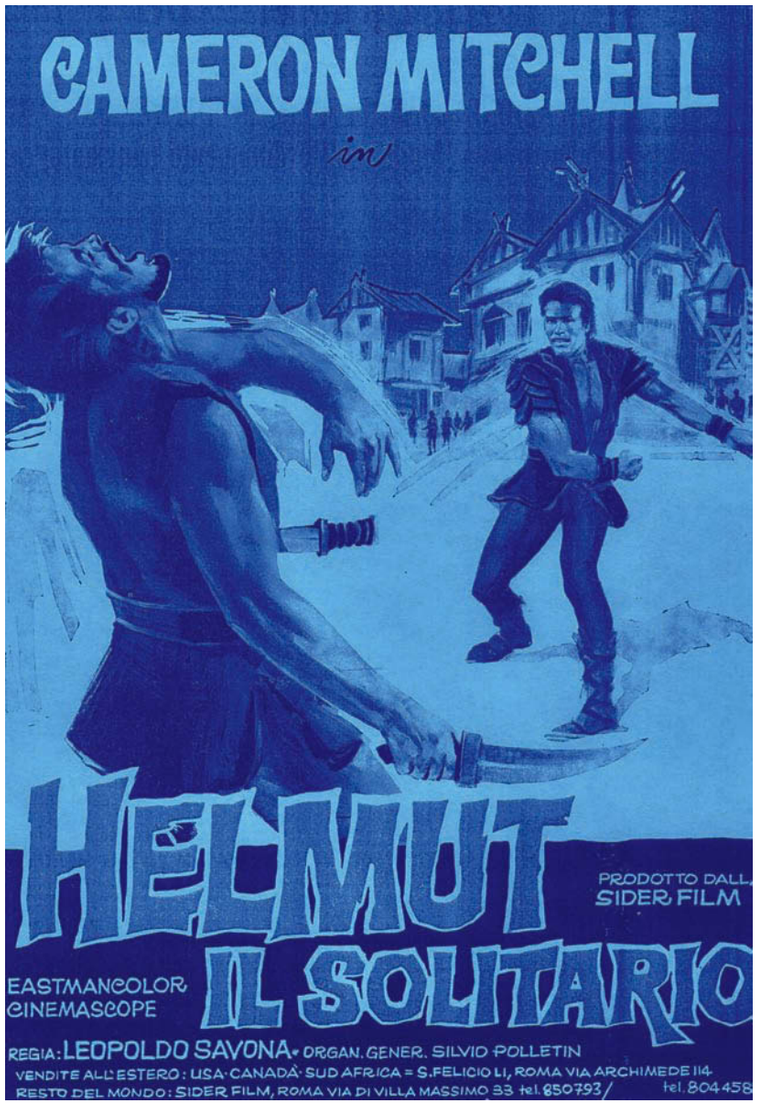
Considering the personal sense of grief and loss he felt in the wake of her death, it should not be surprising that Mario Bava's next film turned out to be an uncharacteristically warm, humanistic work about the longing of an aging, lonely drifter for the lost comforts of home and family—though the film itself was yet another job-for-hire that found him picking up and polishing what another, lesser director had dropped.

By this point in time, the Viking film cycle launched by Richard Fleischer's *The Vikings* in 1958 was nearing its end. The initial spate of Italian Viking pictures—which had included Giacomo Gentilomo's *L'ultimo dei vichinghi* and Bava's own *Gli invasori*—had fizzled out after a year, and did not catch fire again until Jack Cardiff, the gifted cinematographer of *The Vikings* and the greatest of the Powell and Pressburger classics, directed *The Long Ships* (1964), an exciting British-Yugoslavian co-production whose considerable worldwide success indicated there might still be some life in the Old Norse yet.

Naturally, an Italian Viking renaissance was soon to follow. By this time, Gentilomo had already directed his last picture, leaving the genre to be resuscitated by Mario Caiano. His film, which bore the Bava-indebted title of *Erik il vichingo/Erik the Viking*, starred Gordon Mitchell, Giuliano Gemma, and Elisa Montés and was released in March 1965. Within the year, Cameron Mitchell—Italy's archetypal Viking star—was also back in fur-vested harness on a new production.

The film that became *I coltelli del vendicatore* originally began production on December 3, 1964, under a different title—*Helmut il solitario*—and under the aegis of a different director, Leopoldo Savona. Born in Lenola, Italy, in 1922, Savona directed his first picture, *Il principe dalla maschera rossa*, in 1955; it was not a success, and he subsequently co-directed films (like 1956's *Uomini e lupi/Men and Wolves*, with Giuseppe De Santis) and accepted second-unit direction assignments. One of these had been Riccardo Freda's *Agi Murad il diavolo bianco/The White Warrior* (1959), photographed by Mario Bava, and he assisted Freda once again on *I Mongoli/The Mongols* (1961), co-directed by Andre de Toth.

Produced by a new company called Sider Film (incorporated on March 13 of that year), *Helmut il solitario* was not a happy assignment for Cameron Mitchell. Now 47 years of age, Mitchell



ADVANCE *promotional ad announcing that a new film from director Leopoldo Savona is in the works.*

I coltelli del vendicatore

"The Knives of the Avenger"
Working title: *Helmut il solitario,* "Helmut the Loner"
Filmed at Titanus Studios and on location in Monciana, Perugia and Rome
November – December 1965
First released: May 30, 1966
Technicolor, Techniscope, 2.35:1, 85 minutes

Production: Sider Film (Rome). Producer: Saro Patané. Director: John Hold [Mario Bava]. Assistant directors: Roberto Giandalia, Ines Brusci, Saverio Diamanti. Screenplay: Alberto Liberati, Mario Bava. Dialogue and post-synchronization: Gene Luotto. Sound recorded at Cinemontaggio. Director of photography: Antonio Rinaldi. Camera operator: Sacerio Diamante. Camera assistant: Teodorico Memè. Art direction: Piero Filippone, Alberto Tavazzi, Sergio Savini [Sergio Cortona]. Special effects: Eugenio Ascani. Giovanni Assenza. Giuliano Anchisano. Teodorico Memè. Wardrobe: Giorgio Desideri. Costume design: Tigano Lo Faro. Production supervisor: Sergio Cortona. Key grip: Giuliano Anchisanti. Editor: Otello Colangeli. Music: Marcello Giombini. Sound: Vittorio De Sisti. Distributor: Regionale.

Cameron Mitchell (Rurik), Fausto Tozzi (Aghen), Giacomo Rossi-Stuart (Arald), Lissa, Elisa Mitchell or Lisa Wagner [Elissa Pichelli] (Karin), Luciano Polletin (Moki), Mike Moore [Amadeo Trilli] (Viking King), Renato Terra, Sergio Cortona, Tony Burton.

Belgium: *Mesduel,* "Knife Duel," Stellor Films
France: *Duel au Coteau*, "Duel of Knives," Comptoir Française du Film Production, 12/7/66. 1970s Reissues: *La Vengeance du Viking,* "The Revenge of the Viking"; *Les 7 Couteaux du Vengeur,* "The 7 Knives of the Avenger," France Inter Cinema
Germany: *Eine Handvoll blanker Messer,* "A Fistful of Gleaming Daggers," Sonderfilm, 2/24/67, 82m
Italian reissue: *Raffica di coltelli,* "A Shower of Knives," 1970
Spain: *Los Cuchillos del Vengador*, Filmax S.A., 81m
US: *Knives of the Avenger,* World Entertainment Corporation, 10/23/68, 86m. Reissue: Harris Associates, Incorporated, 1969



CAMERON *Mitchell gives a sensitive performance as Rurik, a former king now without home or country.*

knew that he getting a bit long on the tooth to be starring in swashbucklers, but at this point in his career, he couldn't afford to be more selective. For several years, between 1960 and 1964, Mitchell had worked entirely abroad to escape back taxes and alimony problems. During this period, the Italian cinema had been his basic bread-and-butter, but now, with the Italian film industry entering a state of crisis, that oasis was drying up. Fortunately, some time in the previous year, Mitchell made an arrangement with the courts and the Internal Revenue Service that allowed him to return to work in his homeland, with a percentage of every dollar earned being directly applied to his debt. He had returned to American movies in a Western that has since become a cult classic, Monte Hellman's *Ride in the Whirlwind* (1965), opposite the promising young newcomer, Jack Nicholson. Mitchell had taken the role in Savona's picture to continue working off his debt, but with his domestic career finally on the mend, he was looking forward to calling an end to his European period. That opportunity came sooner than expected when, two weeks into production, on December 15, Sider Film executive Saro Patané announced that they had run out of funding.

Mitchell thanked the company with a gregarious gesture: "I remember putting up a couple of thousand *lire* to buy lunch for the crew. I came back to the States because I had a commitment here, and I was toying with the idea of not maybe not going back."

The facts of the production encouraged Mitchell to think along these lines, because the better part of a year passed before *Helmut il solitario* began to straggle back onto its feet. During the extended shutdown, Leopoldo Savona was forced to move on to other projects, leaving the producers to either finish it as best they could or accept their losses. Saro Patané knew of Mario Bava's reputation as a multitalented savior of abandoned films (most recently *Ringo del Nebraska*), and arranged a meeting with him to discuss his predicament. Being available, in need of distraction, and wanting to be of service to his friend Cameron Mitchell, Bava approached the project as he did when he had to replace Riccardo Freda as director of *I vampiri* in 1956: he screened the completed footage and conceived a plan that would not only allow him to complete the picture quickly and economically, but also to make it his own.

Bava was a canny choice to replace Savona—not only because he was experienced at film doctoring and could make a no-budget picture look like a million bucks, but because he was perhaps the only director in Rome who could have lured the film's star back to Italy now that he was finally free to pursue work again at home.

Mitchell was delighted when "Lo and behold, I got a call from Mario! When I heard that Mario was now directing the picture, I *wanted* to finish it! It raised my spirits. It made me happy, because I knew it would be a good film."

Sider Film was able to amass a completion budget of somewhat less than $75,000 (Mitchell's estimate, probably considerably less) on the strength of Bava's involvement. Bava was able to assemble most of his usual crew on short notice, but his son Lamberto was unable to break his prior commitments to resume his role as his father's assistant. Nevertheless, he remembers Mario's activities during preproduction: "My father looked at the footage of the other director and decided not to use most of it. He shot about three-fourths of the film himself on a shooting schedule of no more than six or seven days."

Given this background, one could be forgiven for feeling—as Lamberto Bava does—that *I coltelli del vendicatore* should be filed among his father's least important assignments. After all, it was only a week's work. Yet, against all odds, *I coltelli del vendicatore* is an historical adventure story with an unexpectedly moving human dimension; it is also a film that bears its maker's indelible mark in scene after scene. Not often praised for his direction of actors, Bava's own current sense of melancholy provided Cameron Mitchell with a model for a complex and sensitive role that would remain one of the actor's personal favorites for the rest of his days.

When Mitchell arrived on location to begin working with Bava, he immediately noticed that something about his old friend had changed. It wasn't that he was more remote or short-tempered, as he could sometimes be when money was running low and the pressure was on. Bava was more shaded and melancholy; his genial *sparkle* had dimmed. After making some discreet

inquiries, Mitchell learned that Bava had recently lost his mother. "We didn't really discuss it, but I think it affected him," the actor perceived. "I think a part of Mario died when his mother passed away."

One of the ways in which Bava's diminishment expressed itself, Mitchell notes, was through his eating. The days of multi-course lunches and dinners with wine, which had been his habit with companions like Fulvio Lucisano and Deke Heyward only a year earlier, were now over, replaced by a single, favorite comfort food.

"If you had known Mario Bava before, you'd swear that this man was immortal, he had such life!" Mitchell avowed. "Now his favorite dish—he'd eat pasta of course, but his favorite dish was Italian bread, warmed or toasted in an oven, with butter and jam, along with a *cafe au lait* or *cappuccino*. He would dunk the bread with the jam into the coffee, like a farmer. He would order this same dish throughout the day; he might have it two or three times a day."

With *I coltelli del vendicatore*, Bava was once again mixing genres much like he mixed his food. *La ragazza che sapeva troppo* had blended light comedy with dark thrills, and *Terrore nello spazio* had cross-pollinated horror and science fiction, and now *I coltelli del vendicatore* would propose "the Viking Western." Looking at the finished film, it is not easy to pick out the footage that Bava did not shoot, and impossible to imagine how the original storyline must have differed from Bava's final revisions. But as he watched the other director's footage, the scenes of the Viking drifter coming to the defense of a woman and her young son, and the log-cabin settings, sparked Bava's memories of George Stevens' classic Western *Shane* (1953), known in Italy under the bittersweet romantic title *Il cavaliere della valle solitaria* ("The Horseman of the Lonely Valley"). This—perhaps with other thoughts in mind of how Sergio Leone had reinvented Kurosawa's *Yojimbo* as *Per un pugno di dollari/A Fistful of Dollars*, and how John Sturges had reworked *The Seven Samurai* into *The Magnificent Seven*—gave Bava the inspiration to recast Stevens' masterpiece in a Nordic mold.

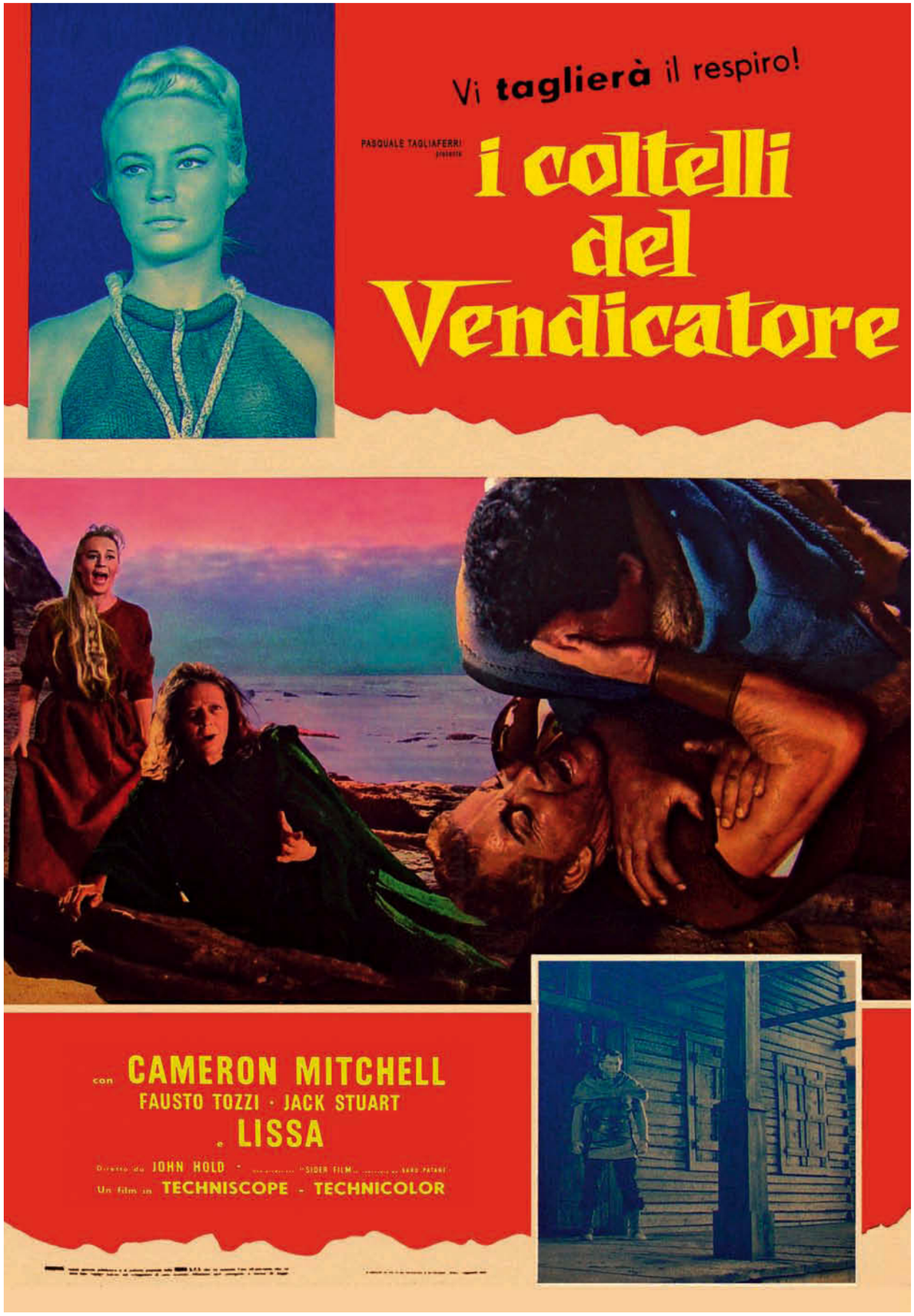
Shane starred Alan Ladd as an aging, sharp-shooting drifter who is looking for a place to settle down and hang up his guns for good. He finds work in exchange for room and board at the Starrett ranch, owned by Joe Starrett (Van Heflin), who lives there with his wife Marian (Jean Arthur) and their young son, Joey (Brandon de Wilde). While working around the ranch, Shane takes time to teach the boy some of the things a father traditionally teaches his son; Marian notices, and finds herself drawing closer to Shane, but they both deny their mutual attraction. The Starrett spread is coveted by cattle baron Rufus Ryker (Emile Meyer), but when Joe refuses to sell, Ryker summons a vicious gunman, Jack Wilson (Jack Palance), who makes flagrant displays of his cruelty, shooting an innocent townsman in cold blood. To save Starrett—not a gunfighter—from Wilson, Shane reluctantly dons his guns and challenges the villain to a showdown at the local tavern. Victory is hard-won, and Shane feels contaminated once again by having resorted to violence. He returns to the ranch and announces that it is time for him to be on his way. In one of the more heart-wrenching scenes to be found in the Western genre, as Shane rides toward the horizon, Joey runs after him, crying "Shane . . . Shane . . . come back!" Bava was still mourning the loss of his mother while preparing *I coltelli del vendicatore*, which may have predisposed him to thoughts of this elegiac Western masterpiece, which is very much a mythicization of a young boy's yearning for an absent parent.

"Bava liked *Shane* very much," Mitchell recalled. "I like it, too; I think it's a classic Western and, far and away, the best film Alan Ladd ever made. And it was this aspect that intrigued me about [Bava's take on] the project. If you were to go through *Knives of the Avenger* scene by scene, you could probably find similar scenes to every one of them in *Shane.* For example, when the bad man comes, we also showed a dog slinking away. The only difference between them is that *Knives of the Avenger* cost a dollar fifty and *Shane* went two million dollars over-budget!"

Taking a cue from Toshiro Mifune's character in Kurosawa's *The Seven Samurai*, Bava had the notion of making Rurik an expert knife-thrower, capable of firing three daggers at once from each of his hands—an inspired metaphor for Shane's alacrity with a six-shooter. Westerns were not Bava's favorite genre, but having directed *La strada per Fort Alamo* and *Ringo del Nebraska* and perhaps a good deal of *Minnesota Clay,* he was as experienced as any other director in Italy was at making them in 1966. Though only a metaphorical Western, *I coltelli del vendicatore* nevertheless seems the best—and in some ways, the most traditionally satisfying—of all Bava Westerns.



THIS SHOT *is all the proof one needs that I COLTELLI DEL VENDICATORE was deliberately patterned after George Stevens' SHANE.*



Synopsis

Arald, King of the Vikings, has been missing at sea for three years. Now his errant general Aghen, a violent and ambitious man, has returned to their homeland with his army in tow, to claim Arald's crown and bride, Karin, as his own. Karin and her son Moki consult with Shuna, an aged oracle, who assures them that Arald still lives, and will soon return—but not before Aghen places them in immediate danger. However, she etches in the sand a symbol of a man holding the disc of the Sun, which she says will be the sign heralding the arrival of the man who will be their salvation. Shuna urges the Queen and her son—the future of her country—to await his coming by fleeing across the beach into hiding, so that the sea's incoming waves will erase the tracks of their departure.

Karin and Moki set up a secluded home in the woods. One day, their solitude is interrupted by a weary traveller named Helmut, who comes to their doorstep, begging a meal. Warily, Karin sends him away to feed from the fish in the river and the berries growing along its banks. Helmut is wounded by her distrust, but does as the fearful woman suggests. While cleaning and eating the dinner he's caught from the stream, Helmut hears a scream and rushes back to the cottage, where the woman and her son are being attacked by a pair of Aghen's men. Helmut bursts in and quickly puts a stop to the intrusion with his fists and a pair of well-tossed knives. Some damage is done in the process, and while disposing of the dead men, Helmut promises to stay until he can repair the broken furniture.

During his stay, Helmut begins teaching the fatherless Moki the masculine arts of self-defense and trapping. Karin is touched by the interest he shows in the boy, but is also aware of his growing attraction to her. Bothered by a sense that they have met somewhere before, Helmut questions Karin, who he can see is no ordinary country woman. She takes him into her confidence, introducing herself as Queen Karin. She tells him the story of how her country went to war against

ITALIAN *manifesto.*



"IT WILL *take your breath away!" promises this Italian fotobusta.*

King Rurik due to the independent actions of Aghen, who disrupted her wedding day by flinging the severed heads of Rurik's murdered wife and son on their altar—in open defiance of the peace accord signed by the two Kings. Outraged, Rurik returned from a sea voyage to stage a merciless, retaliatory raid on Arald's kingdom, killing its men and seeking out the newly married queen, whom he then raped on her wedding night while wearing a garish, helmet with mask. Hearing her story, Helmut's own memories come flooding back—for he is, in fact, the former King Rurik, now deposed and living in denial of his past misdeeds. When Karin flees the room in tears, Helmut/Rurik realizes that he may well be the biological father of the boy whom he has begun to accept as a son.

The next day, after teaching Moki how to trap animals, Rurik returns to make a confession to Karin, but he is interrupted by the boy's screams. Spotted walking on the beach by three of Aghen's men, Moki is nearly apprehended, but saved when Rurik hurls his daggers into the would-be abductors. One of the men escapes and finds Aghen, now returned and making the local tavern his headquarters; Aghen punishes the man for his failure with death. Rurik also proceeds to the tavern but finds Aghen gone; he plans to await his return—but seeing Moki peering at the scene through a window, he realizes that he might be in danger, and so issues a forceful warning to Aghen's men that he will return later. The men notice that Rurik bears a strange birthmark on his wrist that resembles a man holding the disc of the Sun, and report this to Aghen. Knowing that this mark identifies Rurik, Aghen sends his men to find the blademaster on the road and prevent him from returning to the tavern. While riding back later that day, Rurik expects the road will be treacherous and rigs a trap for the trappers, sending a cloaked prop of himself down the road on horseback; when it is caught in a net, the trappers emerge, and Rurik drops them all with his knives. At the tavern, Rurik and Aghen have a showdown, drenched in darkness, but the knives Rurik aims at the black heart of his enemy are deflected by a shield worn over his chest. The cowardly villain also takes advantage of the shadows to flee the scene, riding out to the cabin, where he abducts Moki and leaves Karin with a warning that she must now obey his every command.

As night begins to fall, King Arald's ship finally arrives home, and he confides to his men his concerns that his own son may not recognize him after an absence of three years.





RURIK *teaches Moki (Luciano Polletin) the manly art of self-defense, with the approval of Karin.*

Arald goes to the tavern and finds Rurik—his old enemy, but also a man who allowed him to live at the end of his raid, because he had suffered enough—and challenges him to cross swords. Rurik gains the upper hand in the duel, but refuses to take the King's life. Arald continues fighting, right up to the edge of the beach, until the two adversaries are brought together by the hysterical arrival of Karin, who tells them that Aghen has kidnapped Moki. Arald moves to go after them, but Rurik insists that the boy's rescue is his duty.

Rurik discovers the old sibyl Shuna inside a dark cave, breathing with difficulty. With her dying breath, she tells him—and Arald, who has followed—that Aghen has taken the boy to a secret grotto, and points the way. There in the grotto, Arald's attempt to save Moki is unsuccessful, but the boy manages to remove Aghen's shield, making him vulnerable to Rurik's daggers, and the villain is killed with a blade hurled straight into his heart. Rurik rushes toward the boy and cuts his bonds, saying proudly, "You were courageous, my son"—but the instant his limbs are free, Moki runs into the waiting arms of Arald. Realizing that he has no real right to the boy, or to Karin, Rurik stoically mounts his horse and rides off into the sunset.

Production & Cast

Mario Bava had not photographed one of his own films in an anamorphic widescreen gauge since *Gli invasori* in 1961, but because Leopoldo Savona had filmed his footage in Techniscope, Bava was obliged to followed suit. Techniscope, an invention of Technicolor in Italy, allowed anamorphic films to be shot with standard cameras and lenses, though the camera was modified to expose half the frame at a time, thereby artificially doubling the width of the image. When the film was developed at Technicolor, it was enlarged to fill the entire four-perforation frame space (as opposed to the two-perforation exposure space), which also compressed the image, as on other anamorphic prints, necessitating the use of an anamorphic projection lens to retranslate it to its intended width. Techniscope may have been "the poor man's CinemaScope," as it was sometimes called, but it had more attractions from Bava's perspective than other widescreen processes. First of all, because it permitted the use of standard lenses, Techniscope was the only 2.35:1 format that gave him the freedom to use his zoom lens, which was so crucial to his expediency. Even better, the two-perf process effectively lowered the cost of negative development by a whopping 50%.

Money was tight in all departments, so the one-week shoot was deprived of some traditional conveniences, such as catering. "We never really had a lunch break," Cameron Mitchell admitted. "Instead, there was a crew member around who would bring us food. If I wanted something, or was feeling hungry, I would tell Bava and he would pass the word to the gofer. No craft service table, nothing like that at all—and you know what? You didn't miss it."

Once again, studio accomodations were credited to the no-longer-extant Titanus Studios, a cover for some other studio that Bava was allowed to use in exchange for professional favors granted. Mitchell remembered the majority of the exterior filming taking place in Monciana, a pastoral region of Catanzaro, in Calabria—the instep of the Italian boot. "It was just a 50-minute ride from Rome, but it was like going back in time several hundred years," he recalled. "It was way off the beaten path, away from the town; they had the mountain mules and that little creek there, herds of goat and sheep and small cattle. It was such a contrast to the main highway, about three miles away, where guys were speeding around in Maseratis! But the guys in Monciana were still using the old-style saddle on their mountain mules and dressed as their ancestors dressed three or four hundred years ago. That was our main location for the exteriors. Later, we did the other exteriors somewhere else that Bava picked."

The climactic cavern sequences were filmed in the underground caves of the Viale Libio, which remarkably run below the streets at the very center of Rome. The film's

seaside exteriors were filmed at Bava's beloved Tor Caldara location, which came as quite a relief to Mitchell. "The bulk of the other stuff we had shot miles away from the beach," he said, laughing at a recollection he was about to describe. "Mario would be directing us, in Italian:

'Now you a-look at the ocean.'

'What ocean, Mario?'

'There's an ocean—*over there.*'

'Where?'

[Sternly] 'Just-a believe.'

'*No problema, no problema!*'"

In the finished film, it appears that the tavern was built on prime real estate just above the beach, and a fabulous point-of-view shot of a setting sun turning the ocean into a shimmering sheet of gold is shown punctuated by the decorative posts of its porch. In fact, like the tavern, the porch section was built indoors and location footage of the ocean was optically inserted onto a blue-screen backdrop. The brevity of the film's schedule did not allow for many special effects to be included, but some other trick shots are present, notably a glass matte that places Arald's Viking ship into the far background of the scene of his return; a shot of the helmeted Rurik on horseback during the flashback to his raid on Arald's kingdom (filmed exactly the same way Boris Karloff was filmed for the finale of *I tre volti della paura*, but there is no dollying back this time); and one particular instance of stop-start camera "animation" that allowed Rurik to imbed three knives in a wall behind Aghen's head in a flashing, symmetrical arrangement.

In addition to Cameron Mitchell, *I coltelli del vendicatore* was fortunate to assemble an above-average cast, some of whom worked under pseudonyms, while others—the actress who gives the superb performance as Shuna, for example—received no credit whatsoever. The most familiar face in the supporting cast belongs to handsome Giacomo Rossi-Stuart, who plays Arald. In the years since his early appearances in *La morte viene dallo spazio* and *Caltiki il mostro immortale*, the British/Italian actor had risen to more conspicuous roles, including that of Ishmael in Robert Aldrich's *Sodom and Gomorrah* (1962). He also achieved a kind of pop stardom in Antonio Margheriti's campy space operas *Il pianeta errante/Planet on the Prowl* and *La morte viene dal pianeta Aytin/Snow Devils* (both 1964), in which he played Commander Rod Jackson—the Italian equivalent of *Star Trek*'s Capt. James T. Kirk. His role in this film may be minor, but few Italian actors of his station could have embodied it quite so well.

Mitchell and Rossi-Stuart had few scenes together, but the American actor had high praise for the leading lady they shared. Making her first appearance on the screen, newcomer Elissa Pichelli was billed on Italian prints as "Lissa," and in other world markets as "Elisa Mitchell" or "Lisa Wagner." She gives an excellent performance, but published records indicate that *I coltelli del vendicatore* was her first and only film. "Now that's a mystery, isn't it?" Mitchell exclaimed, reflecting on his co-star. "I thought she was very good—very different and very real." Some published sources, mislead by her "Mitchell" pseudonym, actually reported that Elissa and Cameron were married, but this is untrue.

The actor mentioned Pichelli as the focal point of an occasion when Bava proved to him his absolute mastery of lighting: "Do you remember the scene where I'm wearing the mask and raping the girl? Well, when the day came to film that scene, it was that time of the month, and her skin had broken out. I went to Mario and said, 'You can't shoot her today.' He said, 'Why not?' I said, 'Her face, it's a mess—impossible!' He looked at her and said, 'No, no—*due minuti*.' Two minutes, that's all it took. He moved a couple of lights and, suddenly, she looked . . . 16! Young and beautiful! I've never seen anyone else perform such a miracle in only two minutes! Bava had the technical expertise to make sure the actress was at her most beautiful, even when she was at her worst."

On film, you can see exactly what Mitchell was talking about. In Pichelli's close-ups, the right side of her face is three-quartered in shadow, while the left quarter is softly lit. It is a trick, but completely acceptable in this instance because the scene takes place inside the shelter of a bed, making the change in lighting completely plausible.

Cast in the villainous role of Aghen was Fausto Tozzi, an actor and screenwriter whose career had previously coincided with Bava's in Riccardo Freda's *Beatrice Cenci* (1956) and *Le meraviglie di Aladino* (1961), in which he played the Grand Vizier; he would later play Menelaus in Bava's future project with Franco Rossi, the TV miniseries *Odissea* (1968). Tozzi, whose varied career also included such highlights as *El Cid* (1961), *Im Stahlnetz des Dr. Mabuse/The Return*



MOKI *and his mother discuss the stranger who has entered their lives.*

of Dr. Mabuse (1961), *The Valachi Papers* (1972), and *The Black Stallion* (1979), also directed a single film in 1971, *Trastavere*, a comedy featuring Vittorio De Sica, Nino Manfredi, and Leopoldo Trieste. Tozzi may well have been cast as Aghen to capitalize on his vague, high-cheekboned resemblance to *Shane*'s Jack Palance, but he is given too few opportunities to project true malevolence and seems more of a coward and fool than a formidable opponent. A heavy smoker, he died of emphysema on December 10, 1978, at the age of 57.

Mitchell also liked working with young Luciano Polletin, the first-time actor who played Moki, who happened to be the son of Silvio Polletin, a Sider Film executive named in the original promotional ads for *Helmut il solitario*. "The kid was not too bad, considering that he never did anything before or since. Actually, we began the film with somebody else; I can't remember his name. His father was a very poor man, I remember." Polletin is good in the role, accurately conveying the awkwardness of a male child willing, but not yet strong or mature enough, to be "the man of the house." His presence, though, is somewhat compromised by a ridiculous dye-job on his hair, meant to make him look more like Rurik's own son, and an ill-conceived wardrobe that resembles an Old Norse variation on a Catholic school uniform of the 1960s.

The boy who preceded Polletin in the role can be glimpsed in the final cut, very briefly, at the end of Rurik's first encounter with Karin; the shot of her standing in the doorway lingers onscreen long enough for us to see a similar-looking boy, albeit with straight dark hair, emerge from behind her, defensively holding a bow. Evidently, in the original film story, the boy would have been proficient with such a weapon; in the Bava film, a scene was included showing Helmut/Rurik instructing Moki in how to properly handle a bow and arrow.

With this one telltale piece of the abandoned film identified, it is then possible to determine which other shots and scenes were most likely helmed by Leopoldo Savona. Surely, the entire first meeting between Karin and Rurik qualifies, as do the prior shots of Rurik riding across a stream into the valley, and the subsequent scenes of him cleaning and eating a fish plucked from the river and, later, following the sounds of Karin's screams back to the cabin. It seems probable that the latter scene was filmed with the intention of Rurik ingratiating himself into the homestead by successfully defending this woman and her son against two intruders, but it was amended for Bava's purposes on its soundtrack, with Rurik overhearing the voices of the men identifying Karin as the Queen and wife of Harald—an obvious afterthought, as the blademaster evidently hears this dialogue without processing it, as he doesn't realize her true identity until much later in the picture. Bava's footage would then begin with the shot of the wooden door (which appears to be a miniature), initially closed over the entire field of vision, being pushed open to reveal the fracas going on inside.



VICTORY *is bittersweet for Rurik, as Karin is reunited with husband King Harald (Giacomo Rossi-Stuart).*

Another held-over scene would be the footage of Rurik flailing about in a shallow brook to catch a fish, which would have been filmed as the actual prelude to his fresh-caught meal in the earlier scene, but was re-edited here, with cutaways to an amused Moki, to make it seem he is teaching the boy how to hunt, with buffoonish results. Jarringly, this scene cuts to Rurik returning to the cabin alone to speak privately with Karin, saying that he left Moki behind "at the sea." This isn't where they were, of course, so it would seem that this conversation—during which Rurik seems primed to confess his love to his hostess, but is interrupted by the boy's cry for help. The scene cuts away to Moki being attacked on the beach at Tor Caldara by three of Aghen's men; the shot is naturally backlit, so we cannot see who is playing Moki in these shots, but this sequence was at least partially restaged by Bava, with Polletin, in order to show Rurik saving the boy from his kidnappers with expertly thrown knives.

In all of these scenes, there is a sense of warmer weather and an absence in the interior shots of the colorful lighting employed elsewhere. Bava resumed filming in the middle of a freezing Italian winter—a fact underlined by Shuna's introductory prophecy as she announces the coming of winter, and by the fact that the actors' breath can be seen during at least two interior scenes: during Rurik's encounter with the obese barkeep at the tavern, and during the honeymoon rape scene, and again as Elissa Pichelli backs away from Mitchell onto the bed where the deed is done.

One of the changes necessitated by the change in climate was warmer wardrobe. According to Mitchell, Bava designed all the amendments to the existing wardrobe himself, starting with the heavy mantle that Rurik

adopts from the dead body of one of Karin's dead attackers ("Winter is coming," he reminds us). "You remember the thing with the stuff around the shoulders?" Mitchell said of this item. "Very virile, very practical. It was quite cold, some of the days and nights we worked on that. It was a fur piece that went from over my head to the middle of my chest. Mario actually designed all the wardrobe on that."

According to Mitchell, a Bava set was uniquely open to moments of inspiration and intuition. "Working with Mario was like working on an impressionist painting. If the brush drops, there it is. We were given a script at the beginning, but it was really nothing more than an outline. Any changes that he wanted to make, or that you wanted to make, then make them. If you came up with a good idea, Bava might say *'buon idea'* and go with it. You had some words, you had something of a script, but you didn't necessarily have to stick to it."

By closely studying the lip movements of the actors, it is possible to see that Mitchell, Pichelli, and Rossi-Stuart, at least, played their scenes in English—however, they are usually saying something other than what the English dubbing later had them say. Mitchell claimed that the dubbing took considerably more liberties with the dialogue than merely polishing it to a respectable sparkle. "I'll tell you what was interesting," he said. "When I saw *Knives of the Avenger,* I'd never heard those lines before! The English version had a totally different script! Whoever put that dialogue on the soundtrack, I don't know how they did it, I don't know how they dubbed it, I don't know how they could put it in any kind of sync at all, but it was a totally different storyline!"

The picture was edited by Otello Colangeli, with whom Bava had worked closely on his "stock footage" adventure *La morte viene dallo spazio* in 1958. Since that time, Colangeli had manned the editing table for such classic Italian horror and fantasy pictures as Riccardo Freda's *I giganti della Tessaglia/The Giants of Thessaly* (1960), Antonio Leonviola's *Maciste, l'uomo più forte del mondo/Mole Men Against the Son of Hercules* (1961), Alberto De Martino's *Perseo l'invincibile* (1963), and *Horror/The Blancheville Monster* (1963), and several films for Antonio Margheriti, including *Danza macabra/Castle of Blood* (1964). Colangeli did an exceptional job on *I coltelli del vendicatore,* particularly in pacing the action scenes; perhaps at Bava's suggestion, he also tried his hand at some of the frame-deleting techniques which Romana Fortini had introduced in *Terrore nello spazio.* During the scene of Rurik/Helmut fighting the intruders at the cabin, one of the men nearly brains him with an axe, which splits a salad bowl; after Mitchell exits frame, all the frames of the actual strike are missing, making the impact seem all the more forceful and startling.



A FLASHBACK *sequence tells the story of how Rurik, in his earlier life as King Helmut, exploited his military defeats with rape and pillage.*

When *I coltelli del vendicatore* was completed, Bava chose to sign it with a variation on his "hired gun" pseudonym for *La frusta e il corpo:* "John Hold." Considering its unusual status as a Viking Western, "John Fjord" might have been a more appropriate choice. "I asked Mario why he used a different name," Mitchell said, "and he gave me some kind of goofy answer. I think he wanted it changed because he liked the original version [of *Shane*] better."

Given the fact that Bava was not alone in playing "the name game"—hence the casting of "Jack Stuart" and "Elisa Wagner"—Bava's pseudonym might just as well have been a production mandate enforced to misrepresent the picture as another English production *à la The Long Ships.* But there are other valid reasons, too, why Bava might have preferred to sign the picture with an alias.

I coltelli del vendicatore was more of a rescue job than an original work, and it was made under the duress of little money and even less time. It has some rough edges, missing joints of narrative that the hectic schedule was unable to fill-in, even with Bava presiding. While Bava had every right to be pleased with the final result, such a picture would not be seen by his colleagues in the Italian film industry as a good career move, especially in the wake of so many other moonlighting jobs. With "John Hold" billed as director, certain people in-the-know would recognize the film as his work, but they would also recognize that he had made the gesture of distancing himself from it, implying that his own standards were higher.

Significantly, *I coltelli del vendicatore* would be the final collaboration between Mario Bava and Cameron Mitchell, a fraternal spirit and

his most frequent star. During their years of collaboration, knowing of the actor's financial problems, Bava had recommended his acting services to a number of fellow directors, and it can fairly be said that the Italian phase of his career may have resulted in more distinguished starring roles than would have been available to an actor of his age at the same time in America. Mitchell always kept a special place in his heart for Bava, whom he considered the most talented of all the world-class directors he worked for. They would meet once again, by surprise, but never again would Bava's Mitchell camera photograph Cameron Mitchell.

"I always hoped we would find another great project to do together," Mitchell said with warmth and regret. "Mario and I were always looking for the right vehicle, the film that would be our Sistine Chapel, you know? Our Davide. We almost had one at one time; we were close. We were planning a historical thing about Peter the Great. It would have been a big film. You see, the trouble with Bava . . . it wasn't trouble, really . . . but he wouldn't leave Italy. He loved Italy, and he wanted only to *lavorare in Italia* [work in Italy]. I tried to get him to do some things here [in the States], and some other things in South America, or various points around the world, but he wouldn't budge! 'I'm-a sorry, Camarone,' he would tell me, '*solamente in Italia.*' That was a big hang-up of Mario's. I suspect that, if he found himself making a film in another country—even with a few Italians around him—he would have felt lost. I don't think he would have *been* lost, because he was too good for that, but it stalled what should have been a brilliant career."

Bava's secretary Rosalba Scavia agrees with Mitchell's estimation: "I'd love to have worked with him on an epic. He deserved to be that kind of director, to make that kind of film. He could have been King Vidor, but his modesty and *simpatico* nature were his downfall. I remember Mario having a great sense of aesthetics. He was a perfectionist but, most of the time, things were far from perfect."



ITALIAN *due-foglia, art by A. Morini.*

Mitchell's own career in America quickly succumbed to the very forces that made it possible to resume. Returning to his homeland on the high note of a popular NBC television series and a role in the high-profile Paul Newman picture *Hombre* (1967), Mitchell soon felt the pinch of sharing his earnings with the IRS. Consequently, he had to work frequently, regardless of material or location, and almost immediately began appearing in low-rent exploitation fare such as the Mexican horror film *Autopsia de un Fantasma* (1967), *Nightmare in Wax* (1969) and *The Rebel Rousers* (shot 1967, released 1970). The 1970s were more rewarding, bringing him more respectable work, albeit in not significantly more respectable films, such as *The Midnight Man* (1974, opposite Burt Lancaster), *The Klansman* (1974, opposite Lee Marvin), and *The Swarm* (1978), as well as numerous made-for-television pictures and a soul-affirming part in Orson Welles' legendary, unreleased *The Other Side of the Wind*. However, after starring in 1978's *The Toolbox Murders*, the die was cast and Mitchell's career embarked on a downward spiral that lasted for the rest of his days. There were occasional highlights, such as his small part in the hit comedy *My Favorite Year* (1982), but more typical of his call sheets during this period were *Screamers* (1980, a day's work that inserted him into the revised American version of Sergio Martino's lethargic *La isola degli uomini pesce/Island of the Fish Men*), *Titillation* (1982, an uncredited appearance in a hardcore sex film featuring Russ Meyer discovery Kitten Natividad), and *Terror on Tape* (a 1983 scene compilation video, starring Mitchell as a pasty-faced video store clerk—perhaps the first time a name actor agreed to appear in a direct-to-video production). His last film, Steve Latshaw's *Jack-O* (1995), featured Mitchell in the posthumous role of "Dr. Cadaver." In short, his ensuing resumé made *"Solamente in Italia"* sound like good advice.

Cameron Mitchell—the star of *Gli invasori, Sei donne per l'assassino, Minnesota Clay*, and *I coltelli del vendicatore*—died on July 6, 1994, at the age of 75. His real-life *assassino* was lung cancer.



RARE *promotional art for a French reissue of the film, circa 1980s.*

Music

I coltelli del vendicatore was scored by Marcello Giombini, who was hired to compose the film's music before Bava signed on to complete it. Giombini delivered a rousing heroic score, full of adventure and appropriate colorings of melancholia and self-sacrifice. Unfortunately, by post-production, there was little money left in the production coffers to provide Giombini with an adequate orchestra. Though beautifully written, the music heard on the film's soundtrack is badly compromised by thin orchestration.

The main theme anticipates, in some ways, Paul Ferris' celebrated score for Michael Reeves' *Witchfinder General/The Conqueror Worm* (1968), another historical melodrama that functions as a metaphoric Western. Giombini's own *oeuvre* as a film composer encompassed a large number of Westerns, both before and after this assignment—*Tre pistole contro Cesare/Death Walks in Laredo* (1966), *Ballata per un pistolero/Ballad of a Gunfighter* (1967), *Ehi amico . . . c'è Sabata, hai chiuso!/Sabata* (1970), *Lo irritarono . . . e Sartana fece piazza pulita/Sartana Kills Them All* (1971), and *È tornato Sabata . . . hai chiuso un'altra volta/The Return of Sabata* (1971), to name a few—and he also scored some latter-day *pepla* in earlier stages of his career, which also prepared him well for this job.

In some ways, Giombini's music for *I coltelli del vendicatore* is a Western score, with harmonica occasionally introduced to underline Rurik's loneliness, and the rhythms of percussion underscoring Aghen's abduction of Moki are unmistakably those which the ear associates with Indians on the warpath. Giombini would never quite escape the lower ranks of Italian popular cinema scoring, working for such directors as Joe D'Amato and Alfonso Brescia, but notable in this context among his later efforts are Ruggero Deodato's *Un'ondata di piacere/Waves of Lust* (1975, scripted by Lamberto Bava) and Alfredo Rizzo's *La sanguisuga conduce la danza/The Bloodsucker Leads the Dance* (1975, starring Giacomo Rossi-Stuart).

Commentary

I coltelli del vendicatore may have been undertaken as work-for-hire, but because Mario Bava was forced by expediency to concoct the final script himself—even if the writing was tantamount to seeing where the brush dropped, as Cameron Mitchell recalled—it is the closest of all his films to something written in his own hand. Reflective, philosophic, autumnal, and humanistic, it is recognizable as an annex to Bava's universe from its very first scene, which is comprised of elements present in several of his earlier films, but possessed of a dark and devastated emotional tenor unlike anything felt in his previous work.

The scene fades in on a shot of the symbol of "a man holding the disc of the Sun"—that is, Rurik's birthmark—which Shuna has etched into the sands of the beach. Thus, from the very first frame, the movie asserts its primary theme with a mark of familial association, a symbol evoking the privilege and burden of heredity. The use of a birthmark to identify the high-born dates back to Bava's first adventure film as a director, *Gli*



AGHEN *(Fausto Tozzi) manhandles Karin while Rurik lies in wait.*

invasori, in which two apparent enemies (one of them also played by Cameron Mitchell) are revealed by the discovery of such marks to be brothers, separated in childhood. Here the sign is foretold by another of Bava's female oracles. Unlike the dazzling, young, exotic sibyls of *Le fatiche di Ercole* or *Ercole al centro della terra*, Shuna is an aged, withered crone, forced to live outside society like a feral thing, perhaps outcast as an unwelcome reminder of its superstitious origins, and perhaps somewhat maddened by a lifetime as a seer. Bava may be alluding to the intuitive nature of women by having this hag's advice sought by Karin, who is herself now one of the ostracized, and yet another primary archetype from Bava's back catalogue: a member of a deposed, or fallen, royal family. The scene is grippingly constructed, almost post-apocalyptic in its barren scenery and elegiac pacing, and it prepares us—with Karin—to keep our eyes sharpened for the arrival of a foretold image. As Shuna collapses and the camera tracks down the length of her body, across the brine-washed sands to the incoming waves, one feels confidently in the hands of an artist at the height of his powers, however anonymous.

The arrival of Helmut/Rurik is almost immediate, and it is a flaw of the film's design that "the other shoe" never drops by validating Shuna's prophecy in Karin's eyes by having her see his birthmark; that privilege is left to the audience, when the mark is spied by one of Aghen's men. Rurik's choice of "new identity" is curious, because "Helmut" obviously refers to the most striking component of his battle garb on the occasion when he raped Karin on her wedding night, the act he most regrets from his former life as King. The reunion of these two characters, unperceived by them both, finds Karin meeting him warily, as she met him before, and Rurik as someone more basically trusting of human nature—the flaw which allowed him to be victimized by Aghen in the past.

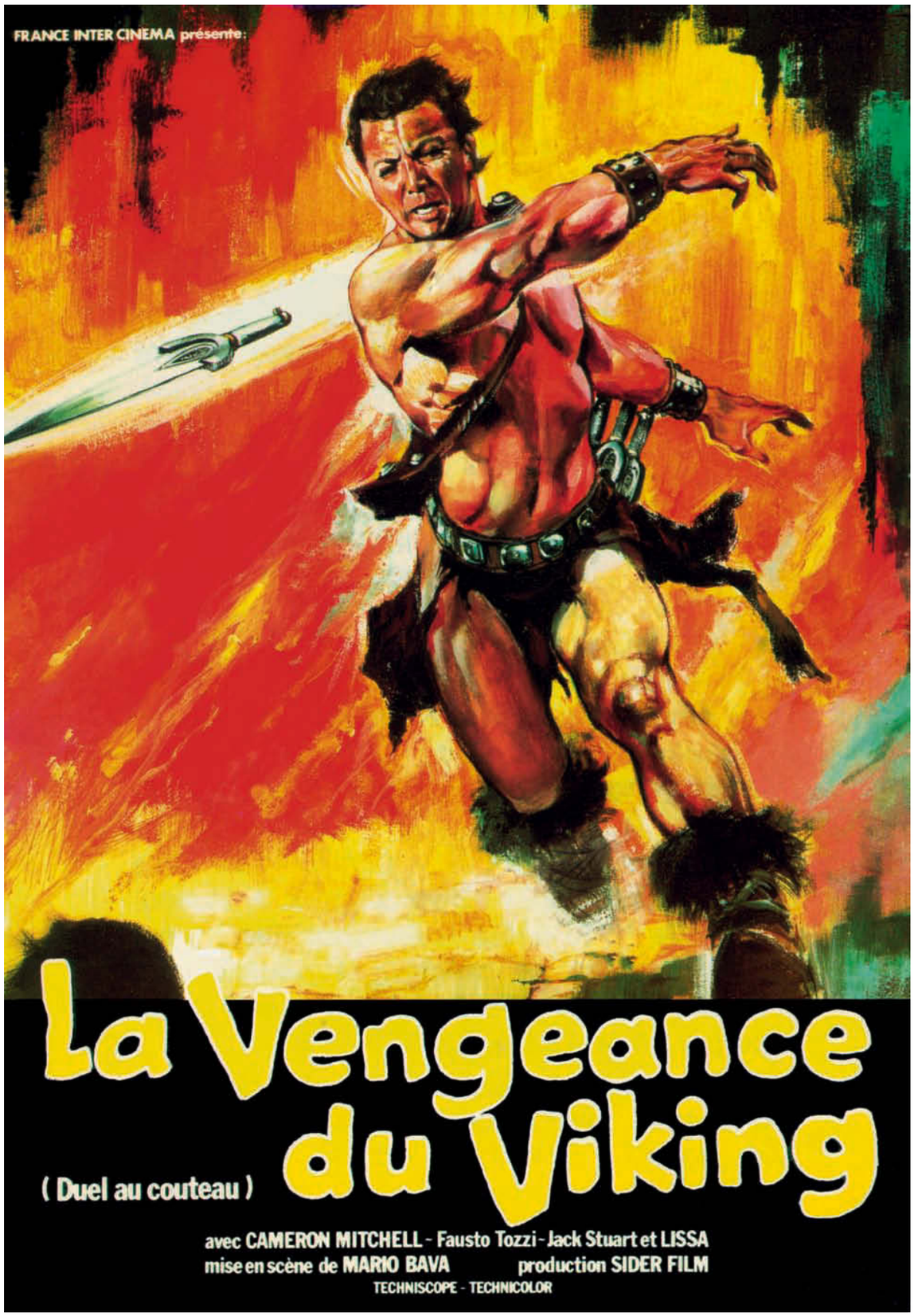
"Why is everyone so mistrusting in this region?" he exclaims.

Though Karin refuses to admit or feed him, she refers him to the abundance of nature, which, beginning with this film, becomes an increasing concern in Bava's work.

"The river is filled with fish," she says, "and there are berries by its banks. Nature you can trust—everywhere."

It may seem an odd sentiment, coming from a director whose films are so plainly uncomfortable when set out-of-doors, but in future works such as *Ecologia del delitto/Twitch of the Death Nerve* (1971) and *Baron Blood* (1972), we will find Bava editorializing—subtly, but with some frequency—about the importance of protecting those things which nature and time have perfected from the craven, commercial meddlings of humankind.

As his filmography progresses, Bava also becomes increasingly interested in detailing the consequences of violence; in this film, by showing how a vengeful rape results in the birth of the violator's son—the offspring he can never have—he is showing how Nature can sometimes provide the balm for the animal violence natural



to men, while at the same time harshly reproaching men for the choices they have made. Rurik loses his own family, and is later provided with the satisfaction of slaying the man responsible, but for inflicting his own random violence against the innocent, he is punished with a short time in the bosom of the family he might have had, which is then taken away from him, leaving him to wander till the end of his days, rootless and damned.

Though the resemblance between the two films is sometimes obvious, no critic at the time noted *I coltelli*'s conscious debt to *Shane*. It may be that, whether for legal or artistic reasons, Bava decided to downplay this connection himself. According to Cameron Mitchell, a final scene was shot in which Moki noticed Helmut/Rurik's departure, broke away from Arald's paternal clutch, and ran after him, calling his name. This was a wise deletion, as such a finale would have upset the complex poignancy of the film as it now exists, for the sake of a gratuitous film reference that would have seemed parodic in such a context, and may also have provoked unwanted laughter.

Even as it is, the film has its faults. The pre-credits scene, however arresting it may be in terms of its elegiac solemnity and powerful imagery, finds Shuna imparting more spoken information (including unfamiliar names) than can be easily absorbed by viewers just settling into the picture. It is another miscalculation to have asserted the cowardice of Aghen—represented by a shield he wears over his heart—over his villainy; it is true that he murdered and beheaded Rurik's family, but because the film never introduces us to these living characters, their loss carries no dramatic weight. By extension, Aghen never accrues the aura of an indomitable evil that must be reckoned with—quite the opposite of Jack Palance's formidable opposition to Alan Ladd in *Shane*. Instead, when Aghen disrupts Arald's wedding with the tribute of the heads, the King publicly

THIS *French reissue affiche art from the 1980s shows the influence of John Milius' recent success, CONAN THE BARBARIAN.*

berates him, which has the residual effect of making Aghen seem not terribly important, or feared, among his fellow countrymen. When he finally faces Rurik in the tavern, he confirms his cowardice by fleeing the scene under the cover of night. The duel scene is impressively staged, and the obvious attention paid to it, in terms of build-up and its expressive *mise-en-scène*, gives one the impression that it should have been the film's climax, but it is ultimately just another means of postponing the inevitable.

Without an aura of evil to bolster Aghen's role as Rurik's ultimate target, Bava prepares us for his moment of truth throughout the picture by giving Rurik dialogue expressive of his obsession to someday pierce his enemy's heart. "Someday," he swears at one point, "I'll tear his living heart out." When the two men finally stage their duel in the darkened tavern, Rurik taunts Aghen into removing the cowardly brand of his shield so that his knives can "find [his] black heart." When they meet again in the secret grotto, Rurik again taunts Aghen, his voice echoing from a hiding place among the rocks, that his blades will find their way to his heart. Finally, Moki succeeds in removing his shield moments before the fatal dagger is flung. Interestingly, the desire to claim an enemy's heart as the ultimate prize is also voiced by Elizabeth Holle in *Baron Blood*, made six years later, indicating that this concept held some personal significance for Bava.

I coltelli del vendicatore also suffers by being essentially restricted to only two sets: Karin's secluded cabin and the tavern where Aghen establishes his headquarters. Consequently, the narrative is forced to ping-pong between one place and the other, with only occasional location shots to break up the monotony. Without much choice of where to go, the second half of the picture is guilty of extensive geographic padding. For example, Rurik goes to the tavern in order to confront Aghen, but retreats after realizing that Moki has followed him into the danger zone. He escorts the boy back to safety, then returns later; Aghen is still not present, because he is back at the cabin, abducting Moki! Such material could have been easily compressed, but it was left in disarray to help bring the simple story to feature length.

Usually the most adept of directors at maximizing a minimal budget, Bava also fails to conceal the production's inadequate completion funding—proving beyond doubt that he was working in depressed, debilitated condition, probably more for distraction than for money. In the past, Bava had quadrupled the size of small armies in the twinkling of an eye with carefully measured multiple camera exposures. On this occasion, Bava lazily (and not very convincingly) doubles the size of Aghen's small army—only five men on horseback—to ten, by simply reversing the camera angle from one side of Fausto Tozzi's face to the other, while rearranging the extras on horseback beside him in different costumes. (Closer examination of the shot reveals that Bava may have left the camera where it was and had the shot reversed optically.) Later, when Aghen settles into his favorite seat in the tavern, Lulli's back bumps into the wall behind him and sets it trembling, like the skin of a drum—exposing the stonework as a painted sheet of canvas.

The film is also guilty of sometimes reaching too obviously for effect, as in providing Rurik with the alias of "Helmut," an obvious reference to the helmet he wore when he raped Karin. The helmet, designed by Bava, resembles the grille of a Rolls-Royce while also recalling Nikolai Gogol's descriptions of the eponymous creature of his story, "The Viy," as a monster whose all-seeing eyes reposed behind heavy iron eyelids. Another case would be one of the film's more obvious borrowings from *Shane*: the irregular appearances of a dog. As Cameron Mitchell remarked, when Aghen is shown arriving at the tavern, there is indeed a shot of a dog slinking under a table in fear; the trouble is, the dog is established in an earlier scene as belonging to Moki and, since he is not present, it has no business being at the tavern, other than to fulfill this self-conscious function. The dog makes only one other appearance in the picture, when Rurik caresses it, lost in thought, after discovering his role in Karin's past and realizing that Moki might be his own



ITALIAN *locandina, art by A. Morini.*



son. Knowing how important dogs were to Bava personally, and to his family, we can understand how even the irregular presence of one in the film would be, to him, an important factor in evoking a sense of home.

Speaking of the Helmut/Moki relationship, there is also a troubling edit in the film, which abruptly cuts short a marvelous scene in which the man uses a handmade cage to educate the boy in the trapping of animals. At one point, Moki laughs and remarks that animals must be stupid to wander so willingly into a trap, and Helmut/Rurik's expression becomes almost pained with conflict as he counters, "No, not necessarily . . ." By this point in their conversation, the viewer is completely absorbed, not least of all because Rurik appears to be on the point of drawing a parallel between the desperation that would make an animal risk its freedom to satisfy its hunger, and his own earlier situation in coming to Karin's doorstep begging for food. Our high expectations of the scene are frustrated by a sudden cutaway, but the scene is nevertheless redeemed by a comic exchange between Karin and Helmut, when the Queen narrowly escapes being hit by one of his thrown daggers. Feigning anger, she yells that he should stop using his knives to instruct the boy in the ways of war and come inside to cut strips of lard for her cooking. "Use my knives for kitchen work? Never!" Helmut laughs—but when Karin goes to pull the knife from the wall, she finds that its impact has already stripped a length of lard from a rack of bacon left hanging there. In this moment, paternal *braggadocio* and spousal cooperation are wed in a single, elegant gesture and Helmut/Rurik's domestication is complete.

With its unusual mixture of mysticism and barbarism, *I coltelli del vendicatore* can be seen not only as a "Viking Western," but also as a distinct forerunner of the "sword and sorcery" genre that first came into bloom with John Milius' *Conan the Barbarian* (1982), scripted by Oliver Stone. As someone who regularly binged on pulp fantasy fiction, Mario

BELGIAN *affiche, crudely repainted from the Italian locandina design.*

Bava was undoubtedly familiar with the "Conan" stories of Robert E. Howard at the time he made this picture, and therefore deserves recognition as the forefather of yet another Italian fantasy subgenre, as the Milius film inspired a whole set of Roman imitations, including Lucio Fulci's *La conquista/Conquest* (1983), Ruggero Deodato's *The Barbarians* (1987), and of course, Luigi Cozzi's sci-fi-tinged reinventions of *Ercole/Hercules* (1983) and *Le avventure dell'incredibile Ercole/Hercules II* (1985).

Distribution

I coltelli del vendicatore had its premiere screenings in Rome at the end of May 1966. It earned 250 million *lire* [$156,000], making it a better-than-average release for Bava, while at the same time hardly encouraging more movies struck from the same mold. The Italian Viking genre was now officially at an end. It struggled toward release in other European countries, being held back in France until the year's end. It waited another entire year before playing in West Germany, where its distributor gave it the frankly Leonesque title *Eine Handvoll blanker Messer* ("A Fistful of Gleaming Daggers").

In America, Viking pictures had been dead since the early 1960s; even in their heyday, they never attained the level of success they had known in Europe. Consequently, *Knives of the Avenger*—as it was called (a direct translation of the original Italian title, for a change)—did not find a willing distributor until early 1967, when it was acquired by World Entertainment Corporation, previously the US representatives of Bava's *The Road to Fort Alamo*. By the time WEC put *Knives* into release in 1968, Cameron Mitchell's celebrity had been refreshed in America by his starring role on the NBC series *The High Chaparral*. Alas, despite its global pretensions, World Entertainment Corporation's funds were insufficient to take advantage of that connection with a nationwide blanket of prints. Indeed, the company was so broke, they processed their trailers for *Knives* in black-and-white, which did nothing to enlighten potential ticket-buyers as to its scenic beauty. An enthusiastic review in the trade newspaper *Variety* encouraged the company to print a special two-color one-sheet that reprinted the review in full—but since the picture received virtually all of its playdates at drive-in theaters, the poster probably didn't sell many additional tickets.



US *one-sheet. Arguably the most ridiculous double bill concept of the 1960s.*

In 1969, the World Entertainment Corporation prints were reissued by Harris Associates, Inc. in tandem with *Gammera the Invincible*—the American reworking of *Daikaiju Gamera,* a black-and-white Japanese monster picture from 1965—as "The Biggest . . . Most Frightening Science-Fiction-Action-Show of the Century!" As "science-fiction-action-shows" go, the combo was adequate at best, but in the annals of unseemly marriages, it was without parallel.

In the 1970s, *I coltelli del vendicatore* was resurrected under new titles for fresh bookings in both France (*La Vengeance du Viking*) and Italy (*Raffica di coltelli*). In the 1980s, Bava's erstwhile producer Alfredo Leone bought the world rights to the picture and had new titles added, which openly credited the formerly pseudonymous Mario Bava as director. It was during the period of Leone's ownership that several US video companies released unauthorized, pan-and-scanned video copies of the film under the camouflage titles *Viking Massacre* and *Bladestorm*—thinly disguised translations of the French and Italian reissue titles. As a variant, the Mogul Video release of *Viking Massacre* is worth acquiring by completists for its preservation of the film's original, pre-Leone main titles.

Leone made no move to release the film himself until the year 2000, when he licensed the DVD rights to Image Entertainment, resulting in a handsome, widescreen digital master that made the picture available, for the first time, to a new generation of viewers.

Within its humble perimeters, *I coltelli del vendicatore* is a better-than-average effort. It is flawed, without question, but Bava—approaching the project in an uncommonly serious mood, his own heart unusually near the surface—invests the material with a dimension of warmth and bittersweet pathos seldom encountered in Italian adventure or fantasy cinema. An inherited project made on short notice, it nevertheless reflects its maker perfectly in the particulars of his recurring themes and interests, and also in some of the dialogue he breathed into these characters. Bava's own inquisitive approach to life and his love for solving problems is especially apparent in an exchange between father and son in the trapping scene.

After Helmut explains to Moki the intricacies of a trap fashioned with his own two hands, the boy asks, "How did you ever learn so many different things?"

"Through wondering—*continuously,*" explains Rurik, simply.

It is because of Bava's ability to express himself so personally through this orphaned project—and in Cameron Mitchell's empathetically haunted performance—that *I coltelli del vendicatore* must ultimately be counted a success. In terms of the Italian Viking cycle that spawned it, it stands as a remarkable example of its type and, in its own quiet way, represents the genre's last hurrah.


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Operation: Pop

"There's no money in poetry, but then there's no poetry in money either."
—Robert Graves

LOVE *so hot, it's a crime: John Phillip Law and Marisa Mell in DIABOLIK.*





THE COLD *hand of heritage reaches out to touch Monika (Erika Blanc) in the form of a child's ghost (Valerio Valeri) in* OPERAZIONE PAURA.

OPERAZIONE PAURA

Kill, Baby . . . Kill!

THREE YEARS had now passed since Mario Bava last directed a traditional horror film, the genre in which he felt most comfortable and creative. *La frusta e il corpo* had been just ambiguous enough to elude such a description—the ghost of Kurt Menliff was finally revealed to be a guilty figment of his lover/murderer's imagination, rendering the story more psychological than supernatural—and *Sei donne per l'assassino* was anything but traditional as it laid the ground rules for what the horror genre would become in the decades ahead.



DR. ESWAI *(Giacomo Rossi-Stuart) arrives in Karmingen.*

For his next film, Bava returned to his roots with an unnerving ghost story set in a rustic, Old World *milieu* that hearkened back to the "Once Upon a Time" settings of *La maschera del demonio* and *I tre volti della paura.* In some ways adventurous, progressive, and eccentric, *Operazione paura* is also the purest of Bava's horror films: it was made without American stars and without American International interference, on less than half its allotted budget; it reflects the kind of horror film that could be made, as Bava liked to say, "*solamente in Italia.*" Moreso than any other Bava film, it achieves a perfect synthesis of horror and poetry, realism and surrealism, color and atmosphere, classicism and innovation.

The director explained how it came about: "I once made a film in twelve days as a bet with some Americans, in which [the ghost of] a little girl appears to certain people and drives them to suicide. The film was improvised from a thirty-page script that was written on the spot. Later, an article was published that said this film earned a place for me in the history of cinema." [1]

Bava's inclination to colorful exaggeration is somewhat in evidence here. The film's lead actress, Erika Blanc, insists that it was filmed over a somewhat longer period of time: "Twelve days?" she laughs. "No, no—maybe twenty." (According to Lamberto Bava, the schedule was four weeks.) However, both Erika and Lamberto corroborate the incredible story that *Operazione paura* was largely a product of improvisation, with the actors inventing their dialogue from rough outlines handed to them in advance of each new camera set-up. The screenplay, as such, is credited to the writing team of Romano Migliorini and Roberto Natale, who previously signed two other horror scripts: Massimo Pupillo's *Il boia scarlatto/Bloody Pit of Horror* (1965, starring Mickey Hargitay) and Ralph Zucker's *Cinque tombe per un medium/Terror Creatures From the Grave* (1966). All three films shared production personnel and studio space; the family crypt at Villa Graps was built on the same sound stage as the dungeon of *Il boia scarlatto*'s Crimson Executioner, and both sets share some of the same furnishings. Also, *Cinque tombe per un medium* has so much in common with *Operazione paura*, in terms of theme and specific scenes, that the screenplay for Bava's film may well have been improvised from the floor plan of the earlier script.

Regardless of how quickly or haphazardly it was made, Bava was not bending the truth when he noted the respect accorded to his film by the critical and artistic communities. Phil Hardy's *Aurum Film Encyclopedia: Horror* called it "one of [Bava's], and therefore one of the genre's, best pictures," and over the years, it has noticeably influenced the work of such filmmakers as Federico Fellini, Luchino Visconti, Nicolas Roeg, Roman Polanski, Martin Scorsese, David Lynch, and numerous others—including Bava's own son.

"Of all the films made by my father, *Operazione paura* is the one I like best," Lamberto Bava enthuses. "I like the film very much, but I also enjoyed the shooting. It was made in a very short time with a very good, small crew in a strange little village. The locations

Operazione paura

"Operation: Fear"
Filmed at Titanus Appia Studios, Villa Lancelotti (Frascati), and on location in Calcata and Faleria, Italy
February – March 1966
First released: July 8, 1966
Eastmancolor, "Schermo Panoramico," 1.85:1, 83 minutes

Production: FUL Films. Producers: Nando Pisani, Luciano Catenacci. Director: Mario Bava. Screenplay: Romano Migliorini, Roberto Natale, Mario Bava. Assistant director: Lamberto Bava. Director of photography: Antonio Rinaldi. Camera operator: Saverio Diamanti. Camera assistant: Salvatore Caruso, C.S.C. Art direction: Sandro Dell'Orco. Makeup: Maurizio Giustini. Wardrobe: Tina Grani. Hairdresser: Maria Teresa Laganga. Production manager: Luciano Catenacci. Production secretary: Rosalba Scavia. Editor: Romana Fortini. Music: Carlo Rustichelli. Sound recordists: Romano Pampaloni, Armando Tarzia. Recorded at CDS Studios, Rome. Distributor: INDIEF.

Additional US credits: English soundtrack scripted by John Hart. Directed by Lewis E. Cianelli.

Giacomo Rossi-Stuart (Dr. Paul Eswai), Erika Blanc (Monika Schuftan), Fabienne Dali (Ruth), Piero Lulli (Inspector Kruger), Max Lawrence [Luciano Catenacci] (Karl), Micaela Esdra (Nadine), Gianna Vivaldi [Giovanna Galletti] (Baroness Graps), Giuseppe Addobbatti (innkeeper), Franca Dominici (innkeeper's wife), Mirella Pamphili (Irene Hollander), Valerio Valeri (Melissa Graps).

Argentina: *Mata, Bebé, Mata,* "Kill, Baby, Kill," Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer, 1969
France: *Operation Peur*
Germany: *Die Toten Augen des Dr. Dracula,* "The Dead Eyes of Dr. Dracula," Alpha Film–Nobis, 3/13/70, 83m. *Dr. Dracula—eine Bestie schlägt zu,* "Dr. Dracula—A Beast Strikes," UFA, (8 mm)
Japan: *Kill Baby Kill,* 20th Century-Fox
UK: *Curse of the Dead,* Miracle Films Ltd., 6/67, 83m 24s, Certificate "X," passed with no cuts
US: *Kill, Baby . . . Kill!,* Europix Consolidated Corporation, 10/66, 84m; Reissue: *Curse of the Living Dead,* Europix Consolidated Corporation, 7/73, 75m
US (Spanish-American): *Mata Bebé Mata,* "Kill Baby Kill," Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer, 1969

were just as beautiful and mysterious in life as they appear on the screen. It is a special film that I remember with great affection."

Synopsis

The year is 1907. In the remote, rustic village of Karmingen, where life is still lived as in earlier centuries, a frightened young woman climbs the stairs of a derelict building as though goaded by some unseen force. Reaching the top of the stairs, she jumps to her death, as though fighting her own will to survive, impaling herself on the spikes of an iron gate. Leaving the scene of this apparent suicide is a young girl, giggling in the wake of death.

Dr. Paul Eswai, a coroner, is summoned to Karmingen to perform an autopsy on the body of the suicide, who is identified as a servant girl named Irene Hollander. Upon arriving, Eswai sees a coffin being carried in haste to the village cemetery on the shoulders of four men in red hoods. He moves on, greeted with cold suspicion by the villagers at the local inn—until the arrival of Karl, the burgomaster, who escorts him to the makeshift office of Police Inspector Kruger.

Kruger tells Eswai that the dead woman was a servant at Villa Graps, seat of the local Barony, who posted a letter to his office—vivid with the dread of dying—shortly before her body was discovered, claiming that the answers to a series of local deaths could be found at Villa Graps. During their meeting, Eswai and Kruger are notified that two local men, Rudolph and Oscar, are—at that very moment—hastily burying Irene's body to prevent it from being "desecrated" by Eswai's autopsy. They arrive at the cemetery in time to preempt the burial and retrieve the corpse. Eswai is assisted in the autopsy by Monika Schuftan, an attractive medical student who left Karmingen as an infant, and who happened to return to her birthplace on the day Irene died. Eswai's post mortem discloses a strange discovery: a gold coin implanted in Irene's heart. Monika explains the finding with an ancient local legend: "Only with money in the heart can a body that has suffered a violent death ever rest in peace."

That night, after escorting Monika to her rooming house, Eswai is accosted in the foggy streets by Rudolph and Oscar, now wielding knives, but is saved by the mystical intervention of Ruth,[2] a local witch. Exhausted and confused, Eswai returns to the inn, where Nadine—the daughter of innkeepers Hans and Martha—informs him that Kruger has gone to Villa Graps in search of answers. Asking when Kruger will return, Nadine replies without thinking, "You don't come back from Villa Graps!" Sensing that she has said too much, Nadine flees the room and sees the face of a blonde little girl gazing at her spitefully through her frosted bedroom window—the face of Melissa Graps.

Unknown to Eswai, the townsfolk of Karmingen are haunted by the guilty memory of Melissa, the 7-year-old daughter of the local Barony, who was trampled to death by horses while running after her ball during a village festival twenty years earlier. As she rang the bell in the town's church tower for help, the villagers came . . . but not to her rescue, watching her bleed to death—as though astonished that a blue-blood bled red like anyone else. Now, the vengeful spectre of this child appears to anyone who dares speak her name, compelling them to acts of self-annihilation.

Nadine's parents summon Ruth to exorcise the hovering malevolent spirit, but her ancient birch-whipping and leech vine treatments are interrupted by Eswai, who is outraged by these abusive, superstitious cures. He gives the girl's mother some medicine to administer—"no more than twenty drops"—but after much feverish anticipation on Nadine's part, Melissa reappears outside her window and compels her to impale herself on the sharp, decorative projection of a gas lamp.

Eswai pursues Kruger to Villa Graps, a foreboding and neglected mansion of bending, disorienting corridors, ominous portraits and staircases that spiral upwards into color and down into darkness. The Baroness Graps, demented by decades of isolation and anger, denies that Kruger has been to see her and warns Eswai, "Get out of my sight, or you'll be sorry." While looking for an exit, Eswai encounters a child who introduces herself as Melissa and promptly disappears. He follows her disembodied laughter and bouncing ball into the darkness, losing sight of her. Meanwhile, across town, Monika has a nightmare filled with strange, prophetic images. She awakens to find a doll from her nightmare resting on the foot of her bed; it



ESWAI *performs an autopsy on Irene Hollander (Mirella Pamphili) with Monika assisting.*

1 Alberto Abruzzese, et al., *La città del cinema—produzione e lavoro nel cinema italiano 1930–70* (Rome, Italy: Napoleone, 1979), 83–89.

2 "Marthe" in French prints. In English-language prints, this is the name given to the innkeeper's wife.



RUTH *(Fabienne Dalí) startles the innkeeper (Giuseppe Addobbatti) with her arrival.*



SUPERSTITION *calls for superstitious cures, as Ruth whips Nadine (Micaela Esdra) with birches to expel the evil forces gripping her.*



ESWAI *is appalled to discover ancient "cures" like leech vines being used to help Nadine.*

disappears into thin air moments after she touches it. Terrified, she races to the room next door to beg shelter, but her neighbor, Frau Morgan, refuses to admit her because she "shouldn't have touched that dead girl"—meaning the corpse of Irene Hollander, but establishing a link between the doll and the little dead girl who once owned it.

Turned away by her neighbors, Monika races into the street and meets Eswai, who blames her nightmare on her participation in the autopsy. Then, together, they witness something that cannot be explained: the sight of the bell of the village church—now a long abandoned ruin—ringing twelve times, though untolled, simulating Melissa's summons of twenty years ago. They later find Kruger in the cemetery, a bullet hole in his temple. Eswai and Monika report these mysteries to Karl—now revealed as Ruth's lover—who uses the opportunity as an excuse to make even greater revelations. He confesses to Monika that the Schuftans were not her real parents. "The answers you're looking for can be found only at Villa Graps," he says, leaving the room to retrieve some explanatory papers left in his care by the Schuftans. Opening the armoire where his special papers are kept, he finds Melissa's ghost clutching the documents! By the time Eswai and Monika can respond to his screams, Karl has slit his own throat with a sickle. The documents related to Monika's birth lie in ashes on the floor.

Eswai accompanies Monika to Villa Graps, where Monika discovers the wrought-iron gate she saw in her dream. The path beyond it also seems oddly familiar to her. It leads them into the Graps family crypt, of which Melissa's tomb, dated 1880–1887, is the centerpiece—along with another. "Twenty years ago," Monika realizes, noting that this was the time of her departure from Karmingen. Together they enter the villa and confront Baroness Graps with their information, which the haggard woman confirms without hesitation. The Baroness admits that Monika is her younger daughter, whom she hoped to shield from her sister's spectral rage by entrusting her care to her servants, the Schuftans. It becomes obvious that Melissa's ghost has assumed its power from the Baroness' refusal to forgive the villagers

for letting her die; she is in fact a medium whose anger has bred an exterminating angel. As she shows Monika and Eswai the dolls in Melissa's old room, Melissa herself is manifest among them—opening a metaphysical labyrinth, a Mobius strip, in which Eswai becomes momentarily lost, comes face-to-face with his own doppelgänger, and is then ejected from the villa through a rift in space where reality and art become one.

Meanwhile, Monika is drawn into a similar cycle, trapped in an endless repetition of the villa's spiral staircase, until she swoons. She awakens in the Graps crypt, where she now discovers a tomb, beside Melissa's, where her own name is engraved: Monika Graps, born 1886, the death date blank. A vision of her older sister, a fatal temptation preserved in spirit at the moment of its premature death, appears before her.

Before the ghost can urge Monika to leap to her death from a precipice outside, Ruth suddenly appears elsewhere in the villa—angered by Karl's death—and revokes a protective spell she has placed over the Baroness by killing her. On the verge of death, the Baroness stabs Ruth in the heart with a fireplace poker. As the two women perish with their grief, Melissa's ghost vanishes into nothingness. Eswai rescues Monika from the edge of the precipice as it crumbles. The nightmare ended, the couple exit the villa together, as the sun rises on Karmingen—seemingly for the first time.



SANDRO DELL'ORCO *provided the rustic art direction for Bava's spectral masterpiece.*

Migliorini and Natale's scenario shares a number of story elements in common with Roy William Neill's *The Scarlet Claw*, a Sherlock Holmes mystery produced by Universal Pictures in 1944. In this original thriller, scripted by Edmund L. Hartmann and Neill from a treatment by Paul Gangelin and Brenda Weisberg, Holmes (Basil Rathbone) and Dr. Watson (Nigel Bruce) are summoned to a small, timeless hamlet called *Le Mort Rouge* ("The Red Death") in French Canada, where a number of locals are found dead with their throats torn out, supposedly by a ghost haunting the village. The story begins with the death of Lady Penrose, the wife of Lord Penrose (a leading advocate of the occult sciences), who dies bleeding to death while ringing the local church bell for assistance that never comes. Despite advice to the contrary, Holmes travels to *Le Mort Rouge* intending to prove that the death of Lady Penrose was caused by rational rather than supernatural means, which makes him unwelcome in the eyes of the superstitious townsfolk. Holmes and Watson examine the corpse of Lady Penrose and take a room at the local inn, where they interfere with the abuse of the innkeeper's young daughter at the hands of her superstitiously frightened father; the girl is later found dead, her throat pierced like all the other victims. The murders are eventually traced to an actor who uses phosphorescent paint on his clothing to adopt a spectral glow and a gardener's weeder as his "claw." The last of the murders is committed while the killer is in drag (an interesting detail for reasons that will become apparent shortly).

Another notable cinematic antecedent is Wolf Rilla's *Village of the Damned* (1960), based on John Wyndham's 1957 novel *The Midwich Cuckoos*. Here, a race of similarly blonde, supernatural children—in this case, of alien origin—demonstrated their capacity for committing murders while keeping blood off their hands, by psychically compelling their victims to suicide. In the first scene that shows them demonstrating their power, they act in response to being accidentally struck by a normal child's ball.

Production & Cast

Retrospectives of Italian horror bracket the years 1957–66 as its "Golden Age." Just as *I vampiri* marks the beginning of this stimulating and fertile period, *Operazione paura* is often cited as its *grande finale*. It was not the last Italian horror film to be produced within this cycle, but it was the last to be widely distributed. It was also one of the last films to be made at Titanus Appia Studios—the former Scalera Film sound stages where Bava had formally begun his directorial career six years earlier with *La maschera del demonio*—which, in 1966, stood on the verge of bankruptcy. It was on the same sound stage where Javutich rose from his grave, and where Dr. Kruvajan was impaled through his eye, in the cemetery of that earlier film that Melissa Graps floated to and fro, past the camera on her spectral swing, in a different yet familiar graveyard setting.

The establishing shots of Karmingen seen in *Operazione paura* actually show the village of Calcata, a medieval village of stone houses huddled atop a plateau in the Treja valley of southern Tuscany, about 50 kilometers outside of Rome. A quiet, verdant village that seems to exist outside time, Calcata is one of the most haunting and unusual natural locations ever showcased in a horror film, and it is remarkable that it has not used in films more often. Certain 20th



ESWAI *and Monika Schuftan bond with one another while investigating the mystery of Villa Graps.*

century conveniences such as electricity and running water have been available in Calcata only since the 1990s, which added to the difficulties of filming the movie.

"Calcata was another dead city, like Canale Monterano," remembers Lamberto Bava, in reference to the locations where parts of *"I wurdalak"* were filmed. "Abandoned, constructed on a mountain of tufa, a material that has crumbled over the centuries, like many countries of the high Lazio. The Anticamente constructed its cities high atop hills in order to defend itself against invaders. When it began to collapse, it was virtually abandoned, but in the late 1960s, it became a kind of hippie community."

While Calcata provided the general view of Karmingen, and also some of its particular locations, the majority of the film's exteriors were shot in Faleria, about five miles north-east of Calcata. A notable Falerian landmark seen in the film is the Parrochia di San Giuliano, a church built in 1298, which is the site of the mysteriously tolling bell tower. Another "dead, medieval city," Faleria was entirely vacated for many years in the wake of a catastrophic earthquake that struck the region in 1942.

Filming commenced in November 1965, and the actors were grateful for the period setting of the piece, as it allowed them to endure the chilly, all-night shootings in warm, layered, turn-of-the-century apparel—much of it authentic vintage clothing provided by wardrobe mistress Tina Grani. "During the shooting it was bitterly cold," recalls Lamberto Bava, "and I remember the actors huddled each night around a large fireplace. It was a very difficult undertaking to pry them away from there to shoot a scene!"

Some of the film's exteriors, such as the village cemetery, were actually studio interiors designed by Bava and his young scenographer, Alessandro "Sandro" Dell'Orco. Dell'Orco would go on to become a gifted art director in his own right, later ascending in his profession to such productions as Jean-Jacques Beineix' *La lune dans le caniveau/The Moon in the Gutter* (1983) and Bernardo Bertolucci's *The Sheltering Sky* (1990).

Standing in for Villa Graps—exteriors and some interiors—was Villa Lancelotti, located in the lush Italian wine country of Frascati, about 30 kilometers outside of Rome, at the intersection of Via Catone, Via Piccolomini, and Via Sant' Angelo in the town's south quarter. Originally built as Villa Piccolomini in the 16th century and rebuilt in the 1700s, Villa Lancelotti was the home of King Charles Emanuel IV of Sardinia (later King Charles IV) in the late 18th and early 19th centuries. Villa Lancelotti made its Italian horror debut in Lionello De Felice's *La lama nel corpo/The Murder Clinic* (1966), produced by Elio Scardamaglia just a short time before *Operazione paura* went into production. In reality, Villa Lancelotti is one of the great garden showcases among Frascati villas, but in both *La lama nel corpo* and *Operazione paura,* it looms out of the darkness as a facade of foreboding gloom, a barren moonscape cratered with empty windows. Lamberto Bava remembers that the location was brought to his father's attention by "a very handsome guy . . . who happened to be kidnapped some years later, and the villa had to be sold to pay the ransom."

Some of the settings in *Operazione paura* also figure in other Italian horror films of the "golden age," as well. In the opening scene, Irene Hollander commits suicide by jumping from the same tower where Katia (Maria Giovanninni) fell to her death in Piero Regnoli's *L'ultima preda del vampiro/The Playgirls and the Vampire* (1960); the Villa Lancelotti corridor where Eswai first encounters Melissa can also be seen in Paul Morrissey's *Blood for Dracula/Andy Warhol's Dracula* (1973) and Andrea Bianchi's *Le notti del terrore/Burial Ground* (1981); and the spiral staircase at Villa Graps was previously featured in Camillo Mastrocinque's *La cripta e l'incubo/Terror in the Crypt* (1964). Several of the film's other locations, as well as its moody graveyard set, also appeared in Massimo Pupillo's *La vendetta di Lady Morgan* ("The Vengeance of Lady Morgan,"1966), truly the last gasp of Italian horror's "Golden Age"—which went into production two or three weeks after the completion of Bava's film.

The Americans who made the bet with Bava that allegedly begot this film could not be identified, but they were somehow affiliated with Europix Consolidated Corporation, the New York-based company that released it in America one year after its completion, in the weeks preceding Halloween 1967. Founded by Herbert D. Schimmel and his brother Stuart B. Schimmel, former partners in a New York certified public accounting firm, Europix had been in operation since 1963, when its first acquisition—a West German/Yugoslav co-production called *Verführung am Meer*, starring Elke Sommer—was distributed to "Adults Only" theaters under the title *Seduction by the Sea*. When "nudie-cutie" features declined in popularity, Europix turned to horror films,

THE VILLAGE *of Karmingen is governed by supernatural forces—as is reflected in the love affair between Burgomeister Karl ("Max Lawrence" a.k.a. Luciano Catenacci) and Ruth, the town witch.*





ANOTHER *great art direction shot, this one showing Baroness Graps ("Gianna Vivaldi" a.k.a. Giovanna Galletti) summoning the ghost of her dead child, Melissa.*

beginning with a successful double bill of two 1965 productions: Michael Reeves' *La sorella di Satana* and Dino Tavella's *Il mostro di Venezia*, which the company retitled, respectively, *The She Beast* and *The Embalmer*. ("Deadlier Than *Dracula!* More Frightening Than *Frankenstein!*" the ads trumpeted.) If Bava's story about the origin of his film is correct, *Operazione paura* was Europix's first excursion into active film production—which would also explain the concurrent metamorphosis of Europix Consolidated into Europix-International, Ltd.

The film's credited producers were Nando Pisani and Luciano Catenacci, both rising above their usual stations for the first (and last) time. Pisani was an experienced production manager, having worked on such pictures as Roberto Rossellini's *Dov'è la libertà . . . ?* (1952) and Giorgio Bianchi's *Gli attendenti* (1961), while Catenacci worked principally as an actor under the *nom d'ecran* "Max Lawrence." Here, Catenacci extended the film's threadbare budget by doing triple duty as producer, production manager, and actor, shaving his head to play the town's burgomaster, Karl.

Bava recalled that the film was titled *Operazione paura* "because the star was the one from the James Bond movies."[3] In fact, Erika Blanc never appeared in a Bond picture, nor did she ever appear in any of the several spy pictures produced in Italy whose titles began with the recurring word *Operazione*. However, she had appeared in two other spy programmers—Sergio Grieco's *Agente 077 missione Bloody Mary* (released in Spain as *Operacion Lota Azul* and in France as *Operation Lotus Bleu*) and Domenico Paolella's *Agente 033 operazione Atlantide* (both 1965). It is therefore doubtful that the titling of the picture had anything to do with Blanc's casting, unless it was rooted in a misunderstanding.

Born Enrica Bianchi Colombatto on July 23, 1942, in Brescia, Erika Blanc was discovered while visiting her husband, future director Bruno Gaburro, on the set of a film where he was employed as an assistant director. "I started going to the sets to see Bruno and, right away, producers and directors started approaching me, asking if I was interested in becoming an actress," she recalls. "I never thought about it before, but I said I didn't mind."

Published filmographies disagree, but Blanc insists that her first film was *Il terzo occhio* ("The Third Eye," 1966), a tale of necrophilic passion starring Franco Nero, produced by *I vampiri*'s Ermanno Donati and Luigi Carpentieri and directed by Mino Guerrini—who worked under the pseudonym "James Warren."[4] She also maintains that *Operazione paura* was her second film, but it could not be, given that its title was supposedly chosen to capitalize on her earlier spy roles. Within twenty days of completing the Bava film, Erika returned to the same locations to play a malicious governess in *La vendetta di Lady Morgan*. Looking more German or Scandanavian than Italian, this strawberry blonde left an indelible mark on the Italian cinema of the 1960s, starring in spy films, Westerns, romances, erotica, and horror films with a pronouncedly fetishistic bent. Among her outstanding achievements in the latter category were Jean Brismée's *Le Plus Longue Nuit du Diable/The Devil's Nightmare* (1971) and Emilio Miraglia's *La notte che Evelyn uscì dalla tomba/The Night Evelyn Came Out of the Grave* (also '71), in which she performs a stupendous striptease that begins with her oozing out of a coffin while wearing thigh-high leather boots. Today, Erika Blanc—in real life, a charming eccentric who smokes a Meerschauum pipe—is considered one of Italy's top theatrical actresses, and she continues to make intermittent onscreen appearances, such as her 1991 cameo in Lamberto Bava's violent thriller *Corpo mosaico/Body Puzzle*.

Cast in the male lead role of Dr. Paul Eswai was Giacomo Rossi-Stuart, happy to work with Bava again after their reunion on *I coltelli del vendicatore*. This, their third and definitive collaboration, would also be their last, though Rossi-Stuart continued to be active in Italian popular cinema for almost another twenty-five years. He died in 1992, two years after his last picture, Umberto Lenzi's *Gates of Hell* (1990). The sons of Bava and Rossi-Stuart perpetuated the collaborations of their families in the first four installments of RAI-TV's popular series of fantasy films *Fantaghirò/The Cave of the Golden Rose* (1991–94)—directed by Lamberto Bava, and starring Kim Rossi-Stuart.

Though she remains well-covered as Ruth, French-born Fabienne Dalí found her fame as a European sex starlet. She appeared topless in Max Pecas' *Le Baie di Désir/The Erotic Touch of Hot Skin* (1964), and modelled revealing wardrobe in Sergio

3 Abruzzese.

4 Not to be confused with the James Warren who starred in the 1953 sci-fi film *Port Sinister*, or the James Warren who published the long-running American horror film magazine *Famous Monsters of Filmland*.

Grieco's *Agente 077—dell'Oriente con furore/From the Orient with Fury* (1965). According to Erika Blanc, "Fabienne took her role [as the witch] so much to heart that she began studying the Tarot and offered card readings to the film company during our breaks."

Piero Lulli, who had played the villainous Bill Carter in *Ringo del Nebraska,* was cast as the heroic Inspector Kruger—just one of the film's many deliberate inversions.

As previously mentioned, the role of Kurt—credited to "Max Lawrence"—was in fact played by Luciano Catenacci, the film's co-producer and production manager. He had been acting under the "Max Lawrence" name since 1965, when he appeared in Giancarlo Romitelli's spy opus *Mark Donen agente Zeta 7.* His career as a moonlighting actor lasted somewhat longer than his daytime work as a producer. He subsequently appeared in the unbilled role of a family physician in *La vendetta di Lady Morgan*, hiding his identity under slightly more hair, a pair of antique spectacles, and a meek demeanor. He resurfaced as an actor, under the new pseudonym "Luciano Lorcas," in Giorgio Ferroni's *La battaglia di El Alamein* (1968), and was subsequently featured in Sergio Bergonzelli's *Nelle pieghe della carne/In the Folds of the Flesh* (1970), Ferdinando Baldi's *Afyon oppio/The Sicilian Connection* (1972), and Sergio Corbucci's *Pari e dispari/Odds and Ends* (1978), among many others.

Lamberto Bava remembers his father directing Catenacci with difficulty: "He wasn't an experienced actor, so he got nervous and wasn't able to act. Mario directed him angrily, repeating, 'Don't move! Don't worry about the lines; Lamberto will prompt you. Just repeat what he says, don't move and don't knit your brows!' Actually he had these long pauses in his dialogue, which gave me time to prompt him. It looked like he was thinking of something very profound, something that tormented him, and because of that, Mario sometimes chose to pan away from him to the actress."

According to Australian documentary filmmaker Brendan Young, who befriended the producer–actor in the years just prior to his death on October 4, 1990, Catenacci resigned from the world of filmmaking and relocated with his family from Rome to Melbourne, where he worked as a baker.



MELISSA GRAPS, *the great ghost-child of Italian cinema, was played by Valerio Valeri, the 7-year-old son of the production office's caretaker.*

The innkeepers, Hans and Martha, were played by Giuseppe Addobbatti and Franca Dominici. Addobbatti (b. 1909), who sometimes worked under the names "John Douglas" and "John MacDouglas," had been active in films since the 1930s. His films include *Il mostro dell'opera/The Vampire of the Opera* (1961), *Ursus nella terra di fuoco/Ursus in the Land of Fire* (1963), the Spaghetti Western classic *Django* (1966), and Bernardo Bertolucci's *Il conformista/The Conformist* (1970). No other credits for Franca Dominici could be ascertained, though it is known that she was not related to actor Arturo Dominici.

The introductory role of Irene Hollander was played by Mirella Pamphili, whom the credits mention was then a student at the Centro Sperimentale di Cinematografica. Though she appears only briefly in this early role, Pamphili appeared in over two dozen films between 1965 and 1969, including the James Bond spoof *O. K. Connery/Operation Kid Brother* (1967), *Satanik* (1967), Federico Fellini's *Satyricon* (1968), *Il dolce corpo di Deborah/The Sweet Body of Deborah* (1968), Jess Franco's *Venus in Furs* (1969) and *Femina ridens/The Laughing Woman* (1969).

The actress who played Baroness Graps is credited as Gianna Vivaldi, but was in fact Giovanna Galletti, a veteran stage and screen performer. Born to Italian parents in Siam in 1916, Galletti had been active in Italian films since the 1930s. She had previously worked with Bava on *Le meraviglie di Aladino*, in which she played the small role of a midwife. Among her other screen credits: Roberto Rossellini's *Roma città aperta/Open City* (1945), John Huston's *La bibbia/The Bible—In the Beginning* (1966), and Bernardo Bertolucci's *Ultimo tango a Parigi/Last Tango in Paris* (1972).

The film's most uncanny casting story concerns the role of Melissa Graps. According to Lamberto Bava, his father auditioned hundreds of girls for the part but none of them had "the necessary quality." At the eleventh hour, a frustrated Mario Bava was astonished to discover that necessary quality standing right under his nose, in the person of Valerio Valeri—the young son of the *portière* at the production's main office. As incredible as it may seem, the role of Melissa was played by a 7-year-old boy in drag.

"The little boy, Valerio Valeri, was not at all enamored with having to dress up as a girl," Rosalba Scavia recalls, "but he hoped it might be the start of a film career. Mario told him never to blink, and I remember he would complain of headaches from having to go for so long without blinking in his scenes."

Erika Blanc erupts in merriment when reminded of the boy's name today. She agrees that Valerio had an almost incandescent hatred of the long blonde wig and Victorian dress he was obliged to wear, and that the force of Melissa's eerie, unblinking gaze was summoned from the depths of Valerio's own blazing, offended *machismo*. To everyone's amusement, Bava delighted in goading the boy's performance by addressing him as "Valeria . . . *perdonami—Valerio.*" This made the boy seethe with quiet rage, to which Bava would theatrically respond by knocking on wood and pretending to ward off chills.

Operazione paura appears to have been Valerio's only movie role, though an actress named Valeria Valeri was active in the Italian dubbing industry during this period. Locating the boy who played Melissa Graps, one of the most influential monsters in the history of horror cinema, has proved impossible. At last check, there were about three dozen Valerio Valeris in the Roman telephone directory.

Two weeks into the filming, producers Pisani and Catenacci ran out of money, and for a short while it seemed that *Operazione paura* would not be completed. Bava summoned his cast and crew around him to apprise them the situation, explaining that they would have to shut down until the necessary funds could be found to complete the picture. To his amazement, everyone agreed on the spot to continue working without pay.

"We all liked the story very much," explains Erika Blanc, "but more importantly, we were all very fond of Mario. We wanted to help him finish the movie."

Considering that Bava's AIP films, those with international stars, were usually budgeted at $100,000–150,000, it seems likely that *Operazione paura*—made on a half-budget with no name stars—was completed for less than $50,000. Regardless of the spontaneous generosity of his cast and crew, Bava still had to see the film through to completion within extraordinarily tight economic guidelines. This surely impacted the week of special effects shooting that was reserved for the last week of production. One likely sacrifice can be detected by paying close attention to the dialogue between Monika and Baroness Graps as the film approaches its climax, where there is reference to the Baroness about to be visited and destroyed by the dead souls of Melissa's victims. That *J'accuse* procession never materializes, being preempted by Ruth's far more economic, heroic act of vengeance. This change was actually fortunate, because the more epic finale would have essentially reprised the climaxes of a past Bava film (*Ercole al centro della terra*) and also a future one (*Baron Blood*), thus weakening all three pictures in retrospect with redundancy.

But *Operazione paura* is less a film about special effects than cinematic sleight-of-hand and visual ingenuity. It is doubtful that the film had to forfeit much more than its climactic siege of the undead. Assorted in-camera tricks are peppered throughout the picture, beginning with the "water glass" effect seen during Irena Hollander's subjective view of the spiked fence, which is used again halfway through the main titles sequence, as Melissa's giggling ghost steps offscreen, leaving ripples in her wake. Similar in effect are the shots of the Baroness Graps' face, stretching and distorting as she extends her will into the Beyond, achieved by photographing Giovanna Galletti's reflection in an ordinary mirror, which was then tipped backwards and forwards to impart the impression of a funhouse mirror. But when all is said and done, the film's greatest illusion is Melissa Graps herself. With young Valerio Valeri's dark hair pinned under a long blonde wig, the illusion of femininity is a triumph for makeup artist Maurizio Giustini.

Melissa's various appearances are given a special air of mystery because she is almost never shown from head to toe. Instead, the child's ghost was shown only in segments: a hand pressed against a window pane, two buckled shoes walking gingerly down a flight of stairs in moonlight, in quick flashes as it darts in or out of a corridor. Melissa's most startling appearance



MELISSA *peers through a window at Nadine, compelling her to commit suicide.*





occurs in the context of a camera trick that unexpectedly seats her at the end of a queue of dolls. In other shots—as Bava had done many times before, borrowing a page from Jean Cocteau—Valerio Valeri was placed on a caster board, to impart a "floating" effect, as he was carried toward a frosted window with arms outstretched. To make these shots even more inexplicably strange, Bava had them filmed in reverse, as Valeri was pulled *away* from the windows. Melissa's disappearance into thin air, at the film's conclusion, was simply achieved by dimming the light that projected Valeri's reflection onto an angled pane of glass.

I must confess to still being uncertain whether one shot in the movie is a trick or not—namely, an easily overlooked shot in which the gravediggers Rudolph and Oscar are shown carrying the corpse of Inspector Kruger toward the cemetery. The shot is indistinguishable from reality, yet the cemetery was a studio set, and the road in question was an actual location, so the two would not converge as they do in this shot. One explanation is that a color slide of the studio cemetery set was projected, at night, onto a wall as the actors carried their bundle toward it; this is a plausible explanation, because the shot cuts to the next setup before Rudolph and Oscar can cross the threshold into the necropolis, However, it is just as possible that some prop headstones were taken to the location and arranged within the shot. Having looked at numerous different prints, videotapes and DVD sources, the shot offers a conflicting explanation every time I see it, and I must admit that, here, Bava has me fooled.

As photographed by Antonio Rinaldi, *Operazione paura* has a visual character that is hard to explain. Filmed on Eastmancolor stock—with prints developed either in Eastmancolor or in Technicolor, depending on where you see it—its foggy, moss-laden exteriors are as intoxicatingly colorful and atmospheric as anything in Bava's most expensive pictures, when seen in a proper Technicolor print. There are minor touches (like a hint of green on a cobweb in Villa Graps) that are quite remarkable, but the greens



ITALIAN *locandina, art by Averardo Ciriello.*

were the first thing to go in the domestically circulated prints that played in American drive-in theaters and on television. Additionally, the texture of the film stock itself looks a bit coarse and moldy throughout. The opening exterior preamble to Irene Hollander's suicide, the exterior views of Villa Graps, and also the scenes at the inn look uncharacteristically washed-out and lacking in detail, in even the best prints circulating today. This, combined with Rinaldi's jagged zoom thrusts, give the picture a personality unlike any other in the Bava canon, and when such crude means are applied to the presentation of such psychologically resonant images, one has the impression of seeing raw dream imagery transferred to film.

No good deed goes unpunished, they say—and although it was the cast and crew's devotion to their director that got the film completed, Mario Bava himself was never paid for directing *Operazione paura*. He resented the producers for abandoning him after he finished it, but he took the experience philosophically. As he summarized: "At least they left me with a film I love." [5]

Music

The more familiar one is with the history of Italian horror cinema, the more aware one is bound to be of the ragged, recycled nature of *Operazione paura*'s musical score. The score is credited to Carlo Rustichelli, who had no recollection of working on it. "I don't remember the music—I don't even remember the film," he chuckled. "It could be that they used my music without me knowing about it. After all, to engage a symphonic orchestra costs a great deal of money."

It isn't surprising that Rustichelli doesn't remember *Operazione paura*. It is a patchwork score consisting solely of library tracks from the CAM Music library, much of which—but not all—was composed by Rustichelli, including several mysterioso cues written and recorded for *La frusta e il corpo*. In addition to making use of music written by Rustichelli, the score includes samplings from the past work of Roman Vlad, Armando Trovajoli, Francesco De

Masi, and Angelo Francesco Lavagnino. Some of the music heard in *Operazione paura* was recorded as much as ten years before it was made, as in the case of a cue from Vlad's *I vampiri* score.

During the autopsy, when Monika is startled by the shadow of a moth drawn to the flame of a lantern, her fright is underscored with a cue composed by Roman Vlad for *I vampiri.* Other *I vampiri* compositions are heard during Eswai's initial approach of Villa Graps, during Ruth's "treatment" of Nadine's curse, and during Monika's prophetic nightmare montage. When Eswai questions Nadine about Inspector Kruger's visit to Villa Graps, her classic line "You don't come back from Villa Graps!" is followed by baleful Rustichelli music from Antonio Margheriti's *I lunghi capelli della morte/The Long Hair of Death* (1964); other excerpts from this cue are heard during the meeting of Ruth and Karl in her cottage, and during the agonizing scene in which Melissa compels Nadine to kill herself.

The music heard during Eswai's initial encounter with Baroness Graps was composed by Francesco De Masi for *La lama nel corpo*, as was the bittersweet theme heard at the very end of the picture, as Eswai and Monika walk toward a new sunrise; this track appears on the rare CAM soundtrack album of *La lama nel corpo* under the title *"Verso del Speranza"* ("Outpouring of Hope"). The climactic scene of Monika running away from her spectral encounter with Melissa in Villa Graps is scored with a vertiginous Roman Vlad cue from Riccardo Freda's *Lo spettro/The Ghost* (1963). There are one or two other cues—particularly the almost subliminal electronic hum heard as Eswai first arrives in Karmingen and enters the tavern, with its sustained, hovering, finger-round-the-wineglass-rim note—which originate from Armando Trovajoli's score for Ottavio Alessi's dark comedy *Chè fine ha fatto Totò Baby?/Whatever Happened to Baby Totò?* (1964), as does the macabre "music box" theme



ITALIAN *due-foglia, art by Averardo Ciriello.*

that recurs throughout *Operazione paura.* The specific contributions of Angelo Francesco Lavagnino have not been determined.

While the recycling of familiar cues is disturbing to some who feel that it degrades an otherwise original film, the resulting patchwork of music also reinforces *Operazione paura*'s spectral atmosphere in extraordinary ways. This is surely accidental, as it was hardly anyone's intention that the audience should recognize the music from other movies, but if we do, our recognition imbues the film with a sense of *déjà vu*, which resonates well not only with the Oedipal subtext of Monika's self-discovery but also the film's emphases of doubled and inverted images. Though cobbled together from a half-dozen sources of varied vintage, the tracks coalesce into a superbly atmospheric score. Only once does a musical selection seem inappropriate—when Rustichelli's "Winsor Concerto" from *La frusta e il corpo* is used to underline the night scene of Eswai escorting Monika to her door, following the autopsy. Despite their tireless devotion to each other's safety, the film really grants the couple no opportunity for romance to blossom, least of all at this early juncture, so the rhapsody would feel inappropriate even had the music not been so sloppily inserted, or belonged so completely to the earlier film.

Samuel Z. Arkoff of AIP, though not involved in the making of this picture, explained how this might have occurred: "Sometimes, the Italians made pictures that had no budget for music, whatsoever. There were several Italian music companies that provided musical soundtracks free, in exchange for publishing and other rights. You would tell 'em what [kind of music] you wanted and they would lay the tracks in."

While there is little about the *Operazione paura* score that is truly original, the film itself is so unlike anything else proposed within the horror genre (despite its many imitations) that the crude manufacture of its soundscapes is easily taken for granted as part of its off-kilter nature. In some ways, the piecemeal character of the music enhances one's appreciation of the movie as a crowning achievement of a great national period of movie making. Also, with no composer actively involved in the scoring, the music of *Operazione paura* comes closer than any other picture to presenting us with a score by Mario Bava himself.

Commentary

Though saddled with regrettable titles the world over, *Operazione paura* stands as a pivotal work in the lineage of horror cinema. In some ways, it represents a turning point in the Gothic horror cycle of the 1960s, showing the way to more intellectual concerns and more complex mysteries. Following its example, though surely not in any studied way, Hammer Films would begin to ask more existential questions of its material in subsequent productions like Terence Fisher's *Frankenstein Created Woman* (1967) and Roy Ward Baker's *Quatermass and the Pit* (1968). It would not be incorrect to suggest that *Operazione paura* occupies, in the chronology of the horror film, a place akin to that of Stanley Kubrick's *2001: A Space Odyssey* (1968) in the chronology of

5 Luigi Cozzi, *Il cinema dei mostri* (Rome, Italy: Fanucci Editore, 1987), 249–60.



ESWAI *finds himself lost in the navel-like labyrinths of Villa Graps.*

filmed science fiction. Both movies represent a point of embarkation, when these genres began to venture away from traditional linear narrative toward literally new dimensions in storytelling that dared penetrate into areas ambiguous, abstract, and intuitive. The two films also have in common rational heroes, bound by logic, who embark on an inexplicable, time- and mind-bending adventure and must ultimately submit to the superiority of that which cannot be explained, and could only be diminished by any attempt at rational explanation.

Though set at the turn of the 20th century, *Operazione paura* is a film very much of the era in which it was made. It can be argued as belonging to a seemingly unrelated group of 1960s films which might be designated as "Continental Op"—European movies with a visual style influenced by the Op Art movement of the 1950s and '60s. The Op artist most influential to the style of *Operazione paura* is undoubtedly M. C. Escher (1898–1972), whose poster art was popular in the 1960s for being at once poetical, mathematical, and deceptive to the eye. The close, huddled village of Karmingen recalls Escher's "Ascending and Descending," which portrays a building surrounded by a never-ending stairway. Specific scenes, such as Eswai's run through the looping corridor and his displacement through a portrait of Villa Graps to the point of the artist's original vantage, also introduce sense-defying, spatial ideas worthy of the artist, as do the overhead zooms into the dark core of a spiral staircase bathed in multiple colors.

Operazione paura is also a splendid example of what stood to be gained from Bava's increasingly improvisational approach to filmmaking. While some critics used the occasion of its release to ponder, "When will Bava get a decent script?" the final text is actually one of the strongest he ever had: a mystifying mélange of the logical and the irrational, of strange names and stranger sights—poetic, richly psychological and phantasmal, yet also underpinned with elements of Greek tragedy. A more conscious, deliberate approach to telling this story could only have made it more mundane. By using the script as a basis for improvisation, Bava left the success of the final draft to a vote between his own aesthetic judgment and decisive factors outside his control or understanding. The French novelist and essayist André Gide was another of many artists from Bava's generation who took such an approach to their work. As Gide once put it, "Art is a joint creation of the artist and God—and the less the artist does, the better."

Especially in its English version, which credits the dialogue to John Hart, the characters' words are uncommonly striking:

> *"We might as well live on the Moon—hardly anyone comes our way."*
>
> *"The tombs where you lay your wreaths in devotion is [sic] not where your parents are."*
>
> *"Only with money in the heart can one who suffers a violent death rest in peace."* [6]
>
> *"You don't come back from Villa Graps!"*

When all is said and done, the convoluted story finally does make perfect sense, though it includes moments in an other-dimensional context which are not given—and should not require—concrete explanation. The ghost of Melissa is ultimately explained as the psychic projection of her vengeful mother, the Baroness Graps, a medium whose anger over her daughter's death has kept her ghost alive, enslaved to her unquenchable thirst for retribution. Being a voracious reader of occult literature, Bava was surely familiar with the Gnostic fable of the Passion of Sophia, which tells that our world first became infused with Evil when the sybil Sophia dared to psychically probe too far into the Beyond, provoking a rupture of cosmic proportions that caused otherworldly forces to bleed into reality. Like Sophia, Baroness Graps may have the purest maternal intentions in trying to make contact with her dead child's spirit, but because she has not dealt consciously with her hostility toward the townspeople of Karmingen (the village name evoking the notion of karma, as well as "come again"), the energy she summons back from the Beyond is also hostile. In this way, *Operazione paura* is the horror genre's counterpart to the science fiction classic *Forbidden Planet* (1956), in which the mind of Morbius (Walter Pidgeon) is so increased in capacity by subjections to brain-boosting machinery left behind by the extinct Krell race that he unwittingly unleashes the primal forces of his subconscious in the form of a rampaging Monster of the Id.

Forbidden Planet may well have been in Bava's own subconscious while preparing *Operazione paura,* as it followed the similarly influenced



COCTEAU-*like torch-bearing arms guide Eswai's passage through the villa.*

Terrore nello spazio. Another inspiration may have been Roger Corman, who has said that he was influenced by readings of Freud while making his Edgar Allan Poe films for AIP. While Corman's Poe films are innovative in their attention to psychological detail and sexual metaphor, their actual Freudian content is simplistic and, as Corman has since admitted, possibly misunderstood.[7] Set in 1907 (we are left to deduce this by ourselves, from the dates on cemetery headstones), *Operazione paura* delves into matters of the subconscious and paranormal as no other horror film had done before. In 1907, Sigmund Freud's *The Interpretation of Dreams* was still a comparatively new book, inspiring a new generation of doctors to enter into the practice of psychoanalysis and map the uncharted wilderness which Freud termed "the subconscious." In *Operazione paura,* the source of evil is subconscious, but this is not as yet a familiar term to the superstitious people of Karmingen, to Inspector Kruger, or to Dr. Eswai, who is merely a forensic surgeon—that is, a medical detective or, more precisely, a death detective. Between Kruger, Eswai, and the townsfolk, the film presents a cross-section of the human animal, divided between the consciousness of law and medical science and the mistier, subconscious terrain of fear and superstition, neither of which is fully apprised of the true laws governing reality. That all three principals are equally in the dark about what's going on is evidence of Bava's personal anti-intellectual stance; it acknowledges that there are some areas of existence in which logic and education are not necessarily an advantage, and may make us more stubbornly unreceptive to the truth.



ESWAI*'s first encounter with Melissa.*

6 An inspired, Surrealist line, but perhaps also the result of an imperfect translation. In Italian, the word *argento* is synonymous with money and silver; the act of lodging silver in the heart of an agent of evil is an age-old concept.

7 Hear the audio commentaries Corman provided for the DVD releases of his films *The Fall of the House of Usher* (1960), *Pit and the Pendulum* (1961), and *X—The Man With the X-Ray Eyes* (1963).





HEARING *Monika's cry of alarm, Eswai pursues a fleeing phantom until he comes face-to-face with his doppelgänger.*

RARE *shot of Giacomo Rossi-Stuart on set with the stand-in who played his double in the doppelgänger sequence.*

Of the various characters involved in this tale, the wisest may well be Ruth, another of Bava's beloved occult women, a tradition encompassing Barbara Steele in *La maschera del demonio,* Rada Rassimov in *Baron Blood,* and Laura Betti in *Ecologia del delitto,* not to mention the various sibyls in his Hercules films—characters who simultaneously embody the fear and attraction of women. Alone of all the characters, Ruth has the wisdom to acknowledge the seen and the unseen, and approaches life in accordance with her own intuitions and the ancient knowledge passed down from mother to daughter, through the generations.

If human psychology is rooted in our perceptions of events in the past, and the way we process memory, the superstitious character of the people of Karmingen may well be ingrained in them by the fact that their village and its way of life have not outwardly changed (read: progressed) in centuries. The past actively coexists with the present; the streets they walk are the same streets walked by people who are long dead. The church where Melissa Graps rang the bell for help, after being trampled, has not been torn down, as it would be by a society determined to put its guilt behind them, but merely abandoned (echoing the chapel ruins of *La maschera del demonio* and *I tre volti della paura*'s "*I wurdalak*"), left as an ongoing reproach of the townsfolk's inaction as they watched her bleed to death.

When Nadine, the young innkeeper's daughter, is marked for death by her chance sighting of Melissa's ghost, we see that the curse afflicts more than those who were present at Melissa's death—an event that certainly preceded Nadine's birth. The scene itself is ambiguously blocked, allowing the viewer to interpret it as a genuine haunting, or as an unconsciously willed hallucination. After telling Dr. Eswai "You don't come back from Villa Graps!" Nadine gasps, realizing she has crossed an unpardonable line, and the ghost appears as though summoned by her own sense of guilt. Ruth is likewise summoned—in fact, she is standing right outside, aware that she is needed—and treats the girl by flogging her with a branch and binding her with a leech vine, Old World cures that recall the ancient medical practice of bleeding patients, literally cutting them with knives, to alleviate fevers and contaminations. Lying in her bed, Nadine indeed looks feverish as she chants, "She's chosen me, she's chosen me," as if convincing herself by rote of what must now occur, according to the local belief system. When Melissa appears once again at her window, Nadine moves toward the end of her bed and folds her fingers around the ball-tipped post of its footboard, unconsciously emulating Melissa's stance with her ball. She is clearly in the grip of a dogma hammered into her, through her parents and environment—oppressed to a state of suicidal desperation by a guilty memory not even her own.

The gruelling scene in which Nadine impales herself through the throat on a gas jet recalls a similar one in *Cinque tombe per un medium/Terror Creatures From the Grave,* also scripted by Romano Migliorini and Roberto Natale earlier the same year. In the earlier film, a wheelchair-bound man is driven by the malefic spirits of a town's plague victims to impale himself on the blade of a sword. Bava remains true to his suggestive aims and shows no blood in the scene, but such is the quality of Micaela Esdra's performance that it remains very difficult to watch.

If Melissa Graps seems a literal embodiment of the allure of death, consider this observation by the American author Shirley Jackson, from her classic ghost novel *The Haunting of Hill House:* "No ghost in all the long histories of ghosts has ever hurt anyone physically. The only damage done is by the victim to himself."[8] *Operazione paura* takes to its limit a concept that would obsess Mario Bava for nearly the entire arc of his directorial career. In *"La goccia d'acqua"* from *I tre volti della paura*, Miss Chester is plagued by the spectre of the dead medium whose ring she has stolen, until she finally strangles herself; in *La frusta e il corpo,* Nevenka takes her own life to end her remorse over killing her lover; and in his final feature, *Schock*, Dora Baldini cuts her own throat after recovering the suppressed memory of having killed her husband and buried him in her cellar. Like these other tragic characters, the villagers of Karmingen may be the victims of a genuine supernatural occurrence, or they may simply be dogged by remorse. This element of ambiguity and the varieties of perception becomes increasingly central in Bava's work, and one imagines he felt it was the only way such subject matter could be truthfully depicted. It was a brave move, artistically, but in the context of a genre so traditionally literal (even condescendingly so at times) as the horror film, ambiguity was widely mistaken at the time for bad writing.

This ambiguity is also consistent within the actions of the film's hero, Dr. Paul Eswai. Impatient with the ignorance he sees in Ruth's treatments, Eswai interferes with her "black magic" by ripping the leech vine from Nadine's back—but Bava slyly introduces a further note of superstition when Eswai prescribes his own, more civilized medication to Nadine's mother, cautioning her to administer "no more than twenty





ART *becomes reality as Eswai leans for support against an old painting of the villa . . . then finds himself transported into an identical web outside.*

drops"—one drop for every year of the curse in which he has so far refused to believe. Another sign of Eswai's unconscious superstition can be inferred from the fact that he keeps the coin he removes from Irene Hollander's heart in his own breast pocket—above his own heart. Throughout the film, Eswai's body language reflects that, though he may well be intellectually superior to the villagers' backward ways of thinking, he likely grew up among people like them, and hasn't entirely escaped from their ways of thinking, regardless of how far he's risen professionally.

In some ways, *Operazione paura* is the story of Eswai's acceptance of the things undreamed-of in his philosophy—not a case of "Physician, heal thyself," but "Detective, find thyself." In Freudian terms, his arrival in Karmingen is staged in the manner of a birth: the coach carrying him rides through a splash of blood-red light, and after stepping out, he makes his way into town through an elaborate, oval archway. (In *Lisa and the Devil*, Lisa Reiner must pass through a similar portal, in the shape of a keyhole, to enter into her dream world.) While he has no familial tie to Villa Graps, its mysteries seem to hold a message specifically intended for him. The Graps family crest, which is seen carved above the entrance to the crypt and again on a wall inside, appears to be an exploded form of the Caduceus—the heraldic emblem of the medical profession—in which the snakes, traditionally entwining the staff of Mercury, have come free. Intentionally or not, the crest portends that, here within these walls, Eswai's belief system will come flying apart. While the film never stops long enough to provide a romantic subplot for Eswai and Monika, the ending does imply that they are embarking on a new life together; if this is the case, then Eswai could also be said to discover his significant other at Villa Graps, through the discovery of the other dimensions of himself. Arriving at Karmingen, Eswai is a realist who believes only in what he can see and touch—that is, conscious reality; as the sun rises on a new day, he has experienced, acknowledged, and survived many things which cannot be explained on that primary level.

The film's only fully realized romantic relationship, that of Ruth and Karl, reflects this duality of consciousness. Initially, it comes as a shock to find them involved with one another—Karl, as burgomaster, represents local government, while Ruth represents everything about the same locality that cannot be governed—but when we see them together, interacting calmly and with a sense of purpose, they communicate a sense of fitting together as a complete person, a unity that no other single person or couple in the film is capable of showing.

Italian horror had always inclined toward the metaphysical—even *I vampiri* toys with the concept of reincarnation, where few American films other than *Peter Ibbetson* (1935) had dared to tread—but *Operazione paura* contains passages that careen into the psychedelic, making this period horror film very much of the era in which it was filmed. Bava bends his film's reality by turning Karmingen into an Escher-like funhouse of labyrinths, reflections, Mobius strips, distortions, and inversions. As Tom Milne pointed out in his perceptive review for *Monthly Film Bulletin*: "The real charge of *Operazione paura* comes from its reversal of the usual symbolism of good and evil. The strange, lowering witch-woman who surges mysteriously out of the night in her black robes during the attack on the hero turns out to be on the side of light; it is the little girl with golden ringlets and frilly white dress straight out of a Victorian picture-book that conjures evil—a vision as poetically ambiguous as Èdith Scob's bland mask in *Les Yeux sans Visage*."

Of course, the inversions go beyond even this account: the little girl with golden hair is played by a dark-haired little boy, and not only does the "witch-woman" turn out to be on the side of light, but this raven-haired sorceress—robed in layers of clothing—is portrayed by a blonde French actress notable for wearing nothing at all in other films. Appearances, as they often are in Bava's films, are deceiving. Ruth is initially perceived by Eswai as directly responsible for perpetuating the local superstitions he is trying to combat, but as the story unfolds, we discovers that he is actually more like than unlike her. ("Why do they call you as if you're practicing medicine?" he asks, incredulously.) Likewise, Monika has returned to Karmingen to visit the graves of the Schuftans, but she never reaches the cemetery; instead, she is led by images from a dream, planted in her subconscious since childhood, to discover the grave of her sister, and the matching grave awaiting her, which confirm that the couple who raised her were not her parents after all. Here the film introduces narrative threads dating back to the Greek myths, particularly the legend of Oedipus.

In his structural analysis of the Oedipus story, Claude Levi-Strauss observed that "the very precautions taken to avoid incest actually make it inevitable."[9] Monika Schuftan is an

8 Shirley Jackson, *The Haunting of Hill House*, in *The Lottery and Other Stories/The Haunting of Hill House/We Have Always Lived in the Castle* (New York NY: Quality Paperback Book Club, 1991), 135.

9 Claude Levi-Strauss, *The Scope of Anthropology* (London, UK: Jonathan Cape, 1967), 35.

Oedipal character, in the sense that she was sent away from her home at an early age to protect her from the murderous advances of her sister's ghost, but brought closer to inevitable self-discovery by her chance return to Karmingen and her equally chance association with Eswai. She returns on the same day that Irene Hollander impales herself on the very gate that will later appear to her in a dream, and again later in reality, heralding her arrival at self-knowledge. The images in Monika's nightmare are all prophetic in nature, perhaps a gift unknowingly inherited from her mediumistic parent. Oedipus likewise had the Promethean gift of foresight, his path fixed, predestined, unavoidable. The ultimate revelation in Monika's case is not incest, but it is Oedipal in the sense that her personal riddle is ultimately solved by the punchline of her own bloodline. It is one of several instances in Bava's filmography of an individual awakening to an unsuspected kinship or mirror image—the Princesses twinned across centuries in *La maschera del demonio*, the enemies who discover themselves to be brothers in *Gli invasori*, the Viking drifter who learns that a past rape resulted in the birth of a son in *I coltelli del vendicatore*.

The dark secret of Monika's parentage is signalled throughout the film by a series of twinned images. The first occurs moments prior to Monika's first entrance: in the room given to Dr. Eswai to conduct his autopsy, two empty coffins bracket the doorway. (This shot also prophesies Monika's later awakening between the twin crypts reserved for her and her sister.) During the autopsy, she reacts frightfully to a shadow fluttering on the wall, which she traces to a moth lighting repeatedly against the bright glow of a lantern. Seemingly unrelated to the scene at hand, this brief *divertissement* ultimately mirrors her own situation, her determination to get closer to the truth placing her life in danger. Later, when Karl consents to retrieve the papers pertaining to Monika's parentage from his office, two small sickles are shown hanging on the wall, very much resembling double question marks. Moments later, he is compelled to use one of them to slash his own throat. When she finally visits Villa Graps and feels Melissa's cold hand on her own, Monika flees down a spiral staircase lit with colored gels, photographed from above so that she appears to be fleeing deeper and deeper into the involutions of her own navel.

Elsewhere within the walls of Villa Graps we see a corridor illuminated by lamps held by sculpted human arms, which may be a deliberate nod to Jean Cocteau's *La Belle et le Bête/Beauty and the Beast* (1946); indeed, *Operazione paura* shares the shimmering irreality of much of Cocteau's work, especially *Orphée/Orpheus* (1949), which depicts Death as a world accessed through mirrors, where everything is filmed in reverse. However appropriate they may be to



MELISSA *shocks Karl with a surprise appearance inside his armoire. Note the chalk marks telling the child actor where to stand.*

MONIKA *awakens on the floor of the Graps family crypt, as she earlier saw herself in a nightmare.*





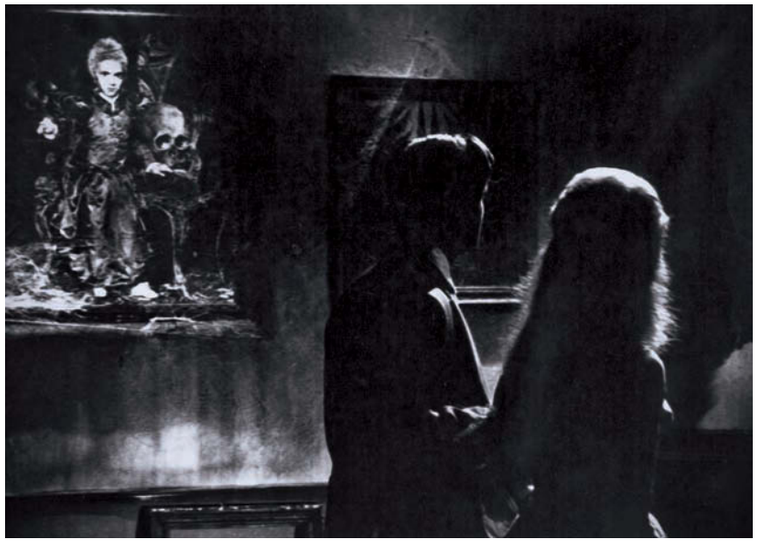


RUTH *determines to bring an end to the hauntings by confronting Baroness Graps, a meeting that ends in their deaths.*

this specific film, these decorations were not, however, created for *Operazione paura,* as they can also be seen lining another corridor in Piero Regnoli's earlier *L'ultimo preda del vampiro/The Playgirls and the Vampire* (1960).

There are noticeable parallels between the Graps and the Vajdas of *La maschera del demonio,* both of whom are once-royal families fallen from grace. Just as the spiritual sickness of the Vajdas is represented by their desiccated chapel, where low winds moan through the broken pipes of an organ, the psychic preoccupations of Baroness Graps are reflected as much by her neglect of the physical world, expressed by the general mustiness of her villa and her dishevelled personal appearance. As with Miss Havisham's derelict mansion in Charles Dickens' novel *Great Expectations,* her world has been deliberately frozen at a moment of an overwhelming loss and, as the Cocteauvian torch-bearing arms in her corridors eerily suggest, the realities have been gradually replaced by tangible fantasies.

Like Monika, Dr. Eswai has his own great moment of self-discovery in Villa Graps when Monika's offscreen cry for help sends him off in pursuit of a fleeing phantom. He follows the marauder through a room, which connects to the same room, forming a Mobius strip; each time he traverses the room, he gains on his quarry until he succeeds in catching up with and apprehending the man, who turns to glower at Eswai with his own face. This *doppelgänger* sequence is one of the most shattering and disorienting moments in horror cinema, all the moreso because Bava never condescends to explain it, thereby preserving its mystery and his film's respect for mystery. As Martin Scorsese has pointed out, this scene has an antecedent of sorts in a divinely irrational moment from Michael Powell and Emeric Pressburger's *The Tales of Hoffmann* (1951), wherein a woman is shown dancing out the door of an elaborate room at screen left, only to burst immediately through a matching door at screen right, as she completes her



A PORTRAIT *of Melissa hangs in a corridor at Villa Graps.*

dancing maneuver. [10] In Bram Stoker's *Dracula*, Jonathan Harker notes a process of supernatural repetition during his coach ride to Castle Dracula: "It seemed to me that we were simply going over and over the same ground again . . ." adding about the coach's encounter with a mysterious blue flame in the depths of the forest that "I think I must have fallen asleep and kept dreaming of the incident, for it seemed to be repeated endlessly . . ." This serial revisitation of the same room also recalls Freud's definition of repetition (in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*) as "a process of coming closer to final truths," as well as "an hypnotic, negative compulsion symbolic of the allure of death." The allure of death is an appropriate reference in this case, as it relates directly to the nature of the mystery that is Melissa Graps.

Eswai's encounter with his double packs such an existential shock that the scene cannot possibly move beyond it, at least not in any linear fashion. So Bava has Eswai exit the moment as abstractly as he entered into it, tottering in shock until he stands leaning against a large, cobweb-covered painting of Villa Graps, which—in a change of location concealed by a change of camera angle—inexplicably transports him into an actual web outside the villa, so that he occupies the same space once chosen by the artist of that long-neglected canvas. So precisely has art matched reality that one becomes a portal to the other.



Eswai first uncovers the facts of Melissa Graps' life and death with the help of another portrait in Villa Graps, captioned with her name and the dates 1880–1887. This painting is the film's only misstep: an almost risible insertion of Valerio Valeri's face into a comic art amalgam of skulls, books, and other Lovecraftian ephemera, which gives the unfortunate impression that Melissa was a thing of formidable evil even when alive—quite opposite to the film's eventual explanation of events. Otherwise, this portrait is interesting for recapitulating what Bava had previously done in *La maschera del demonio*, and again, more comically, in *La ragazza che sapeva troppo:* that is, using a family portrait as a source of menace and illumination to the living. It is ground that Bava would continue to cover in later works such as *Baron Blood* and *Lisa and the Devil*, and carry into the realm of sculpture with *La Venere d'Ille*.

ESWAI *saves Monika from certain death as she races onto a crumbling terrace.*

To borrow Hitchcock's phrase, Bava filmed his murders as if they were love scenes, staging violent acts in ravishingly lit compositions that could seduce even the most unwilling gaze. This aspect of his craft reaches its *ne plus ultra* in the character of Melissa Graps, the most inspired of *Operazione paura*'s many inversions. The inversion is not, as Milne wrote, that the source of the film's evil is the picture of innocence, because the Baroness—another Miss Havisham-inspired shut-in, recalling Aunt Edith from *La ragazza che sapeva troppo*—is the true source of evil. What makes Melissa Graps such a potent figure is her embodiment of the ultimate emotional pain an adult can experience: the loss of a child. She is further enriched by her associations to the many cherubs and angels we've seen in great paintings and graveyard carvings; if we don't consciously make this connection ourselves, Bava brings it to the surface in the scene of Oscar and Rudolph hurriedly disposing of Inspector Kruger's body at the cemetery, where their furtive actions are observed by a mirthful, foregrounded stone cherub. For all her merriment, Melissa is so thoroughly invested with our worst fears that she can raise our gooseflesh by simply pressing her hand to a frosted windowpane—much like her direct antecedent in the Bava filmography, the undead toddler Ivan in "*I wurdalak,*" crying out to his mother that he's cold.

Consequently, the film's most chilling images are those with the lightest

MONIKA *flees the truths that will inevitably be uncovered during her visit to Karmingen.*



touch: the moment when the autopsy of Irene Hollander is interrupted with a cutaway to a giggling Melissa (who has not, at this point, been introduced or explained) playing on a spectral swing in the fogbound cemetery—or another moment, following the autopsy, when her white ball is shown thumping out of nowhere into the empty examination room, bouncing off the inert form of Irene's corpse. Despite the garish and unsuitable titles to which it was subjected around the world, *Operazione paura* contains no graphic violence and very little bloodshed, Bava instead emulating the examples of Jacques Tourneur and Georges Franju by staging his horror scenes with a poet's lightness of touch.

Distribution

Operazione paura had the misfortune to be released in July 1966, at the height of the Italian vacation season. Consequently, few Italians interested in seeing it had the opportunity, as it played in Italian theaters for only a short time—all of four days in August at Rome's Quattro Fontane theater—and consequently disappeared from circulation for decades. Even so, Italian boxoffice records indicate that the self-proclaimed "*classico dell'orrore*" earned 210 million *lire* [$131.000] in its only run, making it a bigger Italian success than either *La maschera del demonio* or *I tre volti della paura,* his greatest American successes to date. Considering that *Operazione paura* had to be completed for approximately half of its intended budget, its earnings were twice as healthy as they appeared to be, and its producers surely profited well from their failings.

According to a proud Erika Blanc, one of the Italians who sought the film out was the acclaimed film and opera director, Luchino Visconti. "I not only heard that he saw it," she says, "but I was told that he gave it a standing ovation." Based on later evidence, the film was also sought out by Bava's friend Bernardino Zapponi, a writer of fantastic short stories who subsequently became the favorite screenwriter of Federico Fellini.

Europix Consolidated waited a full year before releasing the film in America, by which time their company name had changed to Europix-International. They branded it with the unfortunate exploitation title *Kill, Baby . . . Kill!*— following the patterns of AIP's *Die, Monster, Die!* and Russ Meyer's *Faster, Pussycat! Kill! Kill!*—which was more evocative of plunging daggers, go-go boots, and rock 'n' roll than the suggestive, turn-of-the-century chills the film actually delivered. It was paired with *The Sound of Horror*—a black-and-white Spanish import originally titled *El Sonido Prehistórico,* which starred (in early, extremely unpromising roles) future horror queens Ingrid Pitt and Soledad Miranda, and a strong contender for the cheapest special effect of all time—an invisible dinosaur. The resulting double-feature was sold as "The Big S & Q Show," with lurid advertisements guaranteeing "You'll Shiver and Quiver with *Kill Baby Kill*—and—Shake and Quake with *Sound of Horror!*"

The combo scored well on the American drive-in circuit, and became something of a cash cow for Europix, who licensed both films for TV syndication as early as 1968. By this time, *Variety* finally got around to reviewing the overlooked film, thanks to a belated report filed by Stuart Byron ("Byro."). He wrote: "Reviewed for the record since this Italian horror mystery, set in the Transylvanian vampire country, has been in US release via Europix Consolidated since 1966 [*sic*] though only now playing New York (as a second feature at a 42d St. grind house). But film demonstrates once again, as some European critics think, that in director Mario Bava lies one of Italy's most important film talents though he specializes in genre product. '*Kill Baby Kill*' is a small masterpiece of its kind, comparing favorably with the late Val Lewton's horror programmers of the '40s."[11] Its geographic inaccuracy aside, Byron's comments are significant in hindsight as one of the earliest American commendations of Bava's talent. Europix maintained the film as an active theatrical rental for several more years, during which time it trailed other double-bills from Europix (and other companies) as part of weekend triple-bills. In 1972, it was revived once again as part of Europix-International's legendary triple-bill, "The Orgy of the Living Dead."

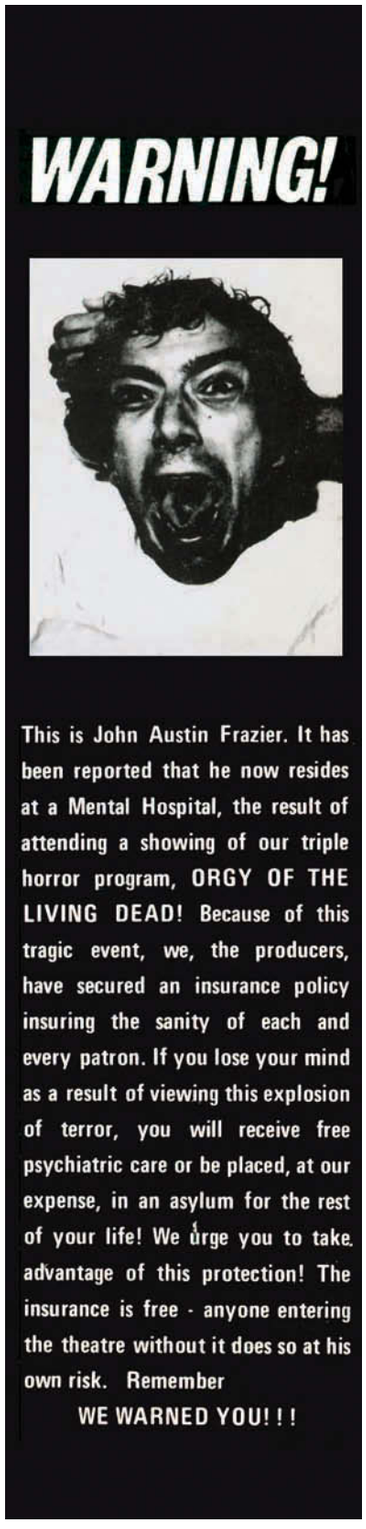
For this program—the brainchild of Europix national sales executive Bob Kilgore, formerly with Gemini Film Corporation—Bava's film was retitled *Curse of the Living Dead* and cut to 75 minutes, by dropping an entire reel. Also in the package were *Revenge of the Living Dead* (a similarly shortened retitling of *La lama nel corpo/The Murder Clinic*) and *Fangs of the Living Dead,* actually Amando de Ossorio's *Malenka* (1967), a Spanish/Italian vampire opus starring Anita Ekberg—the only film of the three not previously released by Europix. Disguised with new, unfamiliar titles and fresh PG ratings,



ARGENTINIAN *one-sheet poster.*

10 Scorsese makes this point in his audio commentary for the Criterion Collection LaserDisc of *The Tales of Hoffmann*, now out of print.

11 Stuart Byron, "Kill, Baby . . . Kill!" review, *Variety,* October 18, 1968.



EUROPIX*'s "Orgy of the Living Dead" campaign was accompanied by this amusing bit of ballyhoo.*

the films were first paraded across America in March 1972 with a brilliantly exploitative ad campaign. It pictured a screaming man in a straitjacket, who, the accompanying text explained, was "John Austin Frazier," a man committed to a mental hospital after viewing the "Orgy of the Living Dead" triple-bill. "If you lose your mind as a result of viewing this explosion of terror," the ads declared, "you will receive free psychiatric care or be placed, at our expense, in an asylum for the rest of your life!"

The campaign—hilariously fleshed-out in a trailer that showed as little footage from the three films as possible—was masterminded by Alan Ormsby, a young artist/writer then based in Coral Gables, Florida, where he played major creative roles in the making of several well-remembered, independent horror films, including *Deathdream* (1972, writer and makeup), *Children Shouldn't Play With Dead Things* (1972, writer, actor, and makeup) and *Deranged* (1974, writer, co-director and makeup). In 1975, he published an instructional book for children, *Movie Monsters: Monster Makeup & Monster Shows To Put On*. In later years, he co-authored Paul Schrader's remake of *Cat People* (1982), directed the recursive horror film *Popcorn* (1991), and wrote the three films constituting the *Substitute* franchise (1996–2000), before his stint as a staff writer for the CBS detective series *Nash Bridges*. Ormsby's personal devotion to the horror genre made the "Orgy of the Living Dead" campaign a classic of boisterous ballyhoo, which also managed to include a surprising grace note of scholarly respect. For the first and only time on an American film poster, the *Maestro*'s name appeared above the title: "Mario Bava's *Curse of the Living Dead.*"

"I don't know that I can take credit for that," laughs Ormsby, "but I certainly knew who Bava was at the time, going all the way back to *Black Sunday*. I remember also being very impressed by *Planet of the Vampires*, with its scary dreamlike atmosphere. A lot of people, over the years, have asked me about the work I did on that campaign, some of them asking me to sell them the rights to that skull artwork I did for the posters, but I don't own it anymore."



US *"Orgy of the Living Dead" triple feature reissue one-sheet, art by Alan Ormsby.*

When asked the undying question "Who was John Austin Frazier?" Ormsby draws a blank until he's reminded about the screaming man in the straitjacket—and then he laughs. "That was my friend Victor Bumbalo," he reveals, "an award-winning playwright who has gone on to write screenplays and do some acting jobs, too. Europix did a special one-sheet just of him, which was hilarious; I've seen it on eBay. I remember that I also shot some film of him, which I guess was used in the trailer; it was shot right inside the offices at Europix, which was this dinky little company in the midst of a porn theater district in New York City. I remember, at the time we shot that, *Behind the Green Door* with Marilyn Chambers was playing at a theater right across the street."

According to a report in *Variety*, the "Orgy of the Living Dead" package racked up more than 400 playdates between March and June 1973,



WHO INSPIRED *whom? This image, highly reminiscent of OPERAZIONE PAURA, appears in a flashback sequence of Fellini's GIULIETTA DEGLI SPIRITI/JULIET OF THE SPIRITS.*

resulting in earnings of over $750,000.[12] At that time, the triple-bill had played in only seven major US cities and was about to open on multiple screens in the metropolitan New York area, so its total income was certainly well over $1,000,000. Not bad for three old movies missing a reel each.

Elsewhere around the world, *Operazione paura* suffered a perpetuation of the misfortune that plagued its production. It was not released in Great Britain until the summer of 1967, when Miracle released it as *City of the Dead*, which was burdened with some of the ugliest, most inept advertising art ever to soil a movie poster. Lagging farther behind was West Germany, where Alpha Film did not premiere the picture till 1970, and then under yet another absurd title: *Die Toten Augen des Dr. Dracula* ("The Dead Eyes of Dr. Dracula"). In this version, the German dubbing of the film relocated the story from Karmingen to Translyvania. Alpha Film reportedly went out of business shortly after releasing it, which prevented the film from being widely seen in that market. In France, the release of *Operation Peur* was similarly postponed, so that its release coincided with the demise of the traditionally enthusiastic magazine, *Midi-Minuit Fantastique*. In the autumn of 1976, the French *fumetti* magazine *Film Horreur* featured an unauthorized photo-comics adaptation of *Operation Peur* in its seventh issue.

When the film was released in Holland, it contained an alternate main titles sequence that held the still-frame image of Irena Hollander impaled on the spiked fence as the credits rolled, eliminating the mood-setting shots of Melissa stepping merrily away from the carnage, and retaining only the non sequitur sound of her giggling on the track.

Influences

In the years since it was made, and especially in the years since it has become widely available on video, *Operazione paura* has become one of Mario Bava's most influential works, indeed one of the most influential films in the horror genre. The character of Melissa Graps, in particular, has become Bava's greatest and most everlasting monster—even more widely imitated than *La maschera del demonio*'s indomitable Princess Asa. This character must touch a very deep nerve in our collective psyche to have spawned so many imitations, but how far back does this archetype really go?

Presumably, Melissa was present in some form or another in Migliorini and Natale's original screen story, but considering the difficulties Bava experienced in casting the role, he must have had a very precise image in mind to start with, one that he was unwilling to compromise. The connection between a dead child and a rolling or bouncing ball can be traced back to Fritz Lang's *M* (1931),



THIS *Melissa Graps archetype grows up to be a troubled adult played by Susannah York in John Huston's hallucinatory biopic, FREUD.*

12 "There's $ Life in Screen 'Dead,'" *Variety*, June 13, 1973, 7.

which diverts its camera eye away from the violence of Peter Lorre's child murders to the poetic images of a dropped, rolling ball coming to a dead stop or a luminous white balloon bouncing on the undersides of telephone wires. The depiction of the deaths of children has always been a screen taboo, and balls have often been used in films and television as a metaphor for that which could not be shown: a child rushes into traffic, we hear the screech of a braking car, the thud of impact, and the camera cuts to a ball rolling into frame to a halt. It has become so basic a cliché, it hardly requires a specific example; it has become part of the language of cinema.

Though the film itself has generally disappeared from public view, a still from John Huston's biopic *Freud* (1962) depicts a young girl in Victorian dress holding a white ball, looking very much like Melissa Graps. The still, capturing a knowing yet off-kilter expression on the child's face, feels powerfully pertinent, but the character is less so in the film itself, where she is only fleetingly shown with the ball, as the film focuses on Freud's attempts to liberate the suppressed memories of childhood sexual abuse from the subconscious of a tormented adult patient (Susannah York).

Critic Richard Harland Smith has traced the most gripping of Melissa's antecedents to Federico Fellini's first color film, *Giulietta degli spiriti/Juliet of the Spirits* (1965), made just one year prior to *Operazione paura.*[13] Throughout the film, Fellini flashes back to the childhood of his protagonist (Giulietta Masina), in scenes shared with her dead friend Laura, who is ultimately revealed to have committed suicide at age 15. Both girls are dressed *à la* Graps, in white dresses, with long blonde hair. At one point, the young Juliet is shown peering through a transparent curtain at her older self, which not only predicts the shot of Melissa Graps looking through the window of Nadine's bedroom, but also the way John Harrington (Stephen Forsyth) is accompanied by an outward projection of his boyhood self whenever he approaches his acts of murder in *Il rosso segno della follia/Hatchet for the Honeymoon* (1970). Bava's casting of a boy in the role of Melissa may also have been inspired by Fellini's history of casting people in roles of the opposite sex, such as the women who played the priests in *8½* or the nuns who were played by boys in *Giulietta degli spiriti.* This revelation turns on its ear the common assumption that Bava was ripped off by Fellini . . . which, of course, is also true.



ITALIAN *locandina, art by Rodolfo Gasparri.*

Fellini would direct the first and most important film to imitate *Operazione paura: Toby Dammit,* "liberally adapted" from Edgar Allan Poe's story "Never Bet the Devil Your Head" and included as the final segment of the French/Italian co-production *Histoires Extraordinaires/Tre passi nel delirio* (1967), eventually released in the United States by American International Pictures as *Spirits of the Dead* in 1969.

In the book *Fellini: An Intimate Portrait,* written by the director's longtime assistant Liliana Betti, a chapter entitled "In Search of Toby Dammit" recounts the long genesis of this short film. According to Betti, when Fellini was first asked to direct a segment for the omnibus—and told that there would be matching contributions from Louis Malle and Orson Welles—his first response was to turn the offer down. "To remove Poe from the written word, especially today, after the experiences of Existentialism, Surrealism and psychoanalysis, would be arbitrary and uninteresting," he protested. "And what about translating him literally? In that case, Mario Bava is the most qualified man; he would be the most suitable and rigorous director for the job."[14]

Fellini and Bava had known one another since the 1940s, and Fellini is said to have been a keen admirer of Bava's movies, but the true progenitor of Bava's influence on the project was Fellini's fellow screenwriter Bernardino Zapponi, who personally regarded Mario Bava as his favorite director of horror films and later befriended him. Only a couple of years earlier in his life, Zapponi had been the editor of a short-lived magazine called *Il Delatore* ("The Informer"), devoted to a variety of arcane topics. In one of its last issues, a special Bava issue was announced as forthcoming in 1965–66. It would

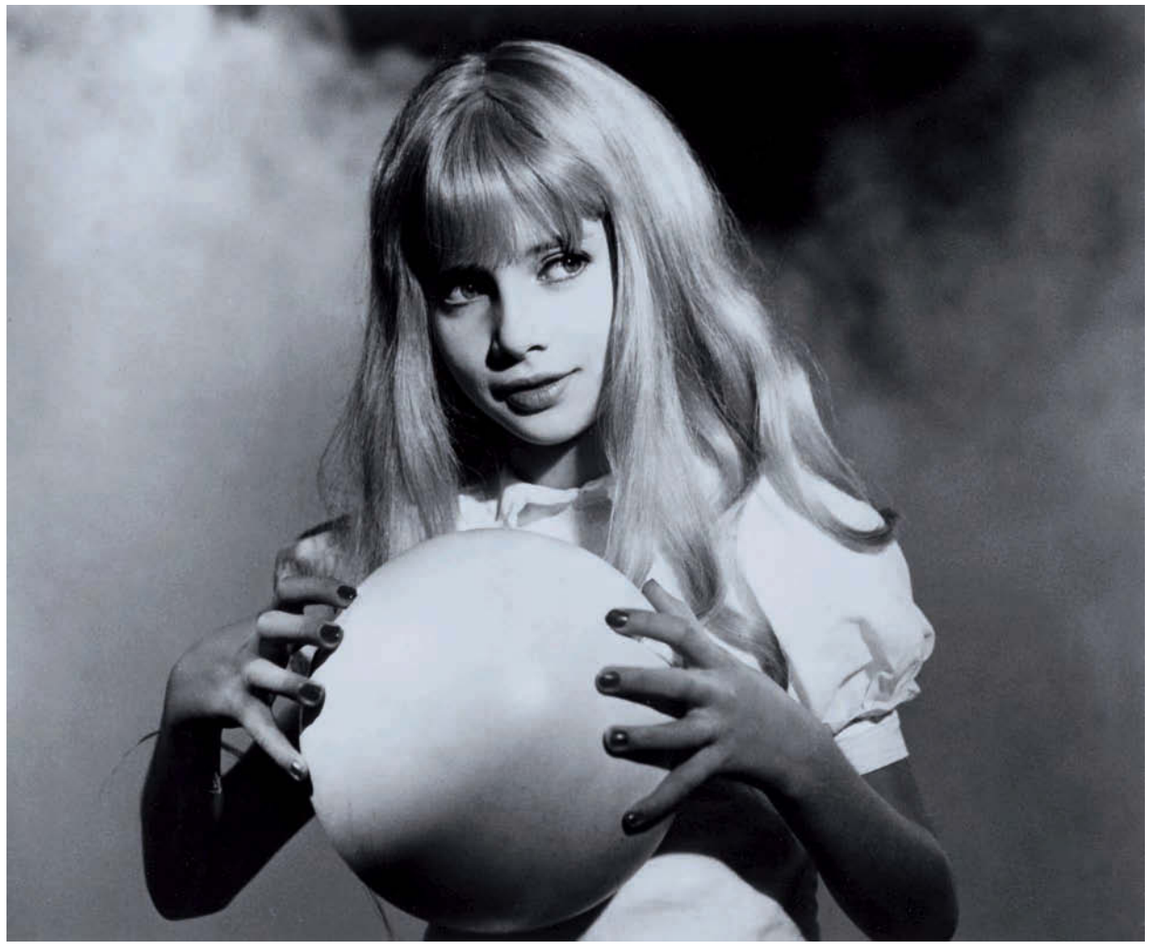
have been the first Italian monograph devoted to Bava, but the magazine ceased publication before it could appear.

"[Bava] was the father of the entire Italian genre, and a delightful man whom I knew well," Zapponi told the authors of *Spaghetti Nightmares*. "He was also the most frightened person I ever met. When the night wove its tales of horror, he felt a need to gird himself against it. He was excessively modest; he wasn't particularly aware of his artistic talent, didn't have much ambition, and was content to submit to the production system more than he should have done. I can also tell you that we intended to work together someday, but unfortunately, our plans never came to anything." [15]

Zapponi's failure to collaborate with Bava is perhaps the single greatest missed opportunity of either man's career. Zapponi was that rare Italian writer capable of fusing the morbid, rococo, often impish excesses of Italian horror to a strong backbone of narrative integrity. His screenplay for Dario Argento's *Profondo rosso/Deep Red* (1975) resulted in what is considered, by many, to be Argento's most consistent thriller—never losing sight of its plot or themes in its fevered search for disturbing images. Zapponi's script for Juan-Luís Buñuel's *Leonor* (1975) resulted in one of the few great Spanish horror films, a hauntingly romantic ghost story. However, it was with *Toby Dammit* that he most grandly succeeded in propelling Italian horror to its most delirious, mind-bending extremes.

In *Toby Dammit,* Terence Stamp stars as the eponymous character, an alcoholic British Shakespearean actor who comes to Rome to star in "the first Catholic Western," a job which he has accepted because the production as promised him a brand new, golden Ferrari. Toby arrives at Fiumicino Airport in a psychedelic haze, the terminal depicted as a series of bizarre friezes of nuns, *paparazzi* firing off flashbulbs, women backing away in abject horror, and other strangers shuffled with two-dimensional cardboard likenesses of other strangers—all photographed by the great Giuseppe Rotunno through a lysergic orange lens. Toby has brought with him his *bête noire,* an apparition of the Devil, whom he sees as a little blonde girl, dressed in white, whose presence is always announced by a luminous, soundlessly bouncing ball. Met by the director of his new project and his entourage, including a sibylline interpreter who seems to translate only every fourth sentence of their antic babble, Toby is driven through a Boschian Roman highway to a RAI-TV interview, where his avowed belief in the Devil prompts a question about whether he sees the Devil as a goat or a cat or a bat. "No, I'm English—not Catholic," he replies. "To me, the Devil is cheerful, agile. He looks like a little girl." After the interview, Toby is taken to the Italian Oscars ceremony, where he is overwhelmed by a parade of artificial stars and hangers-on, all professing their love and admiration for him, despite his best efforts at being the prototype of Johnny Rotten. After reciting some lines from *Macbeth* on stage, he insults the crowd and races off into the night, behind the wheel of his promised Ferrari. In a berserk *hommage* to the finale of Vincente Minnelli's *Two Weeks in Another Town* (1962), Dammit hells around the labyrinthine backroads of the city, finding *cul-de-sac* after *cul-de-sac* in a land where, supposedly, all roads lead to Rome. Crashing through a road barrier, he skids to a halt at the lip of a collapsed bridge. He makes the spot decision to speed the car across the gulf, tempted by the returning apparition of *la piccola diavola,* seen dancing at its cusp. The Ferrari rockets into the dark, and there is no sound of a crash, only a sudden, persistent squeaking. The camera tracks into the darkness, where we discover a wire stretched across the road, plucked and nauseously creaking, dripping with blood. Toby's severed head lies on the asphalt, met by the luminous bouncing ball of the Devil, who gently kneels to collect it.

In a rare act of creative appropriation by this most original of filmmakers, the Devil in Fellini's film is the very image of Melissa Graps, from



THE DEVIL *"looks like a little girl"—and like Melissa Graps—in Fellini's Edgar Allan Poe adaptation, TOBY DAMMIT.*

13 Richard Harland Smith: "Juliet of the Spirits," reviewed in *Video Watchdog* 90, December 2002, 52–55.

14 Liliana Betti, *Fellini: An Intimate Portrait* (New York NY: Little, Brown & Company, 1979), 135.

15 Luca M. Palmerini and Gaetano Mistretta, *Spaghetti Nightmares* (Rome, Italy: M&P Edizone, 1996), 159–60.



her long blonde hair to her luminous bouncing ball and the lullaby theme by Nino Rota that accompanies her every appearance. According to Liliana Betti's book, Fellini experienced similar difficulty in casting this role, eventually casting two performers: Russian actress Marina Yaru in close-ups, and a young dancer for long-shots. It has been claimed by many published sources (including Bava's error-riddled obituary in *Variety*) that Bava supervised the uncredited second-unit direction and special effects of *Toby Dammit*, but this is untrue.

After being told of Fellini's friendly (perhaps tit-for-tat) larceny, Bava attended a screening of *Tre passi nel delirio*. "That ghost child with the bouncing ball . . . it's the same idea as in my film, exactly the same!" he marvelled. "I later mentioned this to Giulietta Masina and she just shrugged her shoulders, smiling, and said, 'Well, you know how Federico is . . .'" [16]

According to Roy Bava, his grandfather also screened the film for Masina to score a point: "When Mario screened his film for Giulietta, she kept looking at him and finally said, 'I really think you should say something to Federico about how much he's taken from you.' Mario said, 'I know, but I don't care; it shows that he appreciates my work.' In fact, when Mario was at De Laurentiis preparing *Diabolik*, Federico was in the same office corridor working on *Toby Dammit*, and they used to communicate via remote control cars. They'd send little messages to each other. They always kidded each other. So what is the borderline between *hommage* and stealing? I'd say Fellini's was *hommage*, but the rest . . . ?" [17]

Indeed, *Toby Dammit* was only the beginning of *Operazione paura*'s extensive influence on other films and filmmakers. Nicolas Roeg's *Don't Look Now* (1973), set in Venice, concludes with Donald Sutherland pursuing a small hooded figure through the labyrinthine streets of that haunted city, half-believing it to be the ghost of his dead, golden-haired daughter. The tiny figure is revealed to be the homicidal dwarf responsible for a recent series of unsolved slayings, and Sutherland's visions are explained as unheeded psychic premonitions of his own death.

The effects of *Operazione paura* were still being felt in the declining Italian horror cinema of 1974, when Luigi Batzella made an interesting, if not entirely successful, erotic horror thriller called *Nuda per Satana/Nude for Satan*. The story, scripted by Batzella himself, is a near amalgam of all the classic Italian horror premises: while driving alone one night, a man (*Terrore nello spazio*'s Giuseppe Mattei, billed as "James Harris") discovers a dazed woman (Rita Calderoni) behind the wheel of a wrecked car, and sprints uphill to a nearby villa for assistance. Therein, he is greeted by a woman (Calderoni again) who not only resembles the injured party, but the model of an ancient portrait hanging on the wall. In time, as previously happened with Dr. Eswai, Mattei comes face-to-face with his own, evil *doppelgänger* in the timeless labyrinths of the villa.

In *The Tenant* (1976), Roman Polanski sets the stage for a clerk's nervous breakdown by quoting the Bavian image of a white ball bouncing spectrally, from nowhere, outside his window—through the air where a woman fell, like Irene Hollander, to her death. In John Schlesinger's *Marathon Man* (1976), Roy Scheider is shown walking through a deserted European plaza by night, when a white ball suddenly rolls out of nowhere; it's never explained, but one feels immediately that his life isn't worth a plugged nickel. In his *giallo* thriller *Tenebrae* (1982), Dario Argento precedes the in-broad-daylight murder of John Saxon's character by having his thoughts interrupted by a child's ball bouncing up against him.

One of the most overt, and surely the most inside, *hommages* to *Operazione paura* is Lamberto Bava's second directorial effort, *La casa con la scala nel buio/A Blade in the Dark* (1983). The film opens with a scene of two boys daring a third (Giovanni Frezza) to venture into the dark of

US *insert poster for the film's original "SQ Show" double bill with THE SOUND OF HORROR.*

an abandoned house. He accepts the challenge, and his disappearance is followed by the emergence of a white ball that bounces off a wall, leaving a bloody mark. The scene is then revealed to be a sequence from a film-within-the film, which is being scored by its young composer hero. In a closing image, Bava *fils* shows Frezza climbing the stairs in drag, wearing a long blonde wig, which offers a metaphoric explanation of the film's killer's sexual ambiguity. For viewers aware of Valerio Valeri's predicament in *Operazione paura, La casa con la scala nel buio* becomes a humorous, if somewhat guilt-tinged, contemplation of how playing the role of Melissa Graps might have played hob with the boy's sexual identity.

In 1983, a significant literary reflection of Bava's film was manifest in Susan Hill's successful ghost story novel, *The Woman in Black.* To my knowledge, Hill has never admitted to being influenced by *Operazione paura*—or *Curse of the Dead,* as it is known in Britain—but the similarities between them are quite noticeable. The novel's protagonist is H. G. Wells' solicitor hero Arthur Kipps, who is sent to an eerie coastal village to work on the estate of one Alice Drablow, whose house is an object of local fear and superstition. During the course of his visit, Kidd rescues a small gypsy girl from being trampled to death, an accident which the locals were content to watch passively—which is, of course, precisely the story of Melissa's fate—and is haunted by the non-violent spectre of a child, male in this case. Hill's novel was adapted several times for the stage, and in 1989 it was filmed by the British network Central Television and director Herbert Wise, working from a script by Nigel Kneale of *Quatermass* fame.

In 1987, Chuck Russell's *A Nightmare on Elm Street, Part 3: Dream Warriors* delved into the backstory of the Freddy Krueger mythos by depicting a disused, haunted-looking manor in which the school janitor committed a series of child murders, and was later punished by their enraged parents. The barren, bluish exterior of the house bears a strong resemblance to Villa Graps, and when the ghost of a little blonde girl comes tricycling out, Russell weds the Bavian imagery provocatively to that of Stanley Kubrick's *The Shining* (1980), which—incidentally—also depicted a ball rolling out of nowhere in a hotel haunted by the ghosts of two murdered girls.

Bava's film was paid further tribute by Martin Scorsese in his film of Nikos Kazantzakis' *The Last Temptation of Christ* (1988), which reaches its climax as the crucified Jesus Christ (Willem Dafoe) is tempted by the Devil with lusty tableaux of the life he might have led as a mortal man. The Devil is portrayed, once again, as a young girl. "In the book, and in Paul Schrader's original script, the angel at the end was a little Arab boy," Scorsese once recounted, "but I felt that brought connotations and we'd have difficulties . . . Then we decided it should be an old man—we had Lew Ayres cast in 1983—but that concept didn't seem right . . . So we went with a little girl, even though we couldn't get away from Pasolini's use of a young girl as an angel . . . but after all, it's a scam; it's the Devil. Of course, a little girl has appeared as the Devil before, in Mario Bava's *Kill, Baby . . . Kill!*, where she plays with the ball, but our girl is older; she's 13." [18]

Alessandro Capone provided another spectral girl-child with a white bouncing ball in *Streghe/Witch Story* (1989), an Italian film produced in the United States. In 1991, ABC-TV premiered David Lynch's acclaimed series *Twin Peaks*, in which a detective (Kyle MacLachlan) is summoned to a small community to investigate a young woman's death. In the case of *Twin Peaks*, the similarities to *Operazione paura* became ever more pronounced as it moved toward its final episode. The series reached its delirious climax in the otherworldly dimension known as the Black Lodge, where—like Dr. Eswai encountering his *doppelgänger* in the Mobius strip corridors of Villa Graps—MacLachlan is pursued and fatally wounded by a phantom figure who is revealed to be his own double. The scene also recalls a much earlier TV series climax, that of Patrick McGoohan's outstanding ITC series *The Prisoner* (1967–68), which concluded with McGoohan's Number 6 unmasking Number 1 and finding himself face-to-face with himself, or to be more accurate, the dark side of himself. But in the case of *Twin Peaks*, the resemblance to *Operazione paura* extended beyond *doppelgängers* into an elaborately extensive and sustained series of twinned and inverted images and subplots. Lynch's particular debt to Bava has never been acknowledged, as far as I know, but it is emphatically supported by unfilmed pages from his screenplay for the series' spin-off feature film, *Twin Peaks Fire Walk With Me* (1992), in which a nurse steals a ring from the finger of a dead patient—clearly a reprise of the "*La goccia d'acqua*" segment of *I tre volti della paura.* [19]

Another television production, Lars von Trier's Danish miniseries *The Kingdom* (1994), featured a narrative thread about a psychic patient who finds herself communicating with the unquiet ghost of a young girl haunting a hospital's elevator shaft. Though this ghost hasn't either the look or the trappings of Melissa Graps, the tone evoked by Bava's film is immediately apparent from the moment we first see von Trier's girl—which indicates what should now be obvious: that *Operazione paura* was a seminal chapter in the cinema of the supernatural. More recently, Jeremiah Chechik's ill-advised remake of *The Avengers* (1998) found John Steed (Ralph Fiennes) and Emma Peel (Uma Thurman) disoriented in a serially repeating room.

Operazione paura was also released theatrically in Japan and had reverberations there, as well as on the Chinese mainland. In 1997, the ghost of a little girl named Ting Ting appeared, accompanied by a bouncing ball, in Wellson Chin's Hong Kong film *Tamagotchi.* Around the same time, another Melissa Graps clone turned up in the unlikely setting of two episodes of the popular animated series *Pokémon* ("Abra and the Psychic Showdown" and "Haunter vs. Kadabra"). Here, the figure of the blonde, ball-carrying girl is eventually revealed to be a spectre, the marauding psychic projection of another character. This explanation, so similar to the relationship between the Baroness Graps and her late daughter, suggests the resemblance is hardly coincidental, as does the macabre, doll-strewn ambiance of the "Haunter vs. Kadabra" episode in particular.

Since the arrival of *Kill, Baby . . . Kill!* on DVD throughout the world, the film's influence on horror filmmakers has become even more pervasive. In Japan particularly, the entire "J-Horror" movement appears to be fixated on the concept of a young girl with long hair who died by abuse or neglect, whose restless spirit returns to punish those who carry the guilt of her death with them. The most noteworthy of these are the *Ringu/The Ring* series started by Hideo Nakata in 1998 (based on a novel by Koji Suzuki) and Takashi Shimizu's *Ju-on* (2000), subsequently remade in America as *The Grudge* (2004). In Spain, Guillermo del Toro made *El Espinazo del Diablo/The Devil's Backbone* (2001), which the director calls his "Mario Bava Western" in the film's DVD commentary. This is a period ghost story set in an orphanage and includes a few shots admittedly copied from *Operazione paura.* The Melissa Graps character was also blatantly copied in William Malone's *Fear Dot Com* (2002).

While 1971's *Ecologia del delitto/Twitch of the Death Nerve* is usually cited as Bava's most influential film, due to the *Friday the 13th* and other "body count" films produced in its wake, *Operazione paura* has become nearly as valuable a conceptual resource to other filmmakers. As the most original of the two works, it may someday be more widely recognized as a codex of its genre—a film that was the first to state a number of ideas that were elevated, by the consensus of persistent imitation, into new tenets of horror cinema.

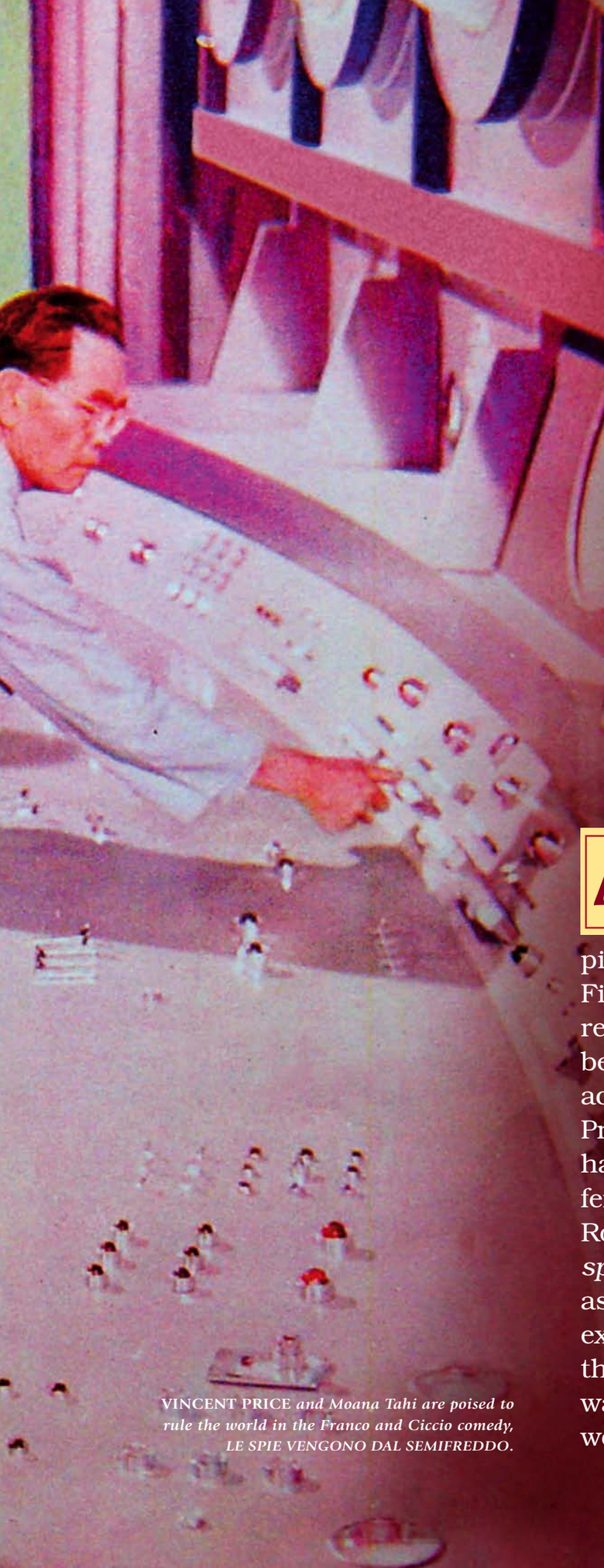
16 Cozzi.

17 Roy Bava interviewed by Alan Jones, April 2003.

18 David Thompson and Ian Christie, eds., *Scorsese on Scorsese* (London, UK: Faber & Faber, 1989), 143.

19 For more details, see Tim Lucas, *"One Chance Out Between Two Worlds: Notes on Twin Peaks Fire Walk With Me," Video Watchdog* 16, March/April 1993, 26–47.



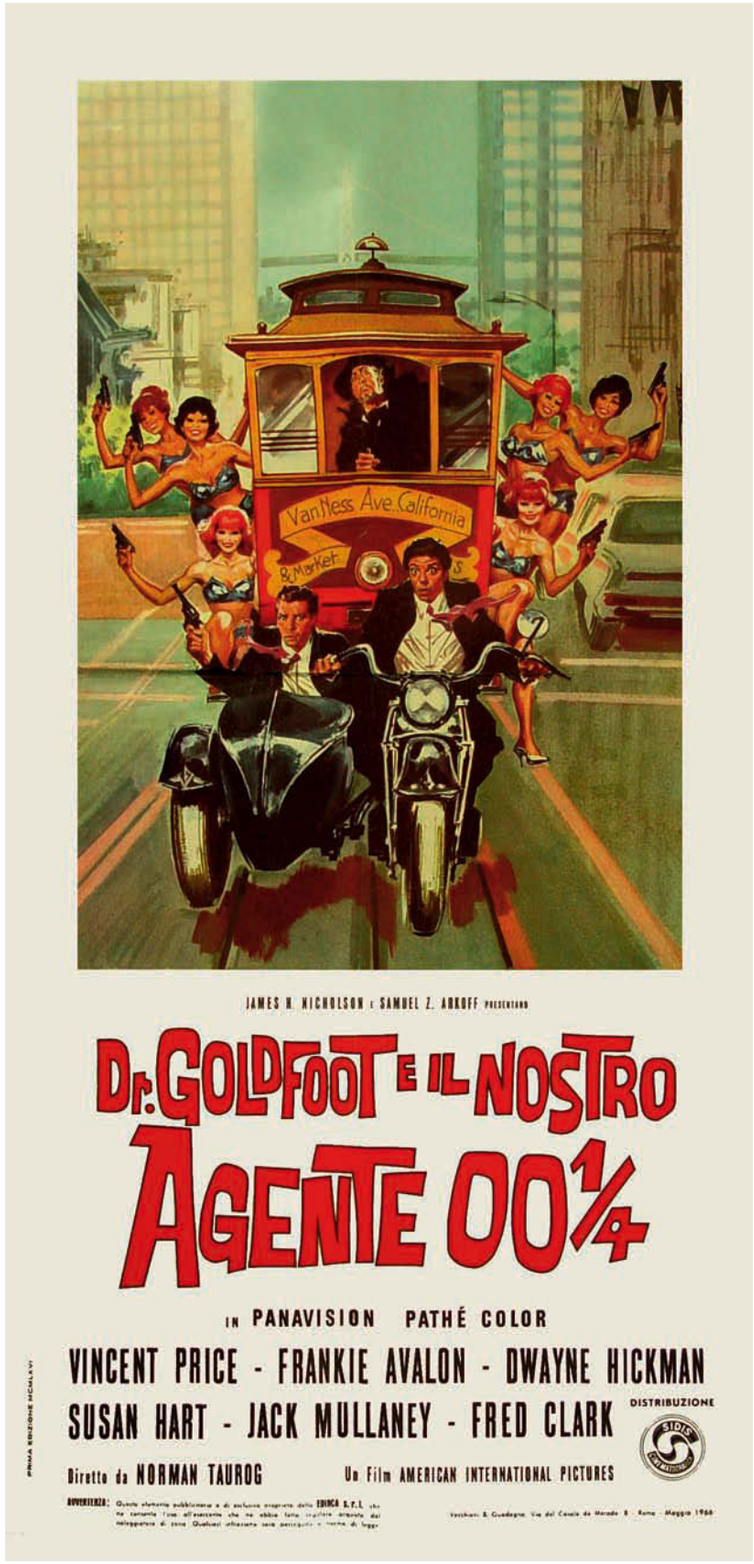


VINCENT PRICE *and Moana Tahi are poised to rule the world in the Franco and Ciccio comedy,* LE SPIE VENGONO DAL SEMIFREDDO.

LE SPIE VENGONO DAL SEMIFREDDO

Dr. Goldfoot and the Girl Bombs

AFTER THE PRODUCTION of *Operazione paura,* Mario Bava was approached by producers Giorgio Moser and Arrigo Columbo to save another troubled picture. This time, the movie was *Dick Smart 2007*, a Filmstudio production starring Richard Wyler and Margaret Lee. Filming had begun in Rio de Janeiro and was set to be completed in Rome at INCIR–De Paolis Studios, where—according to Wyler—Bava's former assistant, director Franco Prosperi (ultimately credited onscreen as "Frank Shannon"), had to be replaced when personal problems began to interfere with his ability to work. The editor on that picture was Romana Fortini, the innovative cutter of both *Terrore nello spazio* and *Operazione paura,* who may have suggested Bava as a replacement. Wyler remembers that there was some excitement among the actors for the few days when they thought Bava might be coming to their rescue—"I had always wanted to work with him," he says—but things didn't work out that way.



ITALIAN *locandina for Norman Taurog's*
DR. GOLDFOOT AND THE BIKINI MACHINE, art by Enrico DeSeta.

Bava was tempted away from *Dick Smart 2.007* by an offer from his friend Fulvio Lucisano to helm a similar spy spoof—the current Italian "flavor of the month"—for his company Italian International, in tandem with American International Pictures. Whereas Bava's earlier experiences with AIP had usually resulted, after the fact, in the creation of a distinctly different cut for the English-speaking market, this new project was evidently conceived as a means of killing two birds with one stone—a film that would function as a sequel to one of Italian International's pictures, and one of AIP's unrelated pictures, as well.

In 1965, AIP had released *Dr. Goldfoot and the Bikini Machine*, a *Goldfinger*-inspired spy spoof starring Vincent Price as a flamboyant villain in gold lamé jacket and slippers, who creates an army of bikini-clad robots to seduce Top Secret information out of important government officials. Frankie Avalon and Dwayne Hickman co-starred as Craig Gamble and Todd Armstrong, two incompetent, girl-crazed agents of SIC (Security Intelligence Command). Conceived by James H. Nicholson, scripted by Robert Kaufman, and "punched-up"

Le spie vengono dal semifreddo

"The Spies Who Came in From the Cool"
Filmed at Cinecittà and on location in Rome
April – May 1966.
First released: July 29, 1966
Technicolor, 1.85:1, 84 minutes

Production: Italian International Film (Rome). Producer: Fulvio Lucisano. Director: Mario Bava. Assistant directors: Antonietta Fiorito, C.S.C. and Lamberto Bava. Continuity: Rosalba Scavia. Screenplay: [Franco] Castellano and Pipolo [Giuseppe Moccia], from an idea by Lucisano. Additional dialogue: Franco Del Cer. Director of photography: Antonio Rinaldi. Camera operator: Saverio Diamanti. Assistant operator: Giorgio Aureli. Second assistant operator: Salvatore Caruso C.S.C. Art direction: Gastone Carsetti. Wardrobe: Ugo Pericoli. Production supervisor: Antonio Raffa. Production manager: Lucio Zarini. Production secretary: Maurizio Marvisi. Editor: Federico Muller. Music: Lallo Gori. "Bang Bang Kissene" by De Paulis, Castellano and Pipolo, sung by Franco Franchi (Ester Records). Sound: Ludovico Scardella. Title design: Biamonti and Grisonte. Distributor: Italian International.

Franco Franchi (Franco), Ciccio Ingrassia (Ciccio), Vincent Price (Dr. Goldfoot/Gen. Willis), Fabian (Bill Dexter), Francesco Mulé (Col. Douglas Benson), Laura Antonelli (Rosanna), Moana Tahi (Hardjob, uncredited), George Wang (Fong, uncredited), Ennio Antonelli (henchman, uncredited), Mario Bava (angel strumming harp, uncredited).

Italian reissues (1972): *I due mafiosi dell' FBI,* "The Two Mobsters From the FBI," *Il clan dei due mafiosi,* "The Family of the Two Mobsters"

Dr. Goldfoot and the Girl Bombs

Working title: *Dr. Goldfoot and the "S" Bomb*
First released: November 9, 1966
Technicolor, 1.85:1, 78 minutes

Production: American International Pictures. Producers: Fulvio Lucisano, Louis M. Heyward. Director: Mario Bava. Screenplay: Louis M. Heyward, Robert Kaufman. Story: James Hartford [James H. Nicholson]. Editor: Ronald Sinclair. Music: Les Baxter. "Dr. Goldfoot and the Girl Bombs" written by Guy Hemrick and Jerry Styner, performed by The Sloopys (Sidewalk Records).[1] Title design: Westheimer Co. Sound effects: Edit-Rite, Inc. Distributor: American International Pictures.

Additional US Credits: Executive producers: James H. Nicholson and Samuel Z. Arkoff. Vincent Price and Fabian are billed above Franco and Ciccio in the English version.

France: *L'Espion qui Venait du Surgelé,* "The Spy Who Came in From the Cold," TV only
Mexico: *Dr. Goldfoot Contra el Mundo,* "Dr. Goldfoot Against the World," "en Sicodelico Technicolor!"

by Elwood Ullman (a veteran writer of Three Stooges and Bowery Boys comedies), *Dr. Goldfoot and the Bikini Machine* was originally filmed as a musical comedy. However, after screening director Norman Taurog's original cut, Sam Arkoff ordered all the songs cut from the picture, feeling that Price's delivery was "too fey." Regardless of the trims, which Price personally felt badly compromised what "would have been a very good, and very funny, picture," *Dr. Goldfoot and the Bikini Machine* (with a theme song by Motown's biggest singing group, Diana Ross and the Supremes) proved more successful than expected—even in Italy, where it was released under the title *Dr. Goldfoot e il nostro Agente 00¼.*

In a strange coincidence, Fulvio Lucisano had independently produced a similar film around the same time, based on a story of his own invention. *I due mafiosi contro Goldginger* ("The Two Mobsters vs. Goldginger," 1965) was another *Goldfinger* spoof, starring the popular Sicilian comedy team Franco and Ciccio, and Fernando Rey as Goldginger. A major success in Italy, where it earned 441 million *lire* ($275,000—more than any of Bava's directorial works would *ever* earn in his homeland), the picture was deemed too Italian to receive a theatrical release in America. However, AIP eventually acquired it as filler for their AIP-TV syndication packages, and in the late 1960s, it occasionally turned up on local American television stations under the obscure title *The Amazing Dr. G.* In comparison, *Dr. Goldfoot e il nostro Agente 00¼* had performed well on Italian screens, but hardly achieved the same level of success as the Franco and Ciccio release, which seemed fated to have all its profit concentrated at its geographic point of origin.

Therefore, when Lucisano was approached by Arkoff and Nicholson with the challenge of producing a sequel to their Goldfoot film in Rome, he recognized an opportunity to not only fulfill that obligation, but to simultaneously produce a sequel to his own company's biggest commercial success to date, while adding some distinguished American guest stars into the bargain. The resulting production yielded two distinct comedies—an Italian International release top-lining Franco and Ciccio (and third-billing Vincent Price), and an AIP release starring Vincent Price (and "introducing" Franco and Ciccio).

Curiously, when interviewed for this book, neither Arkoff nor Lucisano were willing to admit that this had been their conscious strategy. Yet the evidence is there in the movies themselves, and the intention to make two movies in one is further validated by the screenplay, which at over 270 pages, is long enough to have yielded three movies. Pressed to reveal whether or not he was aware that Lucisano had used the production to devise a sequel to his own picture, the most Arkoff would say was, "I'm not saying I didn't [know]."

For his part, Arkoff remembered the production as being "completely American" in origin. "That was a deal picture," he said. "We had made *Dr. Goldfoot and the Bikini Machine,* which was a medium success. We thought of doing a sequel, so Fulvio and I got to talking, and he thought it sounded like a good idea. Horror pictures come and go and, during that period, they weren't doing too well. We had commitments to Vincent [Price], and the picture was conceived as a means of fulfilling our commitment to [him]. We talked to Fulvio and he had these people—they were a pair of Italian comics, so Italian it was ridiculous. Their audience was exclusively Italian. They were . . . they weren't even *Laurel and Hardy!* But he had these people, and we had Vincent Price. It was a mishmash. Then we got Bava. God knows why we used him . . ."

Lucisano explains his reasoning: "Mario was always a man with a big sense of humor. It was surprising [to me] that he was always doing horror pictures. This is why, when I was going to make a picture with Vincent Price and it was going to be a comedy, I chose him to direct. But it was not ready; there were problems with the script . . ." Luigi Cozzi, who met Bava for the first time during this period, agrees with Lucisano's assessment: "Actually, Mario's dream was to be a comedy director. That's what he really wanted to be . . . and he was such a funny man!"



ITALIAN *locandina, art by Enrico DeSeta. Note Vincent Price's also-ran billing.*

1 The song was eventually released on the Tower Records label.

Everyone agrees in retrospect that the script was abysmal, yet several people who never met sought and received credit for it. The Italian version identifies the authors as Castellano and Pipolo (the abbreviated screen credit for the writing team of Franco Castellano[2] and Giuseppe Moccia), and "an idea by Fulvio Lucisano." The American version, on the other hand, is credited to AIP's European line producer Louis M. "Deke" Heyward and Robert Kaufman—the latter being the principal screenwriter of *Dr. Goldfoot and the Bikini Machine*, and the creator of its cast of characters.[3]

"Substantially, it was a screenplay written originally by Robert Kaufman," Deke Heyward confirmed. "I did a total rewrite on it, retaining some of Kaufman's material and his essential storyline. Then I went to Italy to supervise the production, representing the American interests."

The film's international interests may have dovetailed well in theory, but in execution, it became, in Arkoff's words, "a pain in the ass, because we tried to mix genres, languages, and every other goddamn thing. If ever a picture was ill-conceived, by everybody . . . [that was it]."

Although contractually obligated, Vincent Price had flown to Italy with some optimism. He loved Rome for its great scenic beauty, and he looked forward, most of all, to the times when he would not be needed on the set, when he would be free to visit some of the world's greatest museums and scout the little gallerias off the beaten path for local art treasures. He had also heard promising things about his new director. "I knew of Mario Bava, as Boris [Karloff] had told me that he was a very good director," Price revealed, twisting his tone mid-sentence, "but I don't know what happened to him on this!"

"Nobody was very happy about [that picture]," agreed Arkoff, "and I imagine [Bava] couldn't have been very happy making it."

Indeed he was not. According to Heyward, the deep melancholic changes which Cameron Mitchell had observed in Bava's character during the filming of *I coltelli del vendicatore* were still in force throughout this production. "He was depressed," Heyward explained. "He going through a very bad time, but I can't think of him missing any days, nor can I think of him not functioning." Asked to further explain his diagnosis, Heyward added: "First of all, you have to understand my own character. I am something of a 'cheerer-upper,' an everybody-should-be-happy camp director; [I try to] make everybody smile. That's what I do. One day, one of our actors didn't show up, the guy who was supposed to play the general in charge of NATO. So I got into his uniform, dressed as a 5-star general. I was clowning it up, and I had everybody laughing—except Mario. He looked at me in a strange way and said, 'You are now an actor, and you behave as an actor.' Another time, when we were shooting in the park, I remember Mario looked down at the dirt, at the [empty] popcorn boxes, at the whatever-it-was on the ground, and he turned to me very apologetically and said, 'We Italians are really not like this.' It was a sad moment."

To those of us who eagerly awaited each new Bava film, there was an impression—falsely conveyed by AIP's delayed releases of his pictures—that they were being issued with reasonable regularity; there was an impression of a steady creative force at work. But as the true chronology of events, and the revelation of his side projects, show, Bava probably felt that he had given up a happy and prestigious career as a cameraman for a directorial career he never wanted, which was deteriorating—through lack of ambition—into a series of unpaid assignments and anonymous sweep-up jobs. There were also problems at home—problems with his wife Iole (who had grown very fat and neurotic), secondhand problems with his son Lamberto's own now-unhappy marriage, money problems, and perhaps (as Deke Heyward theorized) "problems with a mistress." Bava used to be able to escape his problems by going to work, but now, work itself was a problem. In Italy, Bava was perceived as a failure by many of his colleagues; his movies seldom made money, and he was stereotyped as a horror film director—a lesser breed of filmmaker even when boxoffice was good, but in the mid-1960s, the genre was returning to low ebb for the first time in a decade. In conversation with friends, he spoke about wanting to change his professional course, saying that he wished to direct comedies—and now that he was finally handed the reins of such a project, he was too firmly entrenched in depression to make the best of it.

It might be fairer to say that the script and the haphazard circumstances of production did nothing to assuage Bava's depression. Deke Heyward was kind enough to lend me his personal copy of the shooting script, its title page credited solely to him, which reflects the chaos of the production. Impossible to read sequentially, the screenplay contains a great many disregarded scenes and appears to have been written on at least three different typewriters, indicating a certain amount of composition done while globetrotting. Furthermore, there are numerous handwritten pages, evidently added to the picture on the spur of the moment.



ONE *of Goldfoot's "ragazze-bomba" emerges from a hiding place in a General's hotel room, ready to kiss him into oblivion.*

2 Franco Castellano had previously co-scripted and directed Franco and Ciccio's science fiction comedy *I marziani hanno dodici mani* ("The Twelve-Handed Men of Mars," 1964).

3 Born March 22, 1931, Robert Kaufman made his screenwriting debut with *Ski Party* (1965), produced by AIP as a welcome winter alternative for their popular "Beach" series. After writing *Dr. Goldfoot and the Bikini Machine* (based on an idea by James H. Nicholson), Kaufman also wrote the episode "The Devil and Peter Tork" for NBC-TV's *The Monkees*, a clever reworking of *The Devil and Daniel Webster* that many of the show's followers prize as the outstanding episode of the cult series' two-season run. Kaufman's greatest success of later years was his hit Dracula spoof *Love at First Bite* (1979), starring George Hamilton, Susan Saint James, and Arte Johnson, but he also wrote serious works, notably Ted Kotcheff's *Split Image*, which starred James Woods as a man specializing in the deprogramming of religious cult converts. Kaufman died at the age of 60 on November 21, 1991.



TEEN IDOL *Fabian is clearly outnumbered by the female cast members.*

Neither version of the movie can be synchronized to the script for more than four pages at a stretch; scenes from the middle or end are relocated near the beginning, and sometimes not used at all, and the scripted dialogue was seldom followed verbatim by the actors. Everything that could go wrong with the picture, short of the money running out, apparently did.

The resulting movie is almost always described as the nadir of Mario Bava's career, but this observation is most often made by people unaware that two distinct versions exist, and that the more familiar version—*Dr. Goldfoot and the Girl Bombs*—hardly qualifies as "A Mario Bava Film" at all. Though Bava is credited as the film's director, this version was wholly assembled in Los Angeles by AIP staff editor Ronald Sinclair, without Bava's input or participation. As Deke Heyward recollected, "It was brought back here [to America] and put together out of sheer desperation." It is highly unlikely that Bava ever saw, or had any interest in seeing, the American version.

The Italian and American versions may share the same cast, some of the same scenes, and the same basic story, yet they are as different to one another as *I tre volti della paura* is unlike *Black Sabbath*. As with those films, the definitive version "exists" somewhere in-between, in the viewer's own imagination. Neither version of this comedy is ideal, as both omit outstanding scenes to flatter their respective agendas. The Italian version is more noticeably Bava's creation; it contains its own share of faults, but despite them, it satisfies its intended audience far better than the American version does.

The following synopsis represents *Le spie vengono dal semifreddo*,[4] the only version supervised by Bava.



LOOKING *here much as he felt during production, Vincent Price plays the secondary role of Gen. Willis.*

Synopsis

In Paris, a French general arrives in a hotel room for an afternoon tryst with a mysterious woman in a gold bikini. As they kiss, the city is rocked by an explosion. Dr. Goldfoot is back in business.

In Rome, Bill Dexter—a secret agent from Security Intelligence Command (SIC)—sees Goldfoot being met at Fiumicino Airport by his Chinese hirelings Fong and Hardjob, with whose help he plans to continue assassinating world military leaders, so that "we Chinese" (Goldfoot is not Chinese, but doesn't seem to realize this) can take over the world. Bill recognizes Goldfoot from a prior case and pursues him unofficially, hoping that whatever information he gets will help him to make amends with SIC's top official, Col. Douglas Benson, whose wife was earlier caught making love with Dexter. While pretending to romance a local woman in a park in the Parco di Principe, Bill shadows Fong, but his suspicious moves are observed by two strangers in what appear to be generals' uniforms. They are Franco and Ciccio, two idiots who work as uniformed doormen at Rome's Hilton Hotel, while awaiting the results of a correspondence course to become secret agents—in order to get "lots of girls." Suspecting that Bill is in cahoots with "the Chinaman," they subdue him and rush off to work, where Dr. Goldfoot soon appears with the hotel's hat check girl in tow. Playing with a dart-firing "spy pen" he ordered from a comic book, Franco accidentally discharges it at the woman's derrière, but she doesn't flinch. Goldfoot's companion is a robot designed to replace the real hat check girl, whom Fong chloroforms and abducts. The Girl Bomb takes her place and winks her eye at a passing admiral. Back at the entrance, Franco and Ciccio see Bill enter the hotel and grab him again, this time tying him up for good measure. When Bill's bonds are loosened by an explosion in the hat check room, he explains to the two idiots what has happened and introduces himself as a SIC agent. Franco and Ciccio are awed to meet a real spy and try to impress Bill with their own unique "abilities," including Franco's dumb founding talent for impersonating a chicken.

The two idiots tag along with Bill to SIC Headquarters, where Col. Benson is explaining the need to stop Dr. Goldfoot's evil plot to the agency's best men. Application cards are dispensed to be filled out, and as Bill confers with Benson and his secretary Rosanna, Franco and Ciccio are mistaken for agents and given applications. While speaking to Bill, Benson is distracted by a telephone call from the President of the United States, who orders him to solve the Goldfoot problem as quickly as possible. Speaking to an assembly of international military brass, Benson makes a show of S.I.C.'s new super-computer, RITA, which will be entrusted with choosing the best qualified applicants for the case. Dr. Goldfoot himself spies on the meeting and mischievously crosses RITA's wires so that the electronic brain selects Franco and Ciccio for the job.

Ciccio decked out in deerstalker cap, Franco sporting a boutonniere that squirts water, they proceed to do what secret agents do—lounge around a swimming pool while adored by beautiful girls. They are approached by Bill, who is off the case but has unofficially trailed Goldfoot to a secluded villa. In the meantime, Fong abducts Rosanna—Dexter's current heartthrob—and replaces her with a robot duplicate. Franco and Ciccio go to the villa, where they are rushed by a henchman who lands in a swimming pool stocked with piranha. Helping the man out of the water and pulling up a skeleton, the two idiots flee the premises, bringing back Col. Benson and a dozen soldiers. By the time they return, Goldfoot has disguised the place as a Country School for Young Girls, with his Girl Bombs dressed in gymnasium wear and himself disguised as a nun! Fong, posing as a gardener, proves the pool to be safe by wading in it. While apologies are made by the colonel, Franco and Ciccio sneak into the villa and look around. In the bathroom, they are rushed by one of Goldfoot's thugs, who falls into the bathtub, where the flesh is stripped from his bones by the piranha moved indoors from the pool. They run outside to tell Benson, but the colonel refuses to listen to any more of their nonsense. As his Jeep drives away, Goldfoot signals for the gates to be closed and reveals his identity to the two hapless spies, holding them prisoner.

Tied up and left unattended in the lab, the two idiots look for a radio to produce some calming music and unwittingly activate the Girl Bomb Generator. Dozens and dozens of "ragazzebomba" emerge from the machine, asking how they might serve their masters. Returning from a visit with his stuttering twin, US Air Force Gen. Willis, whom he plans to impersonate as part of his master plan, Goldfoot is aghast at the spectacle of the Girl Bombs participating in a choreographed musical number. Franco manages to escape,

disguised in a blonde wig and gold bikini, but Ciccio is not so lucky, posing as Goldfoot's own mirrored reflection! He is apprehended and duplicated into a super-strong robot who finds and tries, unsuccessfully, to kill Franco on the villa grounds. After Ciccio succeeds in dismantling his double, Franco returns to avenge the earlier attack on his person. Bill arrives, breaking up their absurd fight, and they alert him that Rosanna is being held hostage inside. They find and free her, and thus begins a riotous chase that leads the S.I.C. agents and their Communist enemies to the amusement rides at Luna Park. Impersonating Gen. Willis, Goldfoot gains access to a US Air Force jet carrying a nuclear bomb, which he plans to drop on the Kremlin, initiating a new war between the United States and Russia.

Bill, Rosanna, and the two idiots do what they can to stop Goldfoot's evil plan, hijacking a hot air balloon and riding it to the door of the jet. After gaining entrance by knocking at the side door, various fistfights ensue, as well as a cat-fight between Rosanna and Hardjob. With the bomb set to drop automatically, Dr. Goldfoot exits the plane with Hardjob and nothing more than an umbrella to soften their landing. Once Fong is tied up, all that is left to do is to disarm the nuclear warhead, which Franco and Ciccio attempt as Bill pilots the plane. The two idiots are both aboard the bomb as it drops, but it manages to land softly and non-explosively in a pile of snow somewhere in Siberia.

Initially, Franco and Ciccio are treated like kings by the Russian military for saving their country, but a call from Col. Benson soon reassigns the two idiots to the worst prison imaginable: a simple wooden fence defining their area in the midst of a Siberian snowstorm. Ciccio is seen cooking some food, and a passing Russian officer—obviously Goldfoot in disguise—asks what he's having for dinner. "Spaghetti all'italiana," he says. Goldfoot opens the pot for a look inside—and sees Franco's head, yelling his objections from amid the pasta.

Cast & Production

One of the true originals of American movies, Vincent Price was a modern Renaissance man so beloved by his public that he hardly requires introduction. Film star, stage actor, radio star, author, lecturer, *gourmand*, art collector and gallerist, and *bon viveur*, Price was born in St. Louis, Missouri on May 27, 1911. In films since 1938, he was also one of the first Hollywood actors to work in international co-productions, beginning with the prophetically titled *Adventures of Captain Fabian* (1951), an Errol Flynn vehicle directed in France by William Marshall. In the early 1960s, Price appeared in his first US/Italian co-productions, Fernando Cerchio's *Nefertiti, Queen of the Nile* (1961) and Mario Costa's *Godon, il pirato nero/ Rage of the Buccaneers* (1962]. In 1963, he starred in AIP's underrated *L'ultimo uomo della terra/The Last Man on Earth*, co-directed by Ubaldo Ragona and Sidney Salkow, based on Richard Matheson's classic horror novel *I Am Legend*.

Price was unequivocal in his opinion of *Dr. Goldfoot and the Girl Bombs*. "I absolutely eliminate the entire memory of that picture, it was such a disaster," he exclaimed. "It was a picture that was completely unplanned, unrehearsed, unset, *un-acted*. They had two Sicilian comics in it (who weren't in it to begin with), who didn't belong in it at all . . . two American actors . . . a German Oriental actress . . . an Italian director . . . it was just disastrous! They lost the soundtrack after the shooting, and had to hire a man who read lips to tell us what we said! I, of course, never saw it."

If Price never saw the American version, he almost certainly had neither opportunity nor wish to see the Italian version, in which he might have found moderately more worth. Some of Price's best scenes appear only in the Italian version. If the memory of this experience was not a happy one, it seems to have nevertheless had an instructive effect. At age 54, Price was one of the few actors of his generation still receiving top-billing in an ongoing motion picture career, but he found himself stereotyped in making an entirely different kind of picture than most actors want to be making when they know themselves to be in their creative prime. For some time, Price had been giving "automatic" performances in his horror films—partly because there was a certain "Vincent Price" that audiences expected, and partly because the material he was given seldom inspired him to give anything more. In retrospect, one can see that Price began to take his acting more seriously in the wake of this mess, and



SIC *Agent Bill Dexter (Fabian) meets Franco and Ciccio (Franco Franchi and Ciccio Ingrassia).*

4 The Italian word "*Semifreddo*" literally means "half cold," so I have translated its meaning to "cool." The Italian word, I am told, was probably chosen to make a sideways reference to a then-popular brand of *gelato* (ice cream) called "*Semifreddo*."

gave some of his best and most thoughtful performances in his films of the late '60s and early '70s. One of the industry's true gentlemen, Vincent Price died of lung cancer and complications of Parkinson's disease on October 25, 1993, at the age of 82.

Prior to production, the industry trades reported several times that Frankie Avalon—Price's co-star in *Dr. Goldfoot and the Bikini Machine*—would reprise his role of S.I.C. agent Craig Gamble in the sequel. However, in late March 1966, Avalon secured a release from the picture, allowing him to stay at home with his wife Kay for the birth of their third child. The *Beach Party* star was quickly replaced by another "teen idol," Fabian. (The name of the protagonist was changed by Deke Heyward, though all references to the hero's past experiences opposite Goldfoot were retained. "I schlepped Fabian along because we couldn't get Frankie Avalon," he admitted.) Born Fabiano Anthony Forte on February 6, 1943, Fabian was "discovered" under unusual circumstances, while watching his father, the victim of a heart attack, being taken to the hospital in an ambulance. There on the sidewalk, a stranger showed him persistent attention, asking him if he'd ever done any acting or singing. Upset, Forte cursed at the stranger, who pressed a business card into his hand. Realizing that his family would need some compensatory income while his father recovered, he soon called the number on the card—and the rest is history. Fabian won the 1958 Silver Record Award for Most Promising Male Vocalist at the precocious age of 15, and made the jump to acting in Don Siegel's *Hound Dog Man* (1959), subsequently appearing in such films as *High Time* (opposite Bing Crosby), *North to Alaska* (opposite John Wayne), *Five Weeks in a Balloon* (opposite Peter Lorre) and *Dear Brigitte* (opposite James Stewart). His first international co-production was 1962's *The Longest Day*. Like many teen idols of the 1950s, Fabian later attempted to distance himself from his original, clean-cut image—by playing the lead role of gangster Pretty Boy Floyd in *A Bullet for Pretty Boy* (1970). He also appeared in Joe Dante's made-for-cable feature *Runaway Daughters* (1994).



BILL *is surprised when Gen. Benson's conservative secretary Rosanna (Laura Antonelli) tries to seduce him.*

"Side bar on Fabian," Deke Heyward interjected. "The nicest, hardest-working, most cooperative young star of that era it was ever my pleasure to work with. More than once during the making of that picture, he turned to me and said, 'Deke, what the hell are we doing here?' And I really didn't know what to tell him."

Headlining the Italian cast were the Sicilian comedy team of Franco Franchi (born Francesco Benenato, September 18, 1928) and Ciccio Ingrassia (born Francesco Ingrassia, October 5, 1923). Natives of Palermo, the two men were boyhood chums who, after drifting apart for a number of years, reunited by chance and formed a "strolling minstrels" act. One of the many people who saw them perform was Domenico Modugno (famous for his recording of *"Volare"*), who recommended them for a screen test. Franco and Ciccio became an overnight sensation in their first film, *Appuntamento ad Ischia* (1960), directed by Mario Mattoli. Incredibly, they appeared in twenty-three films over the next two years. Far from being "introduced" by Bava's film, *Le spie vengono dal semifreddo* was their 54th joint screen appearance; they eventually starred in well over 100 films together. Some of their earliest pictures were directed by future Italian horror specialist Lucio Fulci, most notably *I maniaci* ("The Maniacs," 1963), which also featured Barbara Steele. In later years, together and apart, Franco and Ciccio made a practice of poking fun at popular movie trends and successes with titles like *022 Agenti segretissimi* ("022 Very Secret Agents," 1964), *Il lungo, il corto, il gatto* ("The Tall, the Short and the Skittish," 1967) and *L'esorciccio* ("The Exorcist—Ciccio-style," 1974). The most popular comedy duo in Italian film history, Franco and Ciccio came to an end when Franco Franchi died on December 9, 1992. Ciccio Ingrassia began his solo acting career in 1961, but his best-remembered screen role minus Franco was in Fellini's *Amarcord* (1973), in which he played the strange, taciturn uncle who climbs a tree and starts yelling, "I want a woman!" In 1996 he made his final screen appearance as a beggar in Al Festa's *giallo, Fatal Frames*. Ingrassia passed away on April 28, 2003, of heart failure.

"They were the Italian Abbott and Costello—the very poor man's Abbott and Costello," Heyward described them. "They also had direct access to Sicilian wines, which were rather great. They plied Mario with Sicilian wines, which they had shipped to them by the case! It was one of the ways they ingratiated themselves to the production." Asked what Franco and Ciccio were like to work with, Heyward was highly complimentary:

"They were *great! Fantastic! Cooperative!* I *loved* them. Even though they gathered around in great seriousness, listening to whatever words of wisdom I had to impart on their use of fractured English, should a pretty girl go by, one or the other would go after her, Harpo-like, and give her butt a most delicate pinch. They would bow, explain that they were Sicilian, this was a great compliment they said . . . and got away with it! They had genuine senses of humor, much talent, and were eager to work."

According to the AIP pressbook for *Dr. Goldfoot and the Girl Bombs,* "Naples-born" Laura Antonelli (Rosanna) was cast in the picture because Mario Bava considered her to be the most "American-looking" of more than 200 actresses who auditioned for the part. In truth, Laura Antonaz was born in Pula, Italy (now in Croatia), on November 28, 1941, and had made one previous film, Luigi Petrini's *Le sedicenni* (1965), an omnibus of love stories which received only minor circulation. *Le spie vengono dal semifreddo* was her first international release, and surprisingly, she is far more prominent in the American version than in the Italian one. Here, the 24-year-old Antonelli looks like a normal, wholesome young woman, despite spending most of her screen time in a slip. She is attractive, but there is nothing overtly sexy about her—certainly no indication of the direction her career would take only a few years later, when she embraced her future as one of Italy's leading erotic stars.

As Rosalba Scavia remembers, "It was an early film for Laura Antonelli, but she was already keen to exude her charm and her influence long before she became a siren in Italian popular culture. She and Mario had an affinity, due to her very religious upbringing."

Sam Arkoff had a very specific regret about hiring Antonelli. He explained: "My nephew, Ted Rusoff, was working for us in Italy at that time. He still [lives and works there], as an actor, dubber, and director of dubbing. He's even been in a couple of Fellini pictures. At that time, he was very young and we employed him as, basically, a go-fer. He got friendly with Antonelli, who was a beautiful young lady . . . Here was Antonelli; she had made one earlier picture and she'd taken her clothes off in it. We hired her thinking that she might at least take off some of her clothes, but my nephew—unbeknownst to us—was over there telling her that she *shouldn't* be taking off her clothes, that it was undignified! Here was this woman, known throughout the world as a very sexy woman, who took her clothes off with impunity if not immunity—and she wouldn't take her clothes off for us! The only picture she ever made with her clothes on and she made it for us!"

Deke Heyward confirmed: "I had written some additional scenes for the European version, one of which opted to show Laura—in good taste . . . oh shit, maybe not in such good taste!—taking a bath while talking to Franco and Ciccio. She agreed to it, but the morning of the big scene, her mother showed up, dressed in black, and vowed that her daughter was clean enough and didn't need to take no baths, and if there was going to be bath-taking, there was going to be money changing hands, and not too many people around. I could agree to not too many people, but I couldn't agree to more money. After a lot of screaming, breast (mine) beating, threatening and cajoling, Laura got into the bathtub (tepid studio water, not enough bubbles), braless, but with panties on. Every time Mario yelled, 'Camera!' *Mamma* was there, whipping up bubbles [to conceal Laura's breasts], while Franco and Ciccio stood around like Abbott and Costello, averting their eyes from Laura's exposure! A half day was wasted trying to get that shot, and I finally made an executive decision: Dry her off and move on. Considering the amount of flesh she showed in subsequent films, even at this late date, I feel short-changed."

Heyward paused here to clarify himself: "I don't mean to imply that Laura was a terror. She was an *actress*, with one picture completed that had produced quite an enormous press and coverage of her uncoverage. She was scared. She wanted a career, and faced the fact that she had precious little talent and virtually no training, had difficulty speaking and understanding English, and that the major interest in her career was predicated not in the body of her work, but the body of her body."

After working with Bava, Antonelli reconsidered her stance on screen nudity and began more aggressively pursuing her future reputation as one of Italy's great sex symbols of the 1960s and '70s. She began specializing in sexy films in 1968, when she starred in such popular but controversial films as Gian Luigi Polidoro's *Satyricon*, Riccardo Ghione's *Le rivoluzione sessuale* (co-scripted by Dario Argento), and Massimo Dallamano's *Le malizie di Venere/Venus in Furs*, all filmed that same year. By the time she starred in Luchino Visconti's final feature *L'innocente/The Innocent* (1976) opposite Giancarlo Giannini, Antonelli was in her mid-thirties and her body had grown voluptuous with maturity. This film marked the commencement of her international stardom, which continued well into the 1980s. In 1991, Antonelli made unwelcome headlines when she was arrested for cocaine possession and sentenced to three and a half years in prison; the term was suspended when the actress agreed to enter a detox clinic. A reborn Antonelli, still beautiful in her 50s, emerged from the clinic, announcing that she intended to devote her life to God . . . after making one final erotic movie, *Malizia II* (1992). As a crew member on that production mockingly explained, "She's going to seduce the world one last time, then marry Jesus Christ."[5]

Antonelli's comeback was not successful, and her name most recently appeared in the Italian press when she filed suit against the newspaper reporters who made headlines of her drug arrest, claiming that the negative publicity had destroyed her career.

The most surprising difference between the Italian and American cuts of the picture is that Laura Antonelli scarcely appears in *Le spie vengono dal semifreddo*—not to create more screen time for Franco and Ciccio, but as a stern reprimand for her *prima donna* behavior on the set. Deke Heyward freely admitted this: "Laura was contentious throughout the picture and never came with her lines prepared. Unprepared, cared less, *Mamma* around terrifying cast and crew. Laura was going to be a star—she believed it, as did I—but this foolishness was beneath her. Yes, she was cut, cut, cut."

Francesco Mulé (Col. Benson) was born in Rome on December 3, 1926. Active in films since 1953, Mulé quickly gravitated to comedies, working with the likes of Steno, Renato Rascel, and Totò (with whom he made several films between 1958 and 1961). He also appeared in Steno's rarely seen comedy thriller *Psycosissimo* (1961), *Il giorno più corto/The Shortest Day* (1962), *Le voci bianche/White Voices* (1964, with Barbara Steele), John Guillermin's *House of Cards* (1968), Ken Annakin's *The Biggest Bundle of Them All* (1968), and Stanley Kramer's *The Secret of Santa Vittoria* (1969), and continued to work onscreen through 1979. He served Bava once again in an uncredited appearance as the crematory official in *Diabolik/Danger: Diabolik* (1968). Mulé succumbed to cancer on November 4, 1984.

Half-Chinese, Hawaiian-born "Moana Tahi" a.k.a. Moa Tahi (Hardjob, Goldfoot's "dragon lady" assistant) had been living and acting in Rome for several years prior to this film. She had played small roles in several Roman productions—besides Antonio Margheriti's *I criminali della galassia/Wild, Wild Planet* (1965), she was the Asian model caught in a web of ropes and terrorized by Carlo Rambaldi's mechanical spider in *Il boia scarlatto/Bloody Pit of Horror* (1965).

Uncredited in most prints, George Wang (Fong) made his screen debut as one of the few authentically Chinese actors in Nicholas Ray's *55 Days at Peking* (1963), in which the main Asian roles were portrayed by Leo Genn and Flora Robson. Handsome, stocky, impeccably groomed, with an impassive face, Wang was cast in many European productions as imposing henchmen with names like Chu and Ming and Mingo. Among his more important screen appearances were Umberto Lenzi's *I pirati della Malesia/The Pirates of the Seven Seas* (1964, with Steve Reeves), *La decima vittima/The 10th Victim* (1965, as the Hunter shot by Ursula Andress' loaded

5 *The Sport* (UK daily tabloid), June 26, 1991.

brassiere), and—of particular relevance to his casting in the Bava film—Bruno Corbucci's James Bond spoofs *James Tont operazione U.N.O.* and *James Tont operazione D.U.E.* (both 1965) and Lenzi's *A 008 operazione sterminio* (also 1965). After the *Goldfoot* film, Wang found himself increasingly typecast and continued to menace spies until the Italians ceased to parrot the success of the Bond films later in the 1960s. Unexpectedly, he then began to show up with surprising frequency in the backgrounds of Italian Westerns, beginning with Sergio Bergonzelli's *Una colt in pugno al diavolo/A Colt in the Hand of the Devil* (1967) and continuing through nearly a dozen others, including Giuliano Carmineo's *Buon funerale, amigos, paga Sartana/Gunslinger* (1970), Mario Caiano's *Il mio nome è Shanghai Joe* (1972), and Antonio Margheriti's *Ming, ragazzi!/Hercules vs. Karate* (1973). He relocated to Taiwan around this time and appeared in a number of local productions, including 1977's *To Kill With Intrigue*, opposite Jackie Chan.

Designed by art director Gastone Carsetti in accordance with Bava's instructions, Goldfoot's laboratory set occupied Stages 8 and 9 at Cinecittà, and is said to have been the largest set built there since the filming of *Cleopatra*, equivalent in size to one-and-a-half city blocks. Carsetti held the same position on an earlier Franco and Ciccio film produced by Fulvio Lucisano: *L'amore primitivo/Primitive Love* (1963). Goldfoot's laboratory is certainly the most impressive of the film's sets, yet it is almost indistinguishable from the interior of the Argos in *Terrore nello spazio*, an indication of Bava's absolute control over the set design of his movies. In this department, the film is a noticeable improvement over *Dr. Goldfoot and the Bikini Machine*, whose laboratory was none too convincing and heavily recycled existing set modules from the dungeons of earlier AIP releases.

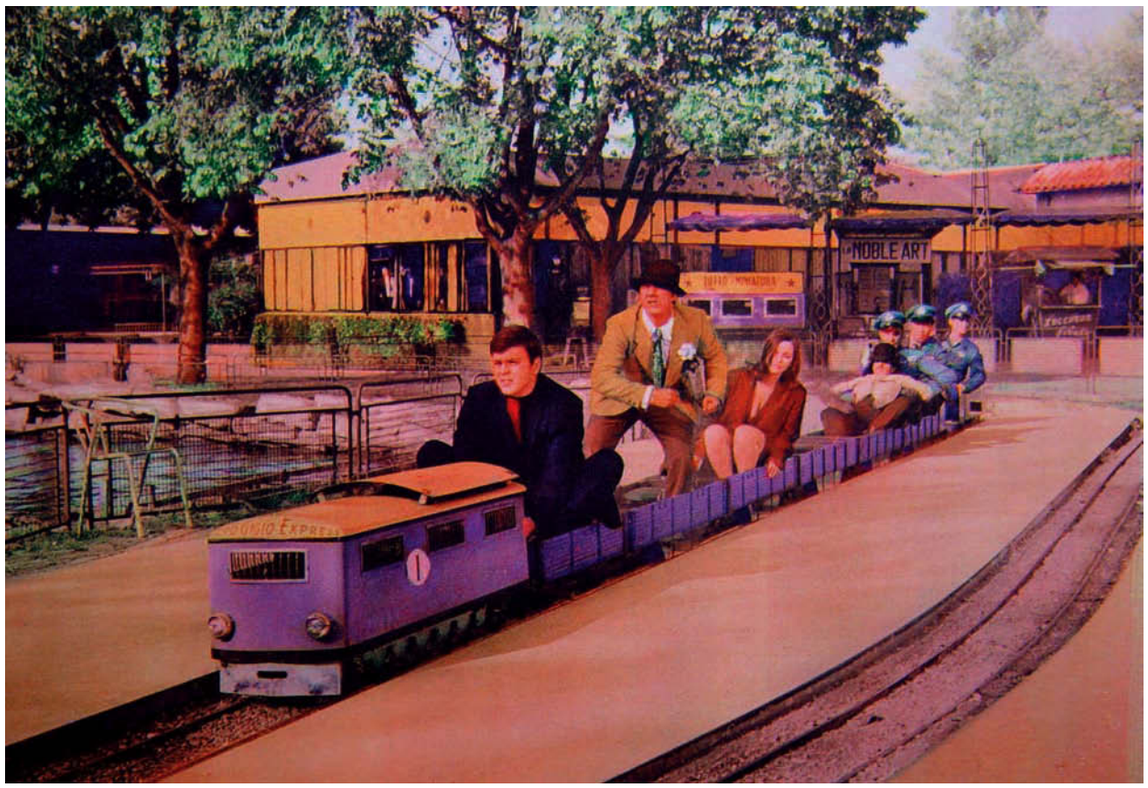
Other interiors were filmed at the Rome Hilton, where the non-local cast and crew members also resided during the filming. In return for its generous promotional exposure (actually, the film never mentions the Hilton by name), the luxury hotel rolled out its red carpets, contributing free shooting space, conference rooms, a food station, and room service. Deke Heyward, who was summoned into service to play one of the generals who meet with Col. Benson, remembered having a surreal encounter there, while in uniform: "I met [Egyptian President Gamal-Abdel] Nasser. He was staying at the Hilton, I was staying at the Hilton, and I ran into him while I was wearing my 5-star general outfit!"

The production demanded much more location shooting of Bava than he liked to do, including a partial day's filming at the Parco di Principe, the scenes inside the Rome Hilton, and also extensive filming at Rome's popular amusement ground, Luna Park. "The value of the amusement park was that we needed production value," Heyward clarified. "'More production value!' was something that Sam was always screaming at me. So Mario or the production manager said, 'We'll go the amusement park' and wrote the scene in, so we could get some production value there."

According to AIP's pressbook, the Luna Park filming did not proceed without incident: it reported that Fabian became a hero that day, after saving a child from imminent peril. During the filming of the mini-train sequence, a 6-year-old Roman girl—eager for a glimpse of the celebrities—reportedly leaned too far outside the miniature car she was riding and nearly fell under the train's wheels. Fabian noticed the mishap and jumped off his own train car, swept the screaming child up in his arms, and carried her to safety. It reads well, but when one looks at the film itself, it becomes obvious that all of the shooting inside Luna Park took place early in the morning, when it was closed to the public. There were no onlookers, no 6-year-old child.

While on location at Luna Park, Bava's lack of inspiration was such that he did something that would have been unthinkable under other circumstances: he hired another artist to execute a glass matte painting needed for the shot. The results, however, were enough to propel Bava back into action. Deke Heyward recalled the occasion: "We had another matte-man [with us] for the day in the park, but Mario was not pleased with the results and [he] repainted it hurriedly on the glass . . . I remember watching him and thinking that this was a strange thing to see a director doing, but he wasn't satisfied and what he did was right."

Another of the curious assertions made by the AIP pressbook is that Bava personally constructed a large-scale miniature of the Colosseum, made entirely out of linguine! It reports that more than 400 pounds of the wheat pasta were crumbled and then painstakingly assembled into "the believable maquette." Unfortunately, the only footage of the Colosseum appearing in either version of the picture is an exterior stock footage shot. What is curious about this publicity item is that Bava is one of the few directors of whom such an assertion is entirely plausible. The Colosseum features in the narrative



THE PATHETIC *chase sequence filmed at Luna Park.*

during the chase sequence, as Goldfoot's car crashes into it, pummelling the vehicle with chunks of falling (papier maché) rock. One would imagine, from this footage, that Bava may well have planned to film a gag effects shot of the entire Colosseum crumbling from the impact.

"Forget the AIP pressbook," Deke Heyward advised. "They didn't have a guy on location with us, so they had to make up things they felt might appeal to the then-willing and quite gullible press. As for the Colosseum being made entirely of linguine—*horse hockey!* There was no time for fooling around. We were fighting for our financial lives. If there was anything made of linguini on the set, it would have been served to the crew in lieu of a break! On one occasion, Mario did spend hours preparing a glass matte painting of the Colosseum, but we were shooting in the Parco di Principe without a permit, and by the time Mario got the shot lined-up to his satisfaction, a member of the park's tight-hatted police force came by and told us to move on. I had no money with me to offer as a friendship gesture, so I offered him an Italian Fudgsicle I had half-eaten. He didn't think it was funny."



THE TWO *idiots pay hommage to Stanley Kubrick in the film's madcap finale.*

The hot air balloon seen in the film was a hanging, 3-dimensional miniature that was photographed, respectively, before a "blueback" [blue background] screen for various optical insertions—for example, for the shots of the balloon landing at Luna Park and ascending, between two groupings of cypress trees, the miniature was optically inserted into the blue sky behind them. For other shots, the miniature was photographed while sandwiched between a blue background screen with dark, animated clouds projected from the stencilled cyclodrum device seen in the closing moments of *I tre volti della paura*, and a foregrounded glass matte of white clouds. For the storm shots, "rain" was added by a dribbling hose held just offscreen to the left. This method produced water droplets too large to be convincing—but, by this point in the movie, the audience has seen so much broadly caricatured that it hardly matters. In one of the most impressive shots of the sequence, Bava introduced a miniature of the US Air Force jet, fashioned after the one seen in the accompanying stock footage, and animated its gradual approach toward the camera, as the balloon awaits its approach from a cluster of clouds.

For reasons that no one remembers, Bava made another of his rare cameo appearances during this sequence. In what appears to be an inside joke of some kind, Bava and another unidentified man appear in two shots as haloed angels on a cloud, who confer and shrug their shoulders philosophically as the angel of the dead amusement park manager continues to badger our heroes from Heaven about the balloon they have stolen from him.

Another charming special effects moment in the picture is the *Dr. Strangelove*-inspired scene in which Franco and Ciccio, entrusted with the task of defusing the nuclear warhead, are accidentally dropped with the bomb while straddling it. The bomb looks flat on camera, and it may well have been a flat wooden reproduction rather than the rounded prop shown as the bomb bay is first opened, the better to allow them to roll around atop it while not sliding off. Flat or round, the bomb was filmed before a blueback screen, allowing the blue area to be optically replaced with passing clouds, a miniature desert where the bomb nearly touches down, and finally a snowy bank where it safely settles. The bomb was rotated optically, in accordance with the actors' movements. For the surprising moment when the bomb bounces like a balloon off the desert surface, a carefully timed jet of air was fired through the sand from below, creating a response to the contact.

The completion of filming left no one feeling very elated. Deke Heyward remembered his last meeting with Bava: "The last time I saw him was at a goodbye feast, at a long table in an Italian restaurant. It was called *Lumaca*—the Italian word for 'snail'—on the Appian Way, and Bava was there playing the genial host, even though he wasn't paying for it. Poor Fabian was inconsolable. He thought his career was ruined. He was a dear friend, but he looked me in the eye and said, 'Vincent told me you'd screw me into the ground. All you AIP guys screw us actors into the ground.' 'Me?' I asked innocently. 'After all we've gone through on *The Dick Clark Show* together?' 'Well, maybe not you,' he said, 'but those AIP guys. I don't know their names, but they came around here yesterday wearing their dark suits.' 'Fabe,' I said gently, 'don't ever talk about them again.' 'You mean . . . ?' I nodded. 'The Big M—Franco and Ciccio are from Sicily, remember?' Fabian nodded. End of conversation."



GOLDFOOT *conducts an inspection of his Girl Bombs, as associate Fong (George Wang) awaits instruction.*

While occupied with the editing of *Le spie vengono dal semifreddo,* Mario Bava's low spirits were raised when he was approached by a young admirer named Luigi Cozzi, born in Busto Arsizio on September 7, 1947. This enterprising 19-year-old would, in time, become a film director in his own right, but at the time, he was approaching his hero as an enthusiastic Italian correspondent for the American magazine *Famous Monsters of Filmland.*

"I was living in Milan at that time," Cozzi remembers, "and I went to Rome and met Mario Bava, to see if I could do an article about him for *Famous Monsters.* He was very, very kind, and I spoke at length with him. I loved listening to him; he was such a funny man. He was a joy to talk with, always joking—that kind of guy. He didn't take himself seriously. He was amazed that someone would talk seriously about his movies. He would say, 'I didn't do the scene that you're raving about because it was a good critical idea, but because I ran out of time and money!'—that kind of thing. He was a very nice guy, but always complained about not being understood by the critics, not being helped by his producers. I would ask him why he made a bad film, because he had such a big talent, I couldn't understand why he would put himself down by working with such stupid scripts. Most of his scripts, I felt even then, were pretty bad—and he agreed! 'Yes,' he said, 'I knew the script was a piece of trash, but I had problems with taxes, I had taxes to pay . . . I asked the producer for authorization to rewrite the script, and he would say 'I don't give a shit, but I won't spend one more penny on it, so I suggest you just take it and shoot it.' This is what he told me. He knew that the French had written a lot of good things about him, and he was proud of that, but at the same time, he was also sad because he was considered as nothing more than a 'B' director in Italy. After he died, all of a sudden, the critics started to say, 'Oh, Mario Bava!' Till the very day he died, a new picture by Bava was not even reviewed by the main reviewer of a newspaper; they would send some kid to cover it. He told me that producers never called him because he was a good director, but because he was cheap and fast. This saddened him. An awareness of this was filtered through his words, you know?"

At some point during their time together, Bava treated Cozzi to a private screening of the rough cut of his work-in-progress ("It wasn't one of his good ones," Cozzi winces), which contained slugs [blank filler] where special effects shots and opticals were to be inserted later. Cozzi was bewildered by this temporary measure, prompting a detailed explanation of the blueback process from the *Maestro,* afterwards.

As Cozzi prepared to leave, Bava gave him the addresses of some publicity agents who could provide him with promotional stills. To his amazement, Cozzi was soon in possession of a large stack of original black-and-white photographs from several different Bava movies, both scene and behind-the-scenes shots. "They were all originals," Cozzi told me in 1989. "I wish I still had them, but I sent them all to Forry Ackerman. He published maybe one or two, but I sent him at least a hundred, probably more."

Cozzi remembers writing two or three articles based on his initial conversations with Bava, but these pioneering appreciations of Italy's King of Horror never appeared in the pages of *Famous Monsters of Filmland.* "No, no," Cozzi laughs, "because those were serious articles—but I did publish them in Italy."

This account is something of a revelation, considering that Bava was perceived by his few fans at the time as a publicity-shunning man of mystery. As someone who knew him personally, Cozzi suggests that Bava may have later deliberately concocted this false image of himself to stimulate the public's curiosity about him and his work. (Or rather, when I suggested this to Cozzi, he replied, "Maybe so . . . I think so.") The fact remains that Bava was warmly receptive to a young interviewer at this time, not just answering questions but actually taking a young and caring *giornalista* into the confidence of his craft. Unfortunately, after this, it was some time before anyone else cared. Bava's bid for international exposure in an important American fan magazine came to nothing, and three more years would pass before the first interview with Mario Bava appeared in print.

Variations

The Italian version of *Le spie vengono dal semifreddo* was edited by "Federico Muller," one of several pseudonyms employed by Frederick Muller, whose career in films has been prestigious and varied. Muller began as an editor, cutting the Biblical drama *Ponzio Pilato/Pontius Pilate* (1962), co-directed by Irving Rapper and Gian Paolo Callegari, which starred actress Leticia Roman the same year she made *La ragazza che sapeva troppo* with Bava. Then, under the name "Fritz Muller," he worked as assistant director on *I castello dei morti-vivi/Castle of the Living Dead* (1964), which may have provided him with the opportunity of meeting Bava. It will astonish anyone who has seen *Le spie vengono dal semifreddo* that it was edited by the man responsible for the astounding montages of Orson Welles' *The Trial* (1963) and *Falstaff: Chimes at Midnight* (1965), but it's true. After the Bava film, Muller changed careers once again and worked as a unit production manager on various American epics filmed in Italy, including *The Agony and the Ecstasy* (1965), *Reflections in a Golden Eye* (1967), *The Shoes of the Fisherman* (1969), and Robert Altman's Malta-lensed *Popeye* (1980). These productions allowed him to make the connections necessary to become a producer, and in 1973, as Frederick Muller, he produced his first film—Nicolas Roeg's marvelous *Don't Look Now.* Muller continues to work in this capacity today, having brought to the screen such productions as *Code Name: Wolverine* (1996) and *Tea With Mussolini* (1999).

The synopsis presented above represents the Italian version supervised by Mario Bava and edited by Muller. When this version was sent to Arkoff and Nicholson at AIP, they screened it and felt it was too Italian for American tastes; however, because they had cast (and paid) Vincent Price and Fabian, it was compulsory to release some form of the picture theatrically in the United States and other English-language territories. Consequently, all of the footage shot for the picture was turned over to AIP editorial supervisor Ronald Sinclair. Sinclair—the most likely suspect behind the filming of Boris Karloff's English-language host footage for *Black Sabbath*—was thus the principal architect of *Dr. Goldfoot and the Girl Bombs.*

"Anything majorly wrong with that picture was [a result of] the American editing, which was pretty bad," admitted Deke Heyward. "They were given a pretty good film to start with. Mario hadn't made many careless pictures before, if he ever did. As you know, Mario was a consummate craftsman. But somehow, whenever we shipped a director's cut to America, it fell prey to itchy fingers."

To better understand the exact nature of the changes affected by Sinclair, the following is a chronological overview of both films, illustrating the ways in which one diverts from the path of the other. *Le spie vengono dal semifreddo* is designated as "II" (for Italian International), while *Dr. Goldfoot and the Girl Bombs* is designated as "AIP."

II: The main titles are pure Bava, depicting Franco and Ciccio—both dressed in white, with white detective *accoutrements* (Holmesian pipe, magnifying glass), photographed against a black background—ogling various details of women's bodies, which appear out of the darkness drenched in saturated color lighting. Faces, breasts, legs, hips are all manifest before them, sometimes gigantically, in a manner that recalls Boris Karloff's interaction with the giant telephone in the introduction to *"The Telephone"* in AIP's *Black Sabbath.* The title sequence is accompanied by Franco's frenetic song *"Bang Bang Kissene,"* which was released in Italy as a single on the Ester label.

AIP: The main titles recap the story of *Dr. Goldfoot and the Bikini Machine,* using clips from that earlier picture (as well as some preview shots from the movie about to be shown) with voice-over narration by Price and new music by Les Baxter. Ironically, Bava's directing credit coincides with the spoken phrase "caught like a rat in a trap."

After the titles, the AIP opens with a stock footage exterior of the Eiffel Tower, which the following shot of the *ragazza-bomba* at the window, establishes as the view from her hotel room. This interior shot is the very first narrative shot of the Italian version, which curiously omits the stock shot.

After the exploding kiss, the AIP cuts to a stock shot of the Colosseum, denoting a change of location to Rome. In a scene not included in the II, Bill Dexter deplanes from his flight reading a newspaper with the headline: "FRENCH GENERAL EXPLODES." Almost immediately, Bill bumps into Dr. Goldfoot, who is being escorted to a North Pole flight by Fong and Hardjob. Bill recognizes Goldfoot and insists that they have met before, but the evildoer denies this, claiming that he is a world-famous Sousaphonist who has fan clubs springing up all over the world.

The next AIP scene is set in a highly artificial North Pole, where a Girl Bomb in bikini stands decoratively outside an igloo. Goldfoot, disguised as a general, drives another general to this remote place of assignation. The general approaches the girl, and we see his hand (at rest on the surface of the igloo) gain heat and sink into the ice as though it were shaving foam—exactly what it is, in this not-very-persuasive trick shot. Goldfoot drives away and hears the explosion. This scene is not included in the II.

Then the AIP cuts to the laboratory in Goldfoot's Italian villa, where he creates a Girl Bomb in the likeness of the hat check girl at the Hilton. "I know a general who's just *dying* to lose his . . . Good Conduct Medal over her!" Goldfoot effuses.

II: The Italian version cuts from the first exploding kiss in the (undesignated) French hotel room to a different scene in Goldfoot's laboratory, which appears about thirty minutes later in the AIP assembly. Dr. Goldfoot speaks proudly to Fong and Hardjob of his equipment and demonstrates how his machine produces the Girl Bombs. With great panache, he creates several and arranges them in a military inspection queue, while addressing the audience directly. The dialogue in the II is somewhat different than the wording of the AIP, with Goldfoot here comparing his invention to the great achievements of science, and himself to such notable past scientific minds as Nostradamus. This scene feels more accurately placed in the II, as its placement in the AIP causes Goldfoot to explain his invention the second time we see it used, when it no longer requires explanation, if it ever did.

This scene is followed by the scene in the Parco di Principe, introducing Franco and Ciccio. The AIP completely eliminates the business about the two idiots believing that Bill is in cahoots with "the Chinaman" Fong (who is in the park spying on a general) and using a handy trip-wire device to send the SIC agent tumbling down a flight of stairs. Then, realizing they are late for work and may lose their jobs, they

hurry away to the hotel. As Bill collects himself, Fong happens along and nonchalantly steps on his hand, without stopping.

At the Rome Hilton, Franco and Ciccio are put immediately to work, attending to an arriving couple. Franco is asked to help the lady out of her fur coat; this he does, exposing her bare back, which he ogles at close proximity, wagging the brim of his cap with his brow to comic effect. This lascivious moment is cut from the AIP.

AIP: As in the II, the hotel business cuts outside the hotel, to show Fong meeting Goldfoot's car. The doctor has brought his duplicate of the hotel's hat check girl, and the two men converse separated by an open car door, with its window rolled up. The AIP adds an absurd bit of business where Goldfoot cannot hear a word that Fong says until he rolls down the window of the open door.

II: When Bill follows Fong to the hotel, he is promptly attacked once again by Franco and Ciccio. The Italian version lengthens their skirmish with a comic, high-speed fight that concludes with the two idiots dragging Bill off to an adjoining room and tying him up.

AIP: Shortly after Fong begins to subdue the hat check girl with chloroform, there is an additional shot of the Hilton's elaborate staircase as the general descends toward the area. Dr. Goldfoot notices and signals to Fong to hurry up. He drags the girl away.

II: Whereas the AIP ends the scene with a close-up of the hat check duplicate winking at the general, the II adds a shot of the general reaching over and pinching her cheek affectionately.

At SIC Headquarters, when Col. Benson produces a tape recorder to impress some new agent recruits with excerpts from a speech he recorded earlier, he initially presses the wrong button and plays some silly music.

AIP: Here, when Benson presses the wrong button on his tape recorder, we hear a woman moaning, "Oh, Colonel, baby . . ."

When Benson enters his office to speak with Bill Dexter, who has brought him word of Dr. Goldfoot's whereabouts, he finds the suspended agent kissing his pretty secretary, Rosanna. At the end of Bill's visit, Rosanna shows him to the door, and he invites her to join him for coffee. She declines, saying that she hates coffee, and Bill asks her to step into the hall for a moment. She follows him out the door, and we hear the offscreen sounds of a kiss and a slap.

II: Both of these scenes with Rosanna, establishing her as the romantic interest of our young protagonist, are omitted from the II, moving Laura Antonelli's character to the far background of the story. Indeed, with the exception of her participation in the chase that occupies the last twenty minutes of the picture (from which it would have been impossible to remove her), all of Antonelli's major scenes were cut from *Le spie vengono dal semifreddo*.

AIP: The film next cuts back to Dr. Goldfoot's villa, where the villain is visiting with his behind-bars prisoner, Gen. Willis—who, if not for his slightly different hair style, eye patch, and hopeless stutter, would be his identical twin. It would seem that Goldfoot was impersonating Gen. Willis in the earlier North Pole scene, but this is the earliest reference to the character in either version—indicating its misplacement in both. (Vincent Price shares the screen with himself in one of Bava's typically well-executed, split-screen, double exposure shots.) Exiting the room, Dr. Goldfoot sends a Girl Bomb in to the general with instructions to give him only "half a charge" since they are indoors. She enters the room and moves toward the jail bars to kiss Willis, who recoils as though he knows exactly what is coming.

The II reserves this scene till the last half hour, thus leading directly into the masquerade prior to the chase sequence, but there are some minor differences. In the AIP, the scene cuts away before the Girl Bomb's lips actually touch Gen. Willis; in the II, the kiss is shown and held for a second or two, before cutting to the explosion (a shot of a red smoke bomb photographed against a black backdrop, flashed onscreen with an accompanying sound effect) and then cutting, again, outside the room to Goldfoot's satisfied expression. The II moves on to the next scene before he can speak, but the AIP includes a comment by Goldfoot: "And then there were none!"

It is at this point that the AIP cuts to the laboratory "creation" scene that occurs almost thirty minutes earlier in the II.

As Dr. Goldfoot leaves the laboratory to supervise the feeding of his pet piranha in the outdoor pool, the AIP contains an additional bridging scene of Goldfoot climbing up through a trap door into a lavish bathroom. There he scolds one of the hired help, whom he catches using his "very best cologne"—packaged in a large, florid-looking atomizer bottle.

After the piranha scene, the AIP cuts to SIC Headquarters, where Rosanna coaches Col. Benson on the speech he is about to make to a gathering of generals.

During the course of Benson's speech, he confuses Dr. Goldfoot's spy periscope for an ashtray and drops a lit cigar down the tube. The watchful villain yells "Ow!" as he backs away from the viewfinder, then explains to the viewer (in the most godawful dialogue reading in the picture), "Smoke got in my eyes!"

When the sabotaged RITA computer selects Franco and Ciccio as the most effective agents for the job of capturing Goldfoot, the AIP contains additional footage of the machine obviously malfunctioning before the selection is made. The II, on the other hand, opts for the more subtle approach of cutting from the wires crossed by Goldfoot to Benson pulling the cards sent up by the computer.

As Franco and Ciccio enter the room of generals in their ridiculous detective garb—Franco sporting a large, water-squirting boutonniere, Ciccio wearing a deerstalker cap and clenching a pipe in his teeth—the AIP cuts to an exclusive scene in Rosanna's apartment, where Bill Dexter is still kissing her. She puts him off, explaining that she likes him, but prefers to be romanced slowly. They talk and Rosanna makes the important suggestion that Bill get to know "the two idiots" who have been assigned to the Goldfoot case, because "if you join them and solve the case, you'll get back into SIC!"

As the conversation ends, we discover that Dr. Goldfoot has been spying on the couple. "That Bill Dexter makes me nervous," he confides to Fong, "and I absolutely *must* have that girl Rosanna!" Fong is surprised, saying, "Ah! So you *do* have a heart after all, Dr. Goldfoot!" To which the doctor petulantly replies, "I don't want to oscillate her, I want to duplicate her!"

II: It is curious that the II retains the scene of Fong chloroforming Rosanna and replacing her with an identical Girl Bomb, because all later reference to the substitution is omitted!

AIP: In this version, Fong's abduction of Rosanna is interrupted by the unexpected arrival of Bill Dexter. The duplicate playfully greets Bill by covering his eyes with her hands, allowing Fong to furtively escape with the real Rosanna in tow. The robo-Rosanna puts on some seductive music and dances provocatively around the apartment, hoping to lure the intrepid agent into a fatal kiss, but Bill sees through her when she agrees to have a cup of coffee. "I *love* coffee!" she purrs. Bill accuses her of being one of Goldfoot's Girl Bombs, and while stalking him through the apartment, she accidentally electrocutes herself, causing her to hyperactivate and explode into several pieces. Bill declares that the real Rosanna must be at Dr. Goldfoot's villa and exits.

Rosanna's abduction by Fong, Antonelli's most erotic scene, and Bill's reason for driving out to the villa—all missing from the II version.

Back at the laboratory, Goldfoot amuses himself by combing his hair differently, donning an eye patch, and asking Fong who he looks like. Fong guesses "Dr. Goldfoot," but the preening villain sternly corrects him: "I look just like Gen. Willis!" Their bickering is interrupted by a phone call, announcing the arrival of a meat truck carrying a side of beef for Goldfoot's pet piranha fish.

II: Here, the same scene is relocated to a point after Franco and Ciccio are shown prowling around the grounds of the villa and discovering the piranha in the pool. The scene also omits the dialogue referring to Gen. Willis (not yet introduced in this version) and begins with Goldfoot on the telephone—the Italian dialogue rewrites the scene so that the call alerts him to the presence of the two idiots on the grounds. Because Vincent Price's hair is combed differently here, in this context without explanation, the inconsistency draws undue attention to itself as an apparent continuity error.



GOLDFOOT *eludes the notice of SIC and the Italian Army by posing as a bearded, pregnant, beach ball-bouncing nun.*

Although the AIP retains the scene introducing Dr. Goldfoot's pool of piranha, the two subsequent "payoff" scenes of Franco and Ciccio's interaction with the carnivorous fish are both cut from that version. In the first, Franco dips his foot into the swimming pool to test the water, and has part of his shoe eaten. Immediately, they are rushed from behind by one of Goldfoot's thugs and he lands in the pool. Franco helpfully reaches out to the hand extending from the water, to help the poor fellow out, but finds the hand attached to the arm of a complete skeleton. In terror, the two idiots flee the scene, running into various booby traps along the way, including two rows of large sabres that spring out of an innocent-looking hedge. They manage to escape before the front gate closes on them.

AIP: Here we cut directly from Goldfoot's comment about the diminished appetite of his piranhas to the abrupt arrival of Col. Benson and his troops—whom Franco and Ciccio presumably summoned after making their getaway.

II: Just before Col. Benson arrives with his military might, the II adds some shots of buttons being pushed in the laboratory, which effect certain changes on the grounds. The menacing sabres retreat once again into the hedges, and a sign appears outside the front gate, reading *"Collegia della Malvezza."*

As Dr. Goldfoot—disguised as a nun (a bearded and apparently pregnant nun, at that!)—supervises gymnastics among his shapely "students" for the amusement of Col. Benson, Franco and Ciccio interrupt to alert their superior to the piranha pool. Goldfoot sends a barefooted Fong, posing as a gardener, into the pool to prove otherwise, whispering to him that the fish have been moved. Fong wades into the pool without incident. Franco and Ciccio sneak away to explore the interior of the villa. While snooping around the bathroom for clues, they are attacked by yet another



BAVA *used a mirror-lined room to multiply a limited number of extras into a veritable army of Girl Bombs.*

henchman, who falls into the bathtub—where he is reduced to a floating skeleton by the piranhas secreted in the water.

AIP: The two piranha scenes incorporate the only macabre imagery Bava was able to interject into the picture, but Sam Arkoff found Franco and Ciccio's antics so insufferable that the scenes were scrapped anyway.

Given the removal of this footage, in the AIP it appears that Col. Benson arrives, stays long enough only to pass a beach ball around with the exercising "student body," then makes a speedy getaway with his soldiers.

II: After being left behind by Benson in the clutches of Dr. Goldfoot, the II dissolves to a shot of Franco and Ciccio, tied up together, stumbling into the laboratory, nervous and upset by their predicament. Franco attempts to calm his nerves by turning a dial that he confuses for a radio control, thus sending the Girl Bomb duplicator into hyperdrive. The lab is soon filled with *donne bomba* asking the two idiots how they might serve their masters. As more and more of the shapely robots dance out of the machine, a wordless musical number begins.

Sprightly and impish, the sequence is one of the most enjoyable in the II, not least of all for Bava's clever camera tricks which transform a core group of no more than ten or fifteen girls into a veritable army. This is mostly achieved by lining the walls with mirrors—an obvious trick for Bava—but the sequence also contains one of his most successful, faceted, multiple exposures, as the camera appears to look down into the lab from the criss-crossing steel beams of its rafters—which provided the facets of the effect.

AIP: All of this sequence, prior to Goldfoot's outraged entrance and whistle-blowing, was cut from the AIP, though unexplained portions were used as background to the AIP's end titles.

II: Here Franco's emergence from the villa onto its grounds, following his escape and prior to his meeting Bill, is slightly longer.

AIP: After Franco's escape, Dr. Goldfoot instructs Fong to give Ciccio a hypodermic injection to sedate him prior to duplication. As Fong stalks his foolish prey, Goldfoot receives a call from Peking, during which his exact plan for world domination is outlined. He tells his Red Chinese partner that some parts of their agreement must be changed, and he divides their designated territories of conquest to assign the fun spots (Las Vegas, Los Angeles, all the Playboy Clubs of the world, etc.) to him, while tossing the drearier scraps to Mao Tse-Tung. During this exchange, we cut away to Fong and Ciccio's game of cat-and-mouse around the duplication machine, which ends with Fong stabbing the needle into Ciccio's protruding posterior.

A trick shot of the duplication machine, showing Ciccio's evil twin materializing in a parallel glass tube, is also exclusive to the AIP.

II: Ciccio's robotic twin exits the laboratory and stomps around the villa grounds, enjoying its exorbitant strength by bending steel bars, felling trees, and splitting a park bench down the middle with a single blow. Still on the villa grounds is Franco, who is delighted to see his friend alive and well, and rushes toward him in a friendly embrace. The robo-Ciccio reciprocates by nearly crushing him to death. Horrified, Franco manages to extricate himself and runs away, calling Ciccio a maniac and a killer.

AIP: Bill Dexter finds his way to the laboratory, where he frees the real Ciccio (suffocating inside the glass-walled duplication chamber) and Rosanna (who has been consigned to a deep freeze chamber wearing only her negligée and heels). Bill thaws Rosanna with a kiss, but the couple are soon attacked by Ciccio's axe-wielding duplicate. ("You are living things," it says mechanically, "therefore you must die!") In a scene appearing in both versions, the robot's axe nearly missing Bill, slamming into some electrical cables, causing it to race around at hyperspeed before exploding into several pieces, as Rosanna's duplicate did in the earlier scene.

II: Franco returns to the villa outfitted in a metal helmet and other soldier garb, to have his revenge against his would-be killer. Naturally, he finds the real Ciccio and they engage in another comic, high-speed fight.

As Bill, Rosanna, and Franco and Ciccio exit the villa in search of the escaped Goldfoot & Co., they pause for a rest beside a religious sculpture of three cloaked, saintly figures—Goldfoot, Fong, and Hardjob in disguise. The mocking of religious statuary alone would have been enough for AIP to cut the scene, but Bava carries it further by having the Goldfoot saint light Bill's cigarette, while a tired Franco leans on the statue by resting his hand on Hardjob's breast.

AIP: Here, the sequence of Goldfoot & Co.'s drive into Rome—in a car hijacked from two very distracted, kissing lovers—is much longer.

First, there is additional footage in which a policeman observes the carjacking without interfering, only moving to make an arrest once he sees the two lovers kissing on a park bench. As the villains reach the outskirts of the city, Goldfoot asks directions from an armless statue, who gives the directions, then sprouts a white-painted human arm to accept a gratuity. Goldfoot drives through Rome, crashing into the Colosseum, passing the Piazza di Spagna, and tossing a coin into the Fontana di Trevi, which rewards him with a tremendous splash. The AIP also reveals the presence of our heroes in the back seat much earlier than in the II, as they make repeated attempts to rise up and seize Goldfoot, but are upset time and time again by his reckless driving, as he disguises himself as Gen. Willis behind the wheel while trying also to drive. Goldfoot instructs Fong and Hardjob to change their outfits too, and when they have difficulty in undressing, he interjects the surprisingly bold line, "Now I know why you Chinese are so in-screw-table!"

For most of the Luna Park/hot air balloon chase sequence, the AIP doesn't bother to dub the dialogue, taking its cue from Bava's silent comedy chase approach to save themselves the expense of looping it. When dialogue is absolutely necessary, silent-style intertitle cards are used. The AIP also adds some conscience, and a further joke, to the episode in which Franco used a pair of handy hedge-clippers to sever the rope hanging from the balloon, to which the angry manager of Luna Park is clinging for dear life. In the AIP, we can see Bill silently berating Franco for this comic act of murder (and such it is, because the angry cuss turns up a moment later as an angel, still irate, yelling at him from a cloud), causing him to drop the clippers. In an additional joke shot, we cut to a long-haired hippie strumming his guitar, interrupted as the falling clippers strike his head and shave half of his head completely bald.

Some dialogue is also changed at the point when our heroes knock at the door of Goldfoot's hijacked US Air Force bomber. Replacing the II dialogue ("Who is it?" "A friend." "Oh, a friend!"), Franco here identifies himself as a Fuller Brush salesman, who offers a pleased Goldfoot the free gift of a genuine Chinese back-scratcher.

II: As described in the synopsis above, the II concludes with Franco and Ciccio stumbling from the bomb into the custody of the Russian Army. Indicating the color of their red underwear and offering salutations of "Viva Trotsky!," they explain their friendly intentions and the fact that they have just saved the Kremlin from certain destruction. They are then treated like kings, seated at a large banquet table, and treated to wine and balalaika music. Just as they are about to be fed, their host receives a telephone call from Col. Benson—prompted by a call from the President, insisting that SIC deny that this episode ever took place—denying any knowledge of these two professed spies. Consequently, Franco and Ciccio are thrown into a Siberian prison and we proceed to the comic closing shot, as described.

AIP: Here the finale is more confusing. We see Rosanna escorting Bill to the airport. He kisses her, promising that he will never look at another woman again, and immediately notices a woman raising her skirt to adjust one of her stockings. She turns and runs to meet her plane, and Bill follows, not realizing that the woman is Hardjob, who pauses on the departure ramp to offer the pilot an unexplained "OK" gesture. Then the scene cuts to the snowy wastes of Russia, where Franco and Ciccio are imprisoned in their little fenced-in area. The disguised Goldfoot stops by to ask what they are cooking, and responds by saying that "we Russians" were responsible for inventing spaghetti. Ciccio invites him inside, and Goldfoot turns to the camera to say, "They're going to love these two in Siberia!" (the omission of this line from the II is concealed by a cutaway to the steaming spaghetti pot)—which doesn't make sense, as they are supposedly already in Siberia!

Music

Another significant difference between *Le spie vengono dal semifreddo* and *Dr. Goldfoot and the Girl Bombs* lies, predictably, in their music scoring. With the exception of the *"Bang Bang Kissene"* theme song (which is attributed to the Italian screenwriters and a third partner identified as De Paulis), the Italian version was scored by Coriolano "Lallo" Gori. Gori had been composing the music for Franco and Ciccio's films since 1963—a short time, perhaps, but time enough to have brought him already more than a half-dozen assignments. As always, AIP considered the Italian music inappropriate and had the completely re-edited picture completely rescored by their old stand-by, Les Baxter.

Lallo Gori entered the film music business in 1960 with Domenico Paolella's rock musical *I Teddy Boys della canzone* ("The Teddy Boys of Song"), starring Teddy Reno, Delia Scala, and Signora Passaguai herself, Ave Ninchi. His path to Franco and Ciccio came about as a result of scoring one of the earliest so-called "*mondo* movies," Osvaldo Civriani's *faux* documentary *Sexy proibito/Sexy Proibitissimo* (1962), a supposed, around-the-world tour of striptease clubs. When Fulvio Lucisano decided to star Franco and Ciccio in a satire of the *mondo* movement—*L'amore primitivo/Primitive Love* (1963), which also featured Jayne Mansfield and Mickey Hargitay—he hired Gori, who was young, affordable, and had some past experience in the genre. *L'amore primitivo* was a surprise hit, earning nearly 350 million *lire* [$218,000], and as he continued to make films with Franco and Ciccio, Lucisano kept Gori under contract as well.

Gori's original accompaniment is consistently comic, combining standard jazz instrumentation with funny sounds, like a wah-wah trumpet, boinging Jew's harp, or clackety spoons, and occasionally quoting well-known themes to venture ironic comments. It also displays a virtuoso sense of musicianship and *tempi*; the dazzling, light-fingered piano parts could only have been played by a true master, and the time signatures of several cues pose particular challenges (the cue heard during the hat check counter scene, for example, unfolds in 5/4—a difficult tempo rarely attempted in popular music, with the famous exception of Dave Brubeck's jazz classic "Time Out"). It is a quirky but clever score, a perfect accompaniment to the ripe antics of Franco and Ciccio, as it never lets the audience forget that the intention is to laugh, to have a good time, to not take things too seriously.

Bava (who often cited Charles Chaplin as his favorite director) pays visual *hommages* to silent comedy throughout his director's cut, beginning as early as Franco and Ciccio's accelerated hotel fight with Fabian. Lallo Gori responded to this element with a recurring use of "old timey," rinkytink or stride piano. Consequently, when these "silent comic" touches reoccur during the climactic chase, they feel perfectly germane—not abrupt and inappropriate, as they do in the AIP re-edit. If one can make any complaint about the Gori score, it is that it tends to objectify the action rather than involve the viewer in it, but this is actually quite faithful to Italian comedy traditions, which tend to be farcical rather than realistic.

Another undoubtedly apocryphal story from the AIP pressbook relates that the music for the Girl Bombs' dance sequence was based on a 5-minute theme improvised on the spot by Franco Franchi, who played it for the film's composer by blowing on a blade of grass stretched taut inside his cupped hands—a technique he learned while a child in Sicily. It is a peculiar story, because (1) the dance sequence was not included in the US version; (2) the music is virtually the same as the *"Bang Bang Kissene"* theme, minus the vocal, which is not credited to the film's Italian composer, much less its American one; and (3) the AIP version was scored by Les Baxter, who never visited the set and, we can therefore assume, never got any ideas from Franco Franchi blowing on grass.

Baxter's score takes a completely different approach to that of Gori. The American score is very accessible, buoyant without being comic, and at times, is very much influenced by the freewheeling instrumentals of Herb Alpert and the Tijuana Brass ("Spanish Flea," "Tijuana Taxi"), which were

popular at the time. While Gori's score is unfailingly witty and energetic, Baxter's is sometimes leaden, particularly when it complements the swaying hips of the Girl Bombs with "bump-and-grind" music. It also has an annoying tendency to telegraph and underline comic bits with all the subtlety of an avalanche. That said, the rock-percussive cues heard during the Luna Park chase lend that sequence a fun, propulsive energy it doesn't otherwise have. The theme song heard at the end of the picture—composed by AIP's resident songsmiths Guy Hemric and Jerry Styner (*Beach Party, Beach Blanket Bingo*), and performed by the manufactured Tower Records act "The Sloopys"—tries its best to turn the film's unmelodious title into a lyric and is sung endearingly off-key.

Baxter's rescoring lays heavily on the AIP cut, like a dense, waxy build-up that, along with the dubbing and the other post-production artifice, makes *Dr. Goldfoot and the Girl Bombs* seem less like a movie than a weird, Third World recreation of an AIP movie.

Commentary

Over the years, so much of the critical commentary regarding these two related films has been dismissive that none of it has been very well considered or meaningful. It isn't enough to look at these films and declare that Mario Bava was miscast as director and disabled by an unfamiliar milieu and a hopeless script. In fact, Bava was not a poor choice to direct this picture; he was thoroughly experienced in the art of comic filmmaking, having collaborated on some of the finest works of Aldo Fabrizi, Vittorio De Sica, Totò, and Alberto Sordi and proven himself adept at visually maximizing the humor of their performances onscreen. Furthermore, the raw material of the *Dr. Goldfoot and the Girl Bombs* script contains several narrative components seemingly tailored to Bava's particular universe. In retrospect, the *ragazze bomba* are not unlike the mannequins of *Sei donne per l'assassino, Il rosso segno della follia/Hatchet for the Honeymoon,* and *Lisa and the Devil,* which were rooted in Bava's childhood recollections of finding full body sculptures and sculpted body parts in his father's workshop.

Appropriately, in this context, Goldfoot himself is somewhat influenced here by the example of Eugenio Bava. Far more than in Norman Taurog's *Dr. Goldfoot and the Bikini Machine,* the Goldfoot of the sequel often suggests the ingenious, flamboyant, bohemian inventor that Bava portrayed when describing his father in interviews. When Goldfoot takes to the streets, he dons a wide-brimmed black hat, cape, and velvet ascot ensemble that is closely modelled on the "*avant garde*" clothing styles worn by Eugenio in photographs taken in the early 20th century.

The nature of the Girl Bombs also presented Bava with the opportunity to further explore two of his recurring themes: romantic betrayal and the dangers of erotic temptation. The "kiss kiss bang" dealt by these shapely robots can be read as a comic reduction of the mutual murder that bonds Nevenka and Kurt at the end of *La frusta e il corpo,* Max and Cristiana at the end of *Sei donne per l'assassino,* or any number of lovers in *Ecologia del delitto/Twitch of the Death Nerve.* Elements of the nascent "body count" subgenre are also in evidence, as it is Goldfoot's specific plan to put nine generals out of commission before an important summit conference. This detail is emphasized in the AIP version when the explosion of Gen. Willis is followed by Goldfoot's comment to the audience, "And then there were none"—a direct reference to the American title of the Agatha Christie novel that started it all. (Bava reportedly disliked Christie's novel, which may explain why the reference was not retained in the Italian cut.)

Bava's interpretation of this admittedly silly, half-baked material is also more emphatically erotic than anything in the juvenile *Dr. Goldfoot and the Bikini Machine.* His Girl Bombs are not the wholesome, bikini'd beauty queens of Taurog's film, but slinkier, sexier, and more street-wise, with a slightly sinister aspect. When Fong replaces Rosanna (a girl who protests that Bill kisses too much) with her duplicate, the shadings of Laura Antonelli's facial expressions change immediately—not to a blank, emotionless state, but to a darkly knowing aspect of sexual experience and mechanical superiority. The duplicate dedicates herself to seducing Bill right away, and unlike Taurog's earlier picture (in which kissing was portrayed as the ultimate act between the sexes), there is no question that the robo-Rosanna is tempting Bill with the promise of more than her lips. Visually, both versions of the Bava film verge on prurience in their appreciation of the flaunted female form, encouraging memories of



ROSANNA*'s robot double gets so turned-on by SIC agent Bill Dexter that she falls to pieces.*

Bava's comic cameo in *Evil Eye* as the leering portrait of Uncle Augusto.

The film's slapstick humor is often laborious, and its eventual retreat into silent movie mannerisms is awkward—excruciating in the American version, while almost charmingly nostalgic in the Italian edition. What is most interesting about the picture, in comedic terms, is Bava's occasional attention to surreal or absurdist humor, which shows a certain debt to the films of Richard Lester. (It must be Bava's contribution, as it has no basis in the Kaufman/Heyward script.) To note a few examples: the conversation between Goldfoot and Fong, on opposite sides of an *open* car door, neither of them able to hear the other until the window is rolled down; Goldfoot sharing the frame with Fong and Hardjob and saying, "we Chinese"; the Luna Park scenes in which the heroes naïvely "pursue" the villains on various amusement rides (helicopters, trains) where there is no possibility of gaining on the enemy; Franco hitting Fong twice on the head with a large metal wrench to no effect, but knocking him cold when he experimentally hits *himself* on the head; and the open pen that is Franco and Ciccio's Siberian prison, seemingly vulnerable to all the harsh elements yet admitting cold air only when the barbed wire gate is opened.

Bava *was* an inappropriate choice to direct, however, in terms of the script's political content, because as a private citizen, he was essentially apolitical. As director of this script, he was able to distill the comedy from it, but not the satire. Admittedly, the script's satiric content isn't very deep (one suspects it was moreso in Robert Kaufman's initial draft), but in a film that touches on such subjects as the precarious relationships between world powers, the vanities of the military, our increasing dependency and trust on machines, and the imminent danger of nuclear war, *Le spie vengono dal semifreddo* might have had more lasting appeal had it given its audience something more substantial than bubble gum to chew.

But bubble gum was exactly what Italian audiences wanted. When *Le spie vengono dal semifreddo* was released to Italian theaters on July 29, 1966, it was an immediate success, eventually grossing more than 365 million *lire* [$228,000] at the boxoffice. Incredible as it may seem—especially given the film's universally bad reputation—Franco and Ciccio gave Mario Bava the biggest Italian hit of his career.

In America, however, *Dr. Goldfoot and the Girl Bombs* was a disaster, pure and simple. US boxoffice figures for the film are not available, but no one affiliated with the picture was, or is, too happy to discuss it. Every failed motion picture demands a martyr, someone ultimately accountable for the losses incurred, and though Bava was in no way responsible for the mess made of his picture in a Los Angeles editing suite, he would pay the price for it. Deke Heyward's reports to Sam Arkoff about Bava's depressed state of mind during the production somehow—we cannot say how without access to studio correspondence—became inflated into yet another story of a nervous breakdown, and the American cash cow finally broke their ties with the artisan who made *Black Sunday* and *Black Sabbath*. AIP's co-production contract with Italian International was not renewed.

Consequently, Bava's biggest hit lost him the opportunity to helm a project with the potential to become another masterpiece of terror: *Scarlet Friday*, AIP's long-planned adaptation of "The Dunwich Horror." This signature tale of his favorite writer, H. P. Lovecraft would have reunited Bava with Boris Karloff and Christopher Lee.

"It was first mentioned [to me] by Mario Bava," Lee recounted in a 1967 interview. "He was given a script by American International. Boris didn't like the script, I understand; I was given it and thought it needed a great deal of revision. It was advertised that we were going to do it together . . . and since then, there's been a complete and utter silence. I'm still hoping; it's a great subject, but very difficult to do . . . like most of Lovecraft's work. Frightfully difficult to do it *as he wrote it* because he put so many strange and extraordinary beings into his stories that they would be impossible to translate into the physical these days. Virtually impossible, I think."[6]

The film would have provided Bava with an extraordinary opportunity, and considering how brilliantly he had evoked the unknowable, eldritch creatures and atmospheres of Lovecraft in cheap vehicles like *Caltiki il mostro immortale* and *Terrore nello spazio,* the failure of *Scarlet Friday* to materialize must be counted as one of the great missed opportunities of his career. But after *Dr. Goldfoot and the Girl Bombs,* and hearing exaggerated rumors about Bava's depressed state of mind, AIP effectively withdrew from their collaborations with Italian International and began focusing their attention on British co-productions.

As for *Scarlet Friday,* it resurfaced in trade ads under the title *Dunwich* in 1969, with AIP's new youth star Peter Fonda announced in the lead and Russell still listed as screenwriter. When the film was finally released as *The Dunwich Horror* in 1970—a year after Karloff's death—Fonda's role was played by Dean Stockwell, the director was AIP's Lovecraft veteran Daniel Haller, and the roles written for Karloff and Lee were played, respectively, by Ed Begley and Lloyd Bochner. No longer attributed to Russell, the script was signed by future *L.A. Confidential* director Curtis Hanson, Henry Rosenbaum and Ronald Silkovsky (who had served as editor on Haller's 1968 release *The Wild Racers*). The extent of their revisions is open to speculation, but given the original casting plans and the locations used for *Die, Monster, Die!*, Russell probably scripted the action to take place in England, instead of Lovecraft's New England. If so, Bava's refusal to work outside of Italy may have also played a part in his forfeiture of the project.

Had the film been made, the production surely would have been overseen by Deke Heyward, who remained in AIP's employ on the continent through the early 1970s, working on such films as *Witchfinder General*/*The Conqueror Worm* (1968), *DeSade* (1969), *The Abominable Dr. Phibes* and *Murders in the Rue Morgue* (both 1971).

While awaiting Deke's email responses to my questions about the Bava/Lovecraft project and its dissolution, I read online that he had passed away, owing to complications from pneumonia, on April 3, 2002, at the age of 81. The comments he contributed to this chapter represent the last interview ever given by "the Third Man of AIP."

It was in the wake of the *Goldfoot* debacle that Mario Bava was approached by someone else in the vanguard of his young admirers. A young artist from Turin, Armando Valcauda was so inspired by Bava's work that he would later enter the field of special effects himself, contributing some enchantingly old-fashioned stop motion and optical effects to several films, including the 1980s *Hercules* remakes of Luigi Cozzi.

Valcauda recalls the circumstances of his first encounter with the *Maestro*: "I was at the age of 21 when one of my friends told me, in passing, that his uncle was a cousin of Mario Bava. I was a mad fan of his movies, and had read only some minor coverage of them in *Midi-Minuit Fantastique—I had to meet him!* One evening, while visiting the house of my uncle, I called and, with the greatest emotion, spoke with Bava! We made a date to meet the following week, and I went to Rome. It was a hot day, in June 1966, when I met Mario Bava near his house, in the historical part of Rome, in the Via Ripetta, near the Piazza del Popolo.

"It was a wonderful experience for me. Our meeting lasted only twenty minutes, but I explained to him my great enthusiasm for his movies, paying special attention to my impressions of *La maschera del demonio* and its fantastic atmosphere of black-and-white. In reply, he told me about his trouble with the scorpions that crawled out of the mask—some of them got loose on the set, and he said the result was amusing, dramatic! I wanted very much to work with him, but did not succeed because our cinema was always in a state of crisis. So I left Rome and continued to work in television and short subjects, in Turin and Milan."

Bava was probably somewhat embarrassed by Valcauda's unabashed adulation, but he must have also found his sincerity endearing. They would not meet again for another ten years, and then in a more professional context.

6 Michel Parry, "*CoF* Interviews Christopher Lee, Part Two," *Castle of Frankenstein* 11, 1967, 19–20.

Eugenio Bava 1886–1966

On September 9, 1966—not long before the US release of *Dr. Goldfoot and the Girl Bombs*, and less than a year after the passing of his wife, Emma—Eugenio Bava died under almost anecdotal circumstances.

Still vigorous and industrious at the age of 80, Eugenio had just finished shopping for sculpting supplies on Via Gregorio VII when he stepped outside, began to cross the street and walked into the path of an oncoming automobile. The driver braked well enough in advance so that the impact was lessened; Eugenio was knocked down, but not disabled by the accident. To the surprise of onlookers, the octogenarian rose calmly to his feet, protesting to all concerned that he felt fine. Nevertheless, he was taken to a nearby hospital for a quick examination. It was there, two hours later, that Eugenio Bava died as a result of undetected internal injuries sustained in the accident.

The inventor had been killed by a machine.

There was only one published report of Eugenio's death that mentioned him by name. It appeared many weeks belatedly, on December 7, in the Vatican's daily newspaper *L'Observatore Romano*. The unsigned article—surely arranged by his daughter, Elena—made no mention of Eugenio's extraordinary career in the cinema, nor of the many inventions he had conceived which remain in popular use today; instead, he was eulogized for the work which had occupied him throughout his private life, particularly during his years of retirement: his sculptures of the Saints.



L'OSSERVATORE ROMANO — 7 Dicembre 1966 — N. 232 (32.358)

UNO SCULTORE DI SANTI

EUGENIO FRANCESCO BAVA

Il giorno 9 dello scorso settembre nella cronaca dei giornali romani del mattino si leggeva: « Un ottantenne, investito da un'auto, sulla via Gregorio VII decedeva due ore dopo all'Ospedale Santo Spirito dove era stato trasportato ». Questo ottantenne era Eugenio Bava, una figura di artista che avrebbe meritato una ben più ampia notazione in quanto ha lasciato nelle chiese, e non solo d'Italia, opere degne che attestano la sua sensibilità e la umanità della sua arte.

Una morte ignorata, confusa tra le tante altre che ogni giorno costellano l'asfalto delle città e sulle quali oramai si sorvola distrattamente, perché considerate il naturale contributo all'attuale civiltà meccanica. Ma lui stesso, in vita, volle essere ignorato, l'umiltà era la sua divisa, raramente, e solo se sollecitato, firmò le sue opere poiché, compreso dalla sua grandezza morale e spirituale dei Santi che effigiava, considerava effimera la sua arte.

Merito di Eugenio Bava è stato quello di uscire dalla tradizione, che, salvo rare eccezioni, trasferiva le figure dei santi in opere artigianali, primitive, che confinavano in figure da teatro dei pupi a, che solo la fede faceva accettare e venerare. La sua arte si rialacciava a quella dei grandi Maestri e come questi operava. Ogni sua opera era studiata e sofferta; studiata perché prima di porre mano alla creta si immergeva nella vita del Santo, leggendo le opere e collocandolo nel suo tempo: sofferta per la ricerca della perfezione anatomica e perché le esigenze dei Padri committenti lo obbligavano a sovrastrutture che spesso alteravano l'opera originale. Sovente doveva trarre gli elementi per la somiglianza da iconografie imperfette e spesso contrastanti. Supplivа allora con la sua sensibilità guidata ed esasperata dall'approfondita conoscenza delle caratteristiche del santo. E sono forse queste le sue migliori. Si può ben dire che creava per una sua gioia interiore.

Altra peculiarità quella di donare, donare agli altri che così poco aveva. La sua vasta opera non gli diede la ricchezza, non appagò sul suo successo, non ebbe mai riconoscimenti ufficiali. Coerente con i suoi principi respinse offerte ben più remunerative perché non volle confondere il sacro con il profano. Un uomo sereno che in piena maturità le viveva con entusiasmo giovanile.

Quando Papa Pio XII scese in S. Pietro per la Beatificazione di Innocenzo XI e per venerarne le reliquie racchiuse nell'effige in argento da lui eseguita, umilmente si cercato per essere presentato al Pontefice, che desiderava esprimergli la Sua ammirazione per quell'opera degna di tanto Tempio. Commosso e felice, dell'ombra come sempre, nascondeva la sua gioia di artista nell'umiltà che gli era cara.

Questo era Eugenio Bava sepolto con quattro righe di cronaca il 9 settembre 1966.

* * *

Si è spenta così una vita esclusivamente consacrata a far rivivere, attraverso un'arte davvero degna di questo nome, grandi figure che la Chiesa ha elevato agli onori degli altari. Egli non era, anche se ottantenne, un pensionato ma un attivo artista che viveva solo del frutto del suo lavoro.

È evidente che non ci è permesso esporre l'intero elenco dei suoi lavori, compresi quelli rimasti incompiuti per l'improvvisa tragica sua morte, ma quelli che ci sarà consentito accennare basteranno a dimostrare la sua fama artistica portata nel campo religioso per ottenere che l'arte compenetrasse la religione e questa a sua volta elevasse e spiritualizzasse l'arte.

Queste sue opere inoltre non appartengono soltanto ad un'epoca storica, ma vanno dal tempo della Chiesa primitiva, con S. Pancrazio, il martire quattordicenne fino alle persone canonizzate e beatificate dai grandi Pontefici Giovanni XIII e Paolo VI.

In questo esteso arco di tempo incontriamo eminenti figure di cui il prof. Bava ha realizzato statue per incarico dei Postulatori dei processi di beatificazione o canonizzazione o delle famiglie religiose alle quali appartenevano.

S. Francesco Borgia
(Scultura di Eugenio Francesco Bava)

SEGUE NELL'ULTIMA PAGINA DEL LIBRO

EUGENIO BAVA*'s death notice, as it originally appeared in L'OBSERVATORE ROMANO, illustrated with a photo of one of his Saintly sculptures.*

A Sculptor of Saints
Eugenio Francesco Bava

Last September 9, in the local section of the Roman newspapers, it was reported: "An 80-year-old man, knocked down by a car on Via Gregorio VII, died two hours later at the Santo Spirito Hospital where he had been taken." This 80-year-old man was Eugenio Bava, an artist who was deserving of more than this short notice, because he left in our churches—and not only in the churches of Italy—works that speak eloquently of the sensitivity and humanity of his art.

An overlooked death, confused among the many casualties that are scattered daily on the asphalt of our streets, and that we are accustomed to passing by without paying heed, because we consider them to be the natural contribution to our mechanical civilization. But the man himself, when he was alive, preferred to be ignored; humility was his trademark. Rarely, if ever, did he sign his works, and only when he was urged to do so, because he had such respect for the moral and spiritual greatness of the Saints he depicted, that he considered his own efforts ephemeral.

One of his accomplishments was bringing an end to that tradition, with few exceptions, that limited the illustrations of the Saints to primitive works, similar to a puppet theater, that only the faithful could accept and appreciate. His art was connected to the art of the great Masters, and he worked as they worked. All of his works were painstakingly thought-out—before plunging himself into his clay, he plunged himself into the life of each Saint, reading about them and the time in which they lived. He experienced great pain in his restless pursuit of anatomical perfection, and also because the demands of certain client countries forced him to useless adjuncts that often distorted his original works. In his search for likenesses, he sometimes had to rely on defective iconographies, which were at times conflicting. He compensated with sensitivity, uplifted by his deep insight into the Saints' characteristics. And maybe these are his best works. You could say that he created for the sake of his own inner joy. He also had another joy: the joy of giving to people in need, although he himself did not have much to give. His big corpus of work did not make him a rich man; he never boasted of his success, never begged for official awards or recognition. Consistent with his principles, he sometimes refused offers that would have paid him well because he did not want to mix the sacred and the profane. He was a peaceful man who lived his old age with youthful enthusiasm.

When Pope Pius XII came down to San Pietro to beatify Innocenzo XI and to venerate his relics made in silver effigy by Bava, he was sought to be introduced to the Pope, who wanted to tell him of his appreciation for his work, which he considered worthy of a Temple—but to no avail. Moved and happy, he stayed in the background as was his custom, finding his artistic fulfillment in the humility that was so dear to him. Such was Eugenio Bava, buried with four lines of local news on September 9, 1966.

And so ended a life that was entirely devoted to restoring to life, through an Art worthy of that name, the great figures who were raised to the honors of the altars of the Church. Though he was 80, he was not a retired man, still living on the fruits of his labors. It would be impossible to draw up a complete list of his works, including the ones left unfinished by his sudden and tragic death, but we will quote just a few of them, to illustrate his artistic effort in the religious field, in order that art could permeate religion, and so that religion could raise art to the level of the spiritual.

These works aren't restricted to one historical period, but range from the first days of the Church (with St. Pancrazio, the 14-year-old martyr), to such great Popes as Giovanni XIII and Paolo VI, beatified and canonized. In this extended arc of time, we find outstanding figures whose statues Bava realized on behalf of the Postulant of the beatification or canonization processes, or of the religious families to whom these figures belong.

These are the principal works, in chronological order:

St. Filippo Benizi; St. Giuliana Falconieri; S. Francesco Borgia (this statue is venerated in the Church of Maldonato in Madrid); St. Francesco Caracciolo; B. Giovanni Battista della Concezione (Corduba, Spain); St. Camillo de Lellis; B. Tommaso da Cori; B. Vincenzo Maria Strambi; B. Anna Maria Taigi (Bava created two of this personage, one resides in Montreal, Canada, while the other is in the Church of Santa Crisostomo in Rome); B, Placido Riccardi; St. Francesca Cabrini (there are

two such statues, one in Rome and the other in New York); B. Elena Guerra; B. Luigi Palazzolo; St. Carlo da Sezze; Sister Bertilla Boscardin; B. Nunzio Sulprizio (two works, one in Pescosansonesco, Albruzza, the other in Naples); B. Ignazio de Santhià.

The Church of Santa Maria della Minerva in Rome once entrusted him with reassembling the remains of the body of Pio IX (which is venerated in Santo Lorenzo al Verano), and also the body of Innocenzo XI.

The greatness of the Saints and the Blessed listed above required a particular power of expression in the artist so entrusted to realize their likeness, and it is to the merit of his clients that they found in Bava someone who was worthy of being called "the sculptor of the Saints."

It is therefore natural to join his admirers, who, when they learned of his tragic end, said they were confident that the Saints—whom he had helped to live again with such realism—would have joined together promptly to raise his spirit and ask for the grace that he might be allowed to remain with them as their companion in eternal bliss.

Also, His Holy Father Pope Paul VI was so gracious as to send his [Eugenio's] daughter—a nun of the Ancelle del Sacro Cuore in Rome—a wreath blessed by him and the assurance of his prayers for her loved one, and his paternal apostolic blessing to all of his relatives, which he hoped would bring them deep spiritual comfort. [7]

Mario Bava had become a father-in-law, a grandfather, had the greatest domestic success of his career—and lost both of his parents—all within the span of a single year.

Eugenio's death must have been shattering to Mario. He was known to complain about his burden of heredity, but it had been his greatest endeavor to please his father for as long as he could remember. Eugenio was evidently the kind of father who boasted of his son's accomplishments only to others, never making demonstrations of more direct approval. Mario had taken care to include his father in his own projects, as his own directorial career coincided with Eugenio's retirement from the Istituto LUCE, which indicates a close and irreplaceable bond, but it would be a mistake to assume that their relationship was entirely positive or uncomplicated. Everyone who observed the interactions of the two men at first hand seems to remember it differently, yet taken together, these different views offer a certain *Rashomon* of truth.

"Theirs was a strict relationship," ventures Mario's son Lamberto. "Since Eugenio also worked in the cinema, there was not much time for family. He was never at home, and it was not until he and my father began working together that they established a relationship. It was a different time—a time when fathers paid almost no attention to their children until they grew up, when they could begin to communicate with them on an adult level."

Armando Govoni, who worked as the production supervisor of Mario Bava's earliest directorial efforts, witnessed the father–son relationship at close proximity on the set. He describes Eugenio Bava as "a very careful man, a wonderful camera mechanic, but also a northern Piedmont character." Govoni's friend, screenwriter Ernesto Gastaldi (who passed his comments along to me), explained the Piedmont character reference as meaning "calm, kind, logical, but a bit cold." Gastaldi, who hails from the Piedmont region himself, and who also knew and worked for Bava, added, "Mario spoke very little about his father; it wasn't his favorite subject, if you want to know the truth."

Cameron Mitchell had witnessed the relationship between father and son on the set of *Gli invasori*: "[Eugenio], I'm told, was a very fine technician and taught Mario a great deal. I know that he helped Mario, but I think Mario went beyond his father. Mario would never admit this, however, because *Papà* was always the boss."

Mitchell's opinion was shared by actor Luciano Pigozzi, who observed Mario and Eugenio together during the filming of *La frusta e il corpo*. "The father was an old man, but he didn't die in bed—a car came along and knocked him down. I think, maybe, this was good for Mr. [Mario] Bava, because he was good when he worked alone, you understand?" (I didn't, so I pressed Pigozzi for a further explanation.) "Let me explain," he said. "When the father was still alive, people in our business would go to Bava's movies and if they saw something good, they would say, 'Eh! Maybe his father did it . . . maybe the father helped his son.' But after a certain point, they could no longer say this, because the father was already dead! I think [Mario] was more talented than his father."

Ordinarily, it might have been a time when Mario could show his colleagues that he was capable of standing and working alone, but Eugenio Bava happened to die at a time when the world of Italian filmmaking was also dying. With the *pepla* now out of fashion, with films *dell'orrore* on the decline, and with the cultural pulse having moved east from Rome's *la dolce vita* to Swinging London, the Italian cinema was now deeply entrenched in crisis. As Eugenio died, Mario found that his old professional ports were also receding from his life. Titanus Studios, where he had photographed and directed some of his biggest projects (including *La donna più bella del mondo* and *La maschera del demonio*), made national headlines during this period after filing for bankruptcy. Galatea, the production house responsible for all of Bava's films during the lucrative 1958–64 period, was dissolved when Nello Santi's wife sued him for divorce. And given their feelings about the latest picture he had given them, Bava seemed to have permanently queered his once-prosperous relationship with AIP.

In the years since he had worked with them, virtually all of Bava's former colleagues—Roberto Rossellini, Vittorio De Sica, Federico Fellini, Gina Lollobrigida, Mario Soldati, Michelangelo Antonioni—had become international celebrities. Now, a new generation of young Italian directors like Marco Ferreri, Bernardo Bertolucci, and Pier Paolo Pasolini were emerging with small films hailed as masterpieces and heaped with awards. Mario Bava, on the other hand, was now a 52-year-old grandfather, working for producers who wrote him rubber checks for sweeping up other directors' messes and directing what was commonly perceived as junk—when his films received distribution at all. There were also the ongoing rumors within the industry about his mental state.

Perversely, Bava would continue to fan the flames of these rumors. In one of his earliest print interviews, he described his professional state of mind: "I've been on the verge of a chronic nervous breakdown for years, due to overwork. I'm unable to say 'No' to a check, even if I know it's likely to bounce. You have no idea how many times my producers have robbed me with these films! I direct them, I run to the bank to cash my check, to pay the bills that gnaw at me, only to discover that the check is no good—that I've worked for nothing! Then I have no choice but to accept the next film I'm offered, because with all the back taxes I have to pay, I'm in no position to pick and choose. Also, I work with the same crew that's been with me for twenty years—the camera operator, my son, the electrician . . . If I stop working, how are they going to eat?" [8]

In another interview, he went so far as to itemize his own personal flaws: "The problem with me is that I accept everything that is offered to me, and also, I can't be serious. I'm always joking, and to producers, it's inconceivable that a director should make jokes. But I've been in the film business for so long . . . I know everybody and everything, so how could I possibly take this absurd circus seriously?" [9]

These quotes show extraordinary candor, but also an extraordinary lack of concern—one might even say, a *self-destructive* lack of concern—for maintaining a sense of professional decorum in public forums. Bava refused to play the games that other directors played with the press; he scoffed at any attempt to discuss his work seriously, often pointed an accusing finger at the unprofessional standards of his industry and co-workers, and refused to be characterized as an artist. His approach was not likely to help him move ahead, but he wasn't working from a game plan. He would speak to the press—on those rare occasions when they cared enough to speak with him—with absolute frankness, taking interviewers into his confidence, relating the difficulties he encountered as a hard-working technician in an industry that, all too often, functioned without moral or aesthetic sense.

7 *L'Observatore Romano*, December 7, 1966. Translated from the Italian by Daniela Catelli.

8 Luigi Cozzi, *Il cinema dei mostri* (Rome, Italy: Fanucci Editore, 1987), 249–60.

9 Alfredo Castelli and Tito Monego, interview in *Horror* 1. 1969. Translated by Daniela Catelli.



THE PRE-CREDITS *bathtub murder of* NUDE . . . SI MUORE *reprises a similar death scene in* SEI DONNE PER L'ASSASSINO.

NUDE . . . SI MUORE

The Young, the Evil and the Savage

WHILE MOURNING the death of his father, Mario Bava was contacted by an old friend from America. Lawrence Woolner—the younger half of the Woolner Brothers team that successfully distributed *Hercules in the Haunted World* and *Blood and Black Lace* in the United States—had relocated to Rome with his wife Betty, and together they were setting up a new independent production company in partnership with Giuseppe "Joe" De Blasio.

As British screenwriter Tudor Gates (1930-2007) remembered: "Lawrence was quite old at the time, and Betty was much younger and pretty much the boss. Joe De Blasio was an Italian-American who had been a production manager for one of the US majors in the palmy days." A former Warner Bros. production supervisor, De Blasio came to the Woolners' new company with more than ten years of Italian film production experience, dating back to Robert Wise's epic *Helen of Troy* (1955).

Earlier in the decade, Lawrence "Larry" Woolner and his brother Bernard ("Bernie") had at least twice invited Bava to relocate to America, promising him all the work he could handle—as AIP's Nicholson and Arkoff had done before them. Bava had turned them all down, and now—several years later—the mountain had finally come to Mohammed. Woolner, with dreams of surpassing the box-office success of *Blood and Black Lace,* approached Bava with an idea about a killer stalking a school for young debutantes, which had been proposed to him by Tudor Gates and his writing partner, Brian Degas.

According to Gates (who had previously written an "adventure/musical" called *Dateline Diamonds*, 1965), his partnership with Degas was more practical than creative. "Brian was never a writer, by any stretch of the imagination," he revealed, "but he had an uncanny ability to pitch an idea and get it sold, which was never my forte. So we both did the plotting, I did the writing, he did the song-and-dance, and we shared the byline—until our partnership dissolved in the early '70s."

Bava accepted Woolner's invitation to direct the film, provisionally titled *Cry Nightmare.* In late May or early June, he settled down to work with the two English writers in Rome, plotting key scenes based on imagery that fired his visual imagination.

Tudor Gates: "I recall going over to Rome and staying at the American Palace, quite near the Woolners' modest offices. They rented a house right by the Hilton. [Brian and I] worked with Bava and his PA [Rosalba Scavia], who interpreted for us. She was a very plain girl, who was also his mistress. He explained that he was unhappily, but committedly, married—Italian-style. He did his own storyboarding, which made it very easy to communicate with him, in the sense that his intentions were very clear. He always knew exactly what effect he wanted to get. The script we wrote amused him. He laughed a lot and was a lovely man."

Asked how he arrived at his perception of Bava's personal relationship with Scavia, Gates explained: "I can only give you the unmistakable impression I had at the time, which was that she and Mario were a couple, and that Mario was married—unhappily—but bound to his wife by ties of custom, practice, and I suppose, faith. Rosalba, also being Catholic, seemed to accept this. There was no overt kissing or cuddling, or anything like that, but they behaved as intimates. If he took us to dinner, it would be with Rosalba as his companion, and not his wife."

When asked directly about the nature of her personal relationship with Bava, Rosalba Scavia answers, hesitantly: "He was very attached to his family, but not very forthcoming about his personal life. I had an occasional insight into that side of him, which may seem unusual for a director and a crew member, but we were close—well, yes, *close.* He told me some things about his personal life, but it would be hard to remember what he said exactly—plus, I don't want to upset anyone. Suffice to say, he was having problems at home and sometimes he wanted to escape from it all—but he did not allow many people to see that side of him. Not even his own son, I think. He used to talk about us being more than colleagues, more than friends. It would be indiscreet of me to say more."

The Script

A woman ("handsome, full-bodied, in her middle thirties") is drowned by a black-gloved intruder while bathing. Her nude body is placed inside a trunk and shipped by train to the Côte d'Azur, where it is met by a minibus that takes it, and a group of arriving people, to St. Hilda College, a school catering to the teenage daughters of "the best families of Europe and America." The minibus is driven by the school's caretaker old Simon; also aboard are his son, the school's riding instructor Richard ("32, handsome"); La Forêt, the gardener ("35, hunched, sitting alone . . . distorted, ugly, Quasimodo-like"), who is returning from vacation; and three new teachers recruited by the school for their holiday season: Miss Martin ("English, about 30, quite pretty but vacuous"), who has been at St. Hilda's before; Mrs. Clay ("about 37, good-looking but in a rather masculine way, rather severe in expression"), a widow dressed in black; and a swimming instructor, Mr. De Brazzi ("an Italian, 35, handsome, athletic"). It is summer and only a small percentage of the student body is in residence—the ones who can't be accommodated by the jet-setting lifestyles of their wealthy parents (thus saving the production the expense of several dozen extras and concentrating the focus and intimacy of the narrative).

While the new teachers make the acquaintance of headmistress Miss Tranfield ("English, aloof, upright, 55"), La Forêt moves the trunk to the school's storage cellar. The relationships at the school are all diverse but share a subterranean erotic current. Miss Martin is shown to a room connecting with that of Miss Tranfield, facilitating the continuation of a past lesbian relationship. La Forêt is a collector of pornographic photos, as well as a Peeping Tom. The students are all hot for members of the faculty, with hyper-imaginative Jill ("a plump and pert American girl with a lively personality") voicing particular interest in Mr. De Brazzi. Whereas Jill is the hyperimaginative type, fuelled by a steady diet of mystery fiction and fond of eavesdropping on others with a set of walkie-talkies sent by her father, there is also real romantic activity going on between a teacher and student. Richard is conducting a secret romance with Lucille Moffat ("French, 17, beautiful, blonde"), who is just a few days away from turning 18. He may have ulterior motives, as she stands to inherit over half a million pounds from her late parents' estate on her birthday. Lucille wants to elope with Richard, but he insists she must wait a few more days until she is of legal age. He agrees to meet with her later that night in the Insect House, an entomology museum maintained by the elderly Prof. Andre.

That night, while seeking a trunk that was supposed to have been picked up for her, student Betty Anne ("American, 17, brunette, attractive . . .") follows La Forêt's advice and looks in the storage cellar. There, searches for the

Nude . . . si muore

"Naked . . . You Die"
Working titles: *Cry Nightmare, Sette vergine per i diavolo.*
Filmed July – August 1967
Shot on location in Rome and on the French Riviera
First released: February 20, 1968
Perfectcolor, Cromoscope, 2.35:1, 98 minutes

Production: BGA (Rome), Super International Pictures (Rome). Producers: Virgilio De Blasi, Dante Amatulli. Executive producers: Lawrence Woolner and Giuseppi De Blasio. Director: Anthony M. Dawson [Antonio Margheriti]. Screenplay: Anthony Dawson and Frank Bottar [Franco Bottari]. [Uncredited: Tudor Gates and Brian Degas, with Mario Bava.] Story: John [Gianni] Simonelli. Director of photography: Frank Zuccoli [Fausto Zuccoli]. Art direction: Antonio Visone. Wardrobe: Annamode. Makeup: Piero Mecacci. Editor: Otello Colangeli. Music: Carlo Savina. "Nightmare" written by Carlo Savina, lyrics by Don Powell, sung by Rose Brennan. Distributor: DIFNE.

Michael Rennie (Inspector Duran), Mark Damon (Richard), Eleonora Brown (Lucille Moffat), Sally Smith (Jill), Ludmilla Luova (Miss Clay/Peter Moffat), Alan Collins [Luciano Pigozzi] (La Forêt), Frank De Rosa (Detective Gabon), Vivian Stapleton (Miss Tranfield), Pat Valturri [Patrizia Valturri] (Denise), Esther Masing (Miss Martin), Gianni Di Benedetto (De Brazzi), Val Marko [Valentino Macchi] (policeman), Aldo De Carellis (Prof. Andre), Katty Parker [Kathleen Parker], Sylvia [Silvia] Dionisio, Lawrence Gerard, Malisa Long [Longo], Paola Natale (girls), Robert Papiri [Umberto Papiri], John Hawkwood.

Australia: *The Young, the Evil and the Savage*, Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer
Belgium: *De Sadist van het Dertiende Uur,* "The Sadist of the 13th Hour"
France: *Le Sadique de la 13e Heure*
Germany: *Sieben Jungfrauen fur den Teufel,* "Seven Virgins for the Devil," 94m
Spain: *Crimen en la Residencia,* "Crimes in the Boarding House," 10/1/72
UK: *The Young The Evil and the Savage,* American International Pictures, 3/71, 81m 17s, Certificate "X," passed with no cuts
US: *The Young, the Evil and the Savage,* American International Pictures, 8/14/68, 82m. Video: *Schoolgirl Killer*, 78m



trunk in vain, the cellar is plunged into darkness by the sudden slamming of the door, and Betty Anne knows she is not alone. Seeing the face of the other person, she is relieved . . . until she is strangled to death. She is discovered missing at bedtime and the remaining students are confined to their rooms for the night. Learning that La Forêt was the last to see Betty Anne, Miss Tranfield questions him and follows his lead to the cellar; the girl is nowhere to be found. Despite the heightened security, Lucille manages to sneak out to the Insect House where, while waiting for her lover, she discovers Betty Anne's dead body concealed in an armoire. By the time Richard turns up, the corpse has vanished. Richard calms Lucille, but sends her back to her room for the present, agreeing to meet her at the swimming pool at 3:00 a.m.

To explain her absence from her room, and to cool off from the hot night, Lucille goes to the shower room, unaware that she is being furtively watched by La Forêt from a tree outside the window. Mrs. Clay discovers her and orders her back to her room immediately after her shower, but Lucille is discouraged from actually showering by a rustling in the tree. She leaves the water running, but another student, Cynthia, happens along and decides to take advantage of the water—only to be strangled by a shadowy figure on the other side of the shower curtain. When the body is first discovered, shrouded in the shower curtain, it is thought that Lucille was the victim. It is the second attempt on her life, the second time a young woman has died for being where Lucille was supposed to be.

Arriving at St. Hilda's to investigate the murder are Inspector Durand and Sgt. Perrier. Jill reports La Forêt's peeping to Mrs. Clay, who advises her to inform the police. Meanwhile, in his cabin on the grounds, La Forêt prepares for the inevitable visit from the authorities by burning his collection of erotica, with tears in his eyes. Suddenly the door opens, and as the gardener pleads his innocence, his visitor buries a scythe in his chest.

Durand questions Jill, who shows keen interest in joining the investigation

ITALIAN *due-foglia, art by Sandro Symeoni.*



198. EXT. THE SEA. NIGHT. (STOCK FOOTAGE)

AS THOUGH IN ANSWER TO JILL'S PLEA, the guns of the seventh fleet open out, muzzle flashes illuminating the night sky.

ANOTHER ANGLE: The battleship prows cut through the waves toward CAMERA, as "Anchors Aweigh" blares on the soundtrack.

ANOTHER ANGLE: Fighter planes make their rocket-assisted takeoff from all corners of the deck of an aircraft carrier.

ANOTHER ANGLE: Landing barges open their jaws like pre-historic monsters to disgorge a battalion of American Marines, with "From the Halls of Montezuma" now vying with "Anchors Aweigh."

ANOTHER ANGLE: On the beach, the Marines deploy themselves, and a battalion commander gives his instructions over a walkie-talkie. The voice which cuts in seems strangely girlish.

JILL (Voice Over): Come in, Red Zero . . .[1]

In actuality, Jill's voice is transmitted to the walkie-talkie left in Miss Tranfield's office, summoning Durand and his men to the caverns in the nick of time. In a humorous coda scene, Durand stops by Jill's room to thank her, just as her father arrives at the school to collect her. He drives a distinctive Aston Martin that identifies him as . . . James Bond!

as an amateur detective, but when the professionals are unreceptive to her enthusiasm, she plants one of her walkie-talkies in Miss Tranfield's office to keep abreast of new information. Lucille, upset by the events, begs Mrs. Clay to let Denise, a fellow student, stay in her room overnight. She later uses her as a decoy to occupy her bed as she sneaks out to keep her date with Richard by the pool. But as 3:00 a.m. nears, Inspector Durand—who has begun to theorize that Lucille may have been the intended victim of the murder—summons her to be questioned, and Lucille asks Denise to take a message to Richard at the pool. There, Denise is attacked by a man in scuba gear who tries to drown her; fortunately, her scream is overheard by Jill, who rushes to her defense and manages to repel the attacker and save Denise's life. The scuba-masked killer gets away, and De Brazzi is found nearby, wet, explaining that he was doing some experimental night diving.

In time, Durand discovers that Lucille has one living relative, a step-brother named Peter, who would have half a million good reasons to want her dead before her 18th birthday. He puts out an alert for any marauding young men. The next morning, the search party discovers the dead body of Betty Anne hidden on the grounds. Next, Mrs. Clay disappears—and her body is found in a lime pit on the property, recognizable only from her clothing. In her room, Durand finds a suicide note and a confession to the murders ("Don't ask why I did it . . . I don't know myself . . . Perhaps I am mad . . . Perhaps it was envy for their beauty and youth, for all the things that are no longer mine . . ."),

MICHAEL RENNIE *in one of his final roles, as Inspector Durand.*

but doesn't believe it to be anything more than a contrivance to throw him off the scent of the real maniac.

That night, Lucille sneaks out to meet Richard in a beachfront cave, where she discovers not her lover but her "affectionate step-brother," whose administration of her inheritance has been careless and greedy. He has been living in drag, disguised as Mrs. Clay, whom he drowned in her bathtub, packed into the trunk, and later dumped in the lime pit to discourage recognition of its true identity. As Jill surreptitiously audits the killer's confession via walkie-talkie, the script describes Lucille's rescue as being depicted in Jill's mind's eye:

Cry Nightmare was approached in the same serio-comic spirit as *La ragazza che sapeva troppo*—particularly its *Evil Eye* variant—with the character of Jill offering a contemporary reprise of Bava's prototypical mystery maven, Nora Davis/Drowson. At the same time, there was an obvious attempt to reprise various highlights from *Sei donne per l'assassino*—the bathtub drowning, the body dragged into the woods, the corpse discovered in the

armoire, etc.—but there is a certain redundancy in its use of watery murder settings (the bathtub, the shower, the swimming pool). Bava's contribution can also be detected in the surprise slaying from behind a curtain (*à la La frusta e il corpo*), in the phony suicide note of Mrs. Clay (which falsely characterizes "her" as someone driven to homicidal madness by the beauty of women, as in the false *modus operandi* provided by the perpetrators of the murders in *Sei donne per l'assassino*), and also in the character of the entomologist Professor Andre, inspired by Bava's memories of Prof. Roberto Omegna, the entomology advisor to his father's documentaries at the Istituto LUCE (who would subsequently inspire another character in 1971's *Ecologia del delitto/Twitch of the Death Nerve*). The input of Tudor Gates is apparent from the girl's school setting and the gender-bending aspect of the killer—which the script shares with a scenario later written by Gates for Hammer Films: *Lust for a Vampire* (1971), the second film in their series about the lesbian vampire Carmilla Karnstein.

More densely plotted than *Sei donne per l'assassino*, *Cry Nightmare* was obviously written with specific components in mind. The script contains several references to a theme song, described as though already recorded; the characters and locations are detailed with perfect familiarity, based on what was known to be available (the only reason to film the climax off the school grounds, in a cave, would be to take advantage of the Viale Libio caverns, seen in the final act of *I coltelli del vendicatore*), and the "Quasimodo-like" role of La Forêt was clearly written to be portrayed by Luciano Pigozzi ("Alan Collins"); indeed, the peeping nature of his character is a veritable reprise of the role he played in Paolo Heusch's *Lycanthropus/Werewolf in a Girl's Dormitory* (1961). Pigozzi confirms that he was aware of Bava's role in developing the screenplay, and was cast by him for the picture.

The screenplay was completed by July—at which time *Le spie vengono dal semifreddo* was showing in Italian theaters and racking up the biggest Italian boxoffice of Bava's directorial career. Its grand success coincided with the collapse of *Cry Nightmare*, at least as far as Bava was concerned.

"Just a short time before the filming was to begin, my father had an argument with the producers and he abandoned the film," Lamberto Bava recalls.

By the time of the dispute, Tudor Gates and Brian Degas were back in England and none the wiser. It was not until he was interviewed for this book that Gates discovered that the film was made—and not by Bava. "We finished that assignment and came back to London, which was our base," Gates recounted.[2] "I was certainly under the impression that the film had been shot [by Bava]. How I could have missed out on the real story, I don't know. Maybe it was the language [difference]—or maybe they didn't want to tell us!"

The argument between Bava and the Woolners may have been rooted in the Woolners' decision to form a partnership with the production company of Bava's professional rival, Antonio Margheriti, with whom they also had business ties. Margheriti explained how he came to be involved: "[The Woolner brothers] came to Italy because they had been the distributors of [my film] *Danza macabra* and several other Italian films and they wanted to produce some horror and adventure pictures. They were also in contact with Bava about doing some horror pictures with him. One of them was this picture. I don't remember exactly why things didn't come together at the end; I think Mario was busy at that time, working on *Diabolik* or something. Anyhow, the project they wanted to do in collaboration with me was a completely different one, also a horror film. Since Mario couldn't do this one, they gave it to our company, because we were also involved on the production side."[3]



MARK DAMON *and Eleonora Brown as Richard and Lucille, the film's intimidated young lovers.*

1 Tudor Gates and Brian Degas, *Cry Nightmare*, screenplay, 138.

2 Tudor Gates, letter to the author, December 16, 1993.

3 All Margheriti quotes taken from Peter Blumenstock, "Margheriti—The Wild, Wild Interview," *Video Watchdog* 28, May/June 1995, 42–61.

Fans of Italian horror tend to regard Freda, Bava, and Margheriti as its great first generation triumvirate, and therefore as a team, but it was common knowledge within the Italian film industry that bad blood existed between Bava and Margheriti. "He and Mario were opposed," confirms their mutual friend, Luigi Cozzi. "They disliked each other. I knew them both at the same time, and they were always talking shit about each other."

By reading between the lines of Margheriti's statement, we can see that the Woolners—unbeknownst to Bava—placed him in a position of working under Margheriti's production supervision, an idea he would have flatly rejected. This complication must have occurred only a short time before filming was to begin; locations had been scouted and secured, cast and crew had been hired, a theme song had been written and recorded. But without its promised director at the helm, cast members and investors backed out, leaving *Cry Nightmare* in dry dock—for almost a full year, while Bava went on to direct his next picture, *Diabolik*, for Dino De Laurentiis.

Cry Nightmare finally went before the cameras the following summer, on location in Rome and on the French Riviera.[4] The film was shot under the Italian title *Sette vergini per il diavolo* ("Seven Virgins for the Devil"—a title retained for its German release), indicating Lawrence and Betty Woolner's intention to promise audiences even more picturesque murders than they were given by *Sei donne per l'assassino*. At the helm was Bava's rival, Antonio Margheriti, directing under his usual *nom d'ecran* "Anthony M. Dawson." Asked how he came to replace Bava as director, Margheriti said, "I directed [it] because I feel better when I know what is happening with my money."

Finally submitted to the Italian censor on December 22, 1967, the film—which ultimately bore the salacious title *Nude . . . si muore*—was not released for another two months, at a time when most titles were approved for release within a single week.

Margheriti directed the film using the screenplay by Gates, Degas, and Mario Bava, none of whom received credit for their work on the resulting movie. Instead, the script was credited to Margheriti and Franco Bottar, with the additional claim of being based on a story by Gianni Simonelli. The enmity between Bava and Margheriti was lasting, but evidently the two professionals could put it aside when necessary. Margheriti's son Eduardo, who was aware of the rivalry between his father and Bava, recalls an occasion when he and his father went to an out-of-the-way *trattoria* for dinner and found Bava there, dining alone. "I was just a boy but I had heard stories of how they didn't get along, which could have made the situation awkward," Eduardo remembers. "But Bava rose up on seeing us and invited us to join him, shaking my hand. He took an uncomfortable situation and made it a rather happy memory."



LUCIANO PIGOZZI *as La Forêt, the peeping gardener whose attempts to spy on the girl's shower room places him as a witness to murder.*





The Film

Nude . . . si muore opens with the bathtub murder of Mrs. Clay, used as a pre-credits sequence, with the montage of the trunk-in-transit unfolding to the tune of Carlo Savina's electric bass-thumping theme song, *"Nightmare"*—similar to the almost synchronously written *"Batman Theme"* by Neal Hefti, but sung in the brassy style of Shirley Bassey by Rose Brennan.

As the movie unfolds, it becomes obvious that the original Bava/Gates/Degas script was filmed almost 100% faithfully, with only minor adjustments made. Lucille was played by Italian-English brunette Eleonora Brown (previously seen in Tony Richardson's *The Sailor From Gibraltar*), rather than a French blonde; the character of Jill was appropriately cast with a British actress (Sally Smith), rather than an American (which the daughter of James Bond couldn't be); and the climactic "Here Come the Marines" stock footage sequence was abandoned in favor of a more sober settling of accounts. The only instance of additional dialogue was some truly moronic flirtation between Richard and Lucille; he calls her "Little Miss Moffat," she calls him "Richard the Lionhearted," and he occasionally camps it up with further



LUCILLE *is cornered by her murderous brother Peter (Ludmilla Luova), who spends most of the film disguised as another character.*

allusions to *Alice in Wonderland.* It was obviously meant to be charming and naïve, but it comes across as the infantile prattlings of two mental defectives. While the full-length Italian version retained the last-minute cameo by 007, it was not included in English-language export versions—which were trimmed in some territories by as much as 20 minutes.

In some ways, *Nude . . . si muore* is typical of Margheriti: a dull and somewhat ambiguous hero, a heroine forever running around in her nightclothes, a two-dimensional romance sandwiched between perfunctory horror scenes, overbright and unmysterious lighting, aggressively mixed orchestral music, and red herrings galore. The direction is flat, the *mise-en-scène* uninteresting, and there is zero interest in color. Fausto Zuccoli's anamorphic cinematography is hobbled by the prevalence of white-walled settings and wardrobe ranging from whites and grays to beiges and black, a scenic palette that is almost too barren to create atmosphere or sustain interest.

Margheriti's previous horror films—*La vergine di Norimberga/Horror Castle* (1963), *I lunghi capelli della morte/The Long Hair of Death* (1964), and *Danza macabra/Castle of Blood* (1964)—introduced him as a promising horror talent in the classical Freda and Bava mold, but he specialized in noisy, impersonal action pictures and pulpy science fiction, which he shot with a limiting three-camera technique adopted from live television and an eye that generally favored quantity over quality. After fifteen years as a director, Margheriti had completed nearly fifty feature films. By the time of *Nude . . . si muore*, he had become far too brisk and pedestrian to have arrived at some of the carefully composed (albeit clumsily shot) suspense sequences found here, leading one to suspect that his visuals here may have been guided in part by storyboards drawn by Bava during the film's preproduction in 1967.

The most likely instance of a Bava storyboard being used is the murder of Betty Anne in the school's storage cellar. The cellar itself showcases the kind of ominous clutter that makes it a forbidding environment, and throughout the scene's opening moments, the single camera is kept in constant tracking motion at a furtive low-angle, accentuating the spooky trappings in a way that recalls the antiques shop sequence of *Sei donne per l'assassino.* (When Jill and Miss Tranfield visit the cellar later, there is a dialogue speculation that someone might have cut the power—a direct reference to the opening shot of that earlier sequence.) The actress playing Betty Anne moves to the right of frame at precisely the right moment to highlight the white upright rectangle of the open door at the rear of the shot at frame left, seconds before it swings shut—the kind of meticulously designed shot, atypical of Margheriti, that could have been captured only by a single camera. The rest of the scene is played out on the stage of Betty Anne's facial expressions, in three-quarter profile, as she registers initial relief, then mounting concern, and suddenly—with a sudden adjustment to a head-on, subjective shot—panic, as a pair of gloved hands thrust up from the bottom of the screen to clutch her throat . . . and to implicate the viewer in the act of murder. The scene ends as she falls, her lifeless head facing the camera, as the killer's escape is implied by the brief flash of light on the stairs in the background as the door is opened and closed. The scene sounds better than it is, because regardless of its clever design, the blueprint is here interpreted without any sense of active style or passion. It doesn't help the atmosphere of the scene that the actress is garbed in a riding costume of absolute white.

Other images strongly suggest the conceptual guiding hand of Bava: Jill's reading lamp headband, which allows her to read her beloved mysteries after "lights out," giving the tent of her bedsheet the ironic appearance of a glowing ghost; the image of a moth flapping its wings drowsily after being pinned by the doting Prof. Andre (an image Bava would personally reprise in *Ecologia del delitto*); and the scene of Jill being caught in the act of eavesdropping on La Forêt, who startles her and laughs like a madman as she runs away—as Luciano Pigozzi would also

4 *Variety*, July 20, 1967.











EXAMPLES *of the Saul Bass-influenced Italian fotobusta set.*



do to Elke Sommer in 1972's *Baron Blood.*

With the exception of "guest star" Michael Rennie (best remembered as space emissary Klaatu in Robert Wise's *The Day the Earth Stood Still,* 1951), the actors seem to be deliberately overstating their performances to help simplify their later post-sync recording duties. (Nearly all of the actors, including Pigozzi, dubbed their own performances—something that almost never occurred in Italian co-productions of this, or any other, period.) Mark Damon, formerly of *I tre volti della paura,* plays the male lead broadly and unctuously, and a number of the supporting players—Vivian Stapleton, Ludmilla Luova, Esther Masing, and some of the secondary student actresses—are so dry and unexpressive that their presence aggravates the film's dramatic pallor. The proceedings are intermittently enlivened by Sally Smith, who gives a spirited performance, and also by Pigozzi, who as usual tackles a somewhat stereotypical character with a dimension of tenderness and pathos. The killer's masquerade as the relentlessly poker-faced Mrs. Clay must also be counted a success, and one of the most deceptive of the many transvestite killers found in '60s cinema. As in William Castle's *Homicidal* (1961), the illusion is assisted by having a woman playing a man disguised as a woman, but Luova makes an even more convincing man than did Joan Marshall (credited as "Jean Arless") in the Castle film. In its way, it is a Bavian *trompe l'oeil* in the spirit of Valerio Valeri's Melissa Graps in *Operazione paura.*

Ultimately, *Nude . . . si muore* provides a useful illustration, by omission, of what Mario Bava brought to his thrillers. As it is, the film has certain enjoyable characteristics—not least of all the prominent score, which finds Carlo Savina aping everyone from John Barry to Neal Hefti to Nino Rota to Riz Ortolani—but no juice. It is basically a numb, mechanical interpretation of some potentially arousing, even subversive material. Realizing Bava's involvement in its preparation, one can't help fantasizing about what sort of darkly comic thrill ride he might have cooked up about a killer who inevitably and repeatedly murders the wrong person.

In the United States, *Nude . . . si muore* was acquired by American International Pictures, who gave it an unsuccessful August 1968 release as *The Young, the Evil and the Savage*—an exploitative attempt to capitalize on the titular template of Sergio Leone's *The Good, the Bad and the Ugly.* The film fared poorly wherever it was released, and it did not arrive in some countries until after the 1971 death of its top-billed star, Michael Rennie: Great Britain in 1971, Spain in 1972.

Disappointed with their Italian venture, Lawrence and Betty Woolner returned to America in 1969, where Larry formed a new company—New World Pictures—in partnership with Roger Corman. He remained as vice-president of the company until 1971, at which time Corman fired him in a dispute involving *The Big Doll House,* a New World women-in-prison release. Woolner took with him the rights to a forthcoming New World release called *Twilight People,* a Filipino adventure-thriller modelled on *The Island of Dr. Moreau,* which became the premiere release of Woolner's own company, Dimension Pictures. Dimension lasted for a full decade, releasing such films as *Group Marriage, Terminal Island,* and *Stone Cold Dead* before selling off their holdings to 21st Century Distribution in 1981. Lawrence Woolner then retired to Las Vegas, where he died in 1985—8 years after the 1977 death of his brother and former partner, Bernard—at the age of 73.

Looking back on *Nude . . . si muore*, Antonio Margheriti took some pride in the fact that he had made his "nice little *giallo*" a year before Dario Argento tried his far more successful, black-gloved hand at the genre. ("Again, I made a film ahead of its time!" he laughed.[5]) Margheriti lived to make dozens of other films, for the cinema and television, before a heart attack claimed his life on November 4, 2002, at the age of 72.

As for where Mario Bava was left in the midst of all this, it was darkest just before the dawn. Around the same time that Eugenio Bava died, Lamberto Bava and his wife Fiamma conceived their second child, who would be Mario's only grandson. And then, just as the most tumultuous year of his life came to an end, Bava received a call from the offices of Dino De Laurentiis, inviting him to step up into the major league and direct the biggest, most prestigious production that would ever bear his name.

US *half-sheet.*

5 Blumenstock.





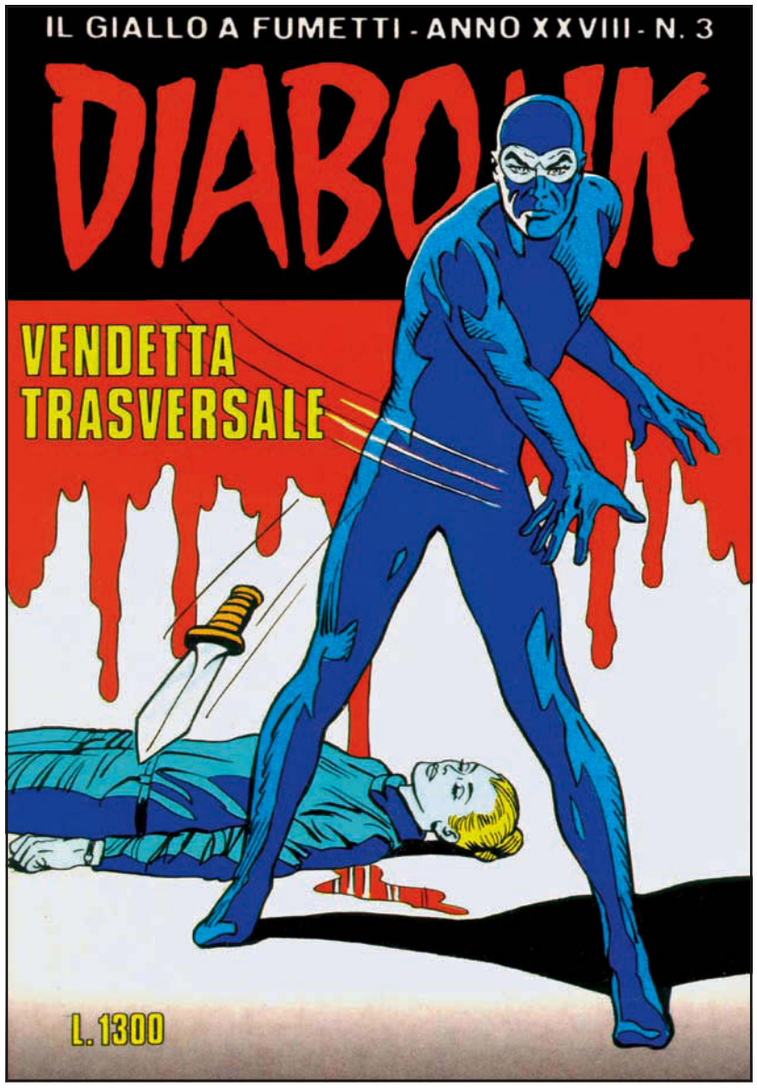
COMIC *strip characters come to life: Diabolik (John Phillip Law) and Eva Kant (Marisa Mell) elude the police after a daring heist in* DIABOLIK.

DIABOLIK

Danger: Diabolik

FOR AS LONG as there has been pulp fiction—a cheaply printed, working-class form of escapist literature—there have been "anti-heroes."

In 1857, Victor-Alexis Ponson du Terrail published the first installment of *Rocambole, ou Les Drames du Paris,* a newspaper serial about a murderous master criminal who eventually sees the error of his ways and turns his formidable talents to more lawful ends. The serial lasted until 1870. In 1905 came Arsène Lupin, the brainchild of Maurice Leblanc, a wittier variation on the Rocambole concept that escalated the personality of the eponymous character to the fabulously inescapable; no matter where you hid your jewels, the great Lupin could plunder them at his leisure. Spoofing the seminal pulp invention of Arthur Conan Doyle, Leblanc opposed Lupin with the master detective "Hemlock Sholmes" in some of his earliest adventures, including the story collection *La Dame Blonde/Arsène Lupin versus Hemlock Sholmes* and the novel *L'Aiguille Creuse/The Hollow Needle.* 1911 saw the first appearance of Fantômas, the diabolical thief, assassin and master of disguise created by Pierre Souvestre and Marcel Allain, whose popularity flourished over a series of thirty-two novels, which were followed by another ten written solo by Allain, following the death of his partner. All of these characters were popular with the Surrealists, who appreciated their elements of surprise and triumphs of style over the mundane, but they were particularly beloved by the working class, who enjoyed their descriptions of the higher classes having their upturned noses tweaked by these daring agents of terror.



DIABOLIK *as he appears on the cover of a recent edition of the Giusanni sisters' long-running digest.*

These characters, and others, were directly responsible for the founding of the motion picture serial and, by extension, the feature-length motion picture as we know it today. In 1908, Studios Éclair hired Victorin Jasset to make a short adventure film based on the eponymously written American stories about detective Nick Carter, while rival studio Pathé retaliated with a Rocambole silent. Both proved so successful that Jasset followed through with four serials devoted to Léon Sazie's master criminal hero Zigomar, made between 1910–12. Then, in 1913, the great French cinema pioneer Louis Feuillade obtained the screen rights to Fantômas, whose exploits became the subject of four ambitious, feature-length serials filmed between 1913–14; these were the first feature-length stories ever told on celluloid. Feuillade topped his Fantômas films with an original epic, *Les Vampires* (1915–16), based on his own conception of a criminal gang led by seductive Irma Vep. When *Les Vampires* met with even greater success, police and church officials began to chastise Feuillade in public forums for romanticizing criminality and murder. He responded with the finest of all his serials, *Judex* (1917–18, co-written with Arthur Bernède), about a cloaked righter of wrongs—a kind of dark-caped public conscience who was probably one of the many cinematic influences on the later creation of Bob Kane's character, The Batman.

Such films were by no means limited to France; in 1913, Vincenzo C. Dénizot followed the example of Feuillade by directing *Tigris*, the first of three feature-length serials about a sinister master of disguise. The Tigris films marked, in effect, the birth of the Italian thriller.

It was in loving response to this tradition that two Milanese sisters, Angela Giussani (born June 10, 1922) and Luciana Giussani (born April 19, 1928) conceived Diabolik. The character made his debut in the first issue of a *fumetti* digest the sisters wrote and illustrated in the winter of 1962.

Diabolik

Working title: *Goldstrike*
Filmed at Dinocittà and on location in Rome, Anzio and Turin
April – May 1967
First released: January 24, 1968
Technicolor, 1.85:1, 101 minutes

Production: Dino De Laurentiis Cinematografica (Rome) and Marianne Production (Paris). Producer: Dino De Laurentiis. Director: Mario Bava. Assistant director: Lamberto Bava. Screenplay: Dino Maiuri, Brian Degas, Tudor Gates, and Mario Bava; based on the comic magazine by Angela and Luciana Giussani. Story: Angela and Luciana Giussani, Dino Maiuri, and Adriano Baracco. Casting director: Guidarino Guidi. Continuity: Rosalba Scavia. Director of photography: Antonio Rinaldi. Camera assistant: Salvatore Caruso. Art direction: Flavio Mogherini. Production design: Ennio Michettoni. Set decoration: Dino Leonetti, Franco Velchi, Elena Da Forno. Wardrobe: Tigano Lo Faro, Gabriele Mayer, Piatelli. Costume design: Luciana Marinucci and Piero Gherardi. Diabolik's mask by Carlo Rambaldi (uncredited). Jewelry: Nino Lembo. Makeup: Otello Fava. Hairdresser: Renata Magnanti. Stills: Alfonso Avincola. Underwater filming consultant: Nicola Balini. Underwater equipment: Fratelli Balini. Production manager: Bruno Todini. Production assistants: Giorgio Adriani, Marco Tamburella, Gilberto Scarpellini, Eros Lafranconi. Production accountant: Fred Sidewater. Unit publicist: Chuck Painter. Editor: Romana Fortini. Assistant editor: Nadia Bonifazi. Music: Ennio Morricone. "Deep Down" by Morricone and Audrey Nohra, sung by Christy [Maria Christina Brancucci]. Sound: Mario Celantano. Boom operator: Gaetano Testa. Distributor: Paramount Pictures Corporation in all territories unless otherwise noted.

John Phillip Law (Diabolik), Marisa Mell (Eva Kant), Michel Piccoli (Inspector Ginco), Adolfo Celi (Ralph Valmont), Terry-Thomas (Minister of the Interior), Claudio Gora (Chief of Police), Mario Donen (Sgt. Danek), Renzo Palmer (Minister's assistant), Caterina Boratto (Lady Clark), Lucia Modugno (prostitute), Annie Gorassini (Rose), Carlo Croccolo (lorry conductor), Lidia Biondi (policewoman), Andrea Bosic (bank director), Federico Boido (Jo), Tiberio Mitri (henchman), Isarco Ravaioli (henchman), Giulio Donnini (Dr. Vernier), Edward Febo Kelleng (Sir Harold Clark), Giorgio Gennari (Rudy/gas station informant), Giorgio Sciolette (Dr. Ferrer/forensic surgeon), Giuseppe Fazio (Tony), Wolfgang Hillinger (henchman), Francesco Mulé (crematorium official, uncredited), Robert Buchanan (gold ingot supervisor, uncredited), Chuck Painter (newscaster, uncredited).

Belgium: *Gevaar: Diabolik!*, "*Warning: Diabolik!*"
Denmark: *Diabolik—Pantertyven i Jaguar,* "Diabolik—The Panther Thief in a Jaguar," 11/25/68
France: *Danger: Diabolik,* 4/12/68, 90m. Announced title: *Diabolik contre l'Inspecteur Ginko,* "Diabolik vs. Inspector Ginko"
Germany: *Gefahr: Diabolik,* "Danger: Diabolik," 4/25/68, 101m
Greece: *12 Ekoikheh toù Enatepman*
Sweden: *Diabolik Ger Ingen Nåd*
Mexico: *Diabolik*, 1969
Spain: *Diabolik*, Filmax S.A., 93m
UK: *Danger: Diabolik*, 1/19/69, 88m, Certificate "U," passed with cuts (submitted at 99m 13s)
US: *Danger: Diabolik*, 12/11/68, 100m
Yugoslavia: *Diabolik*, Inex-Film Beograd, 1969





JEAN SOREL *and Elsa Martinelli as Diabolik and Eva Kant, in promotional shots for Tonino Cervi's shelved production.*

Diabolik is a master of crime and disguise, yet admirable for both his audacity and logical code of ethics, which includes contempt for a police force capable of doing business with the underworld, and a government that monetarily abuses its people. Most humanizing of all Diabolik's personal traits is his faithful and abiding love for one woman, his enchanting accomplice Eva Kant. Most commonly depicted in a skin-tight, midnight-blue costume that reveals only his hawk-like brow and piercing blue eyes, Diabolik's unmasked appearance was patterned by the Giussani sisters after their favorite actor: Robert Taylor. More than forty years after its first issue, *Diabolik* is still being published by Astorina, the Italian comics company founded by the Giussanis. Over the years, there have been attempts to launch an American edition of *Diabolik*, but somehow these export editions have never been able to last for more than a handful of issues.

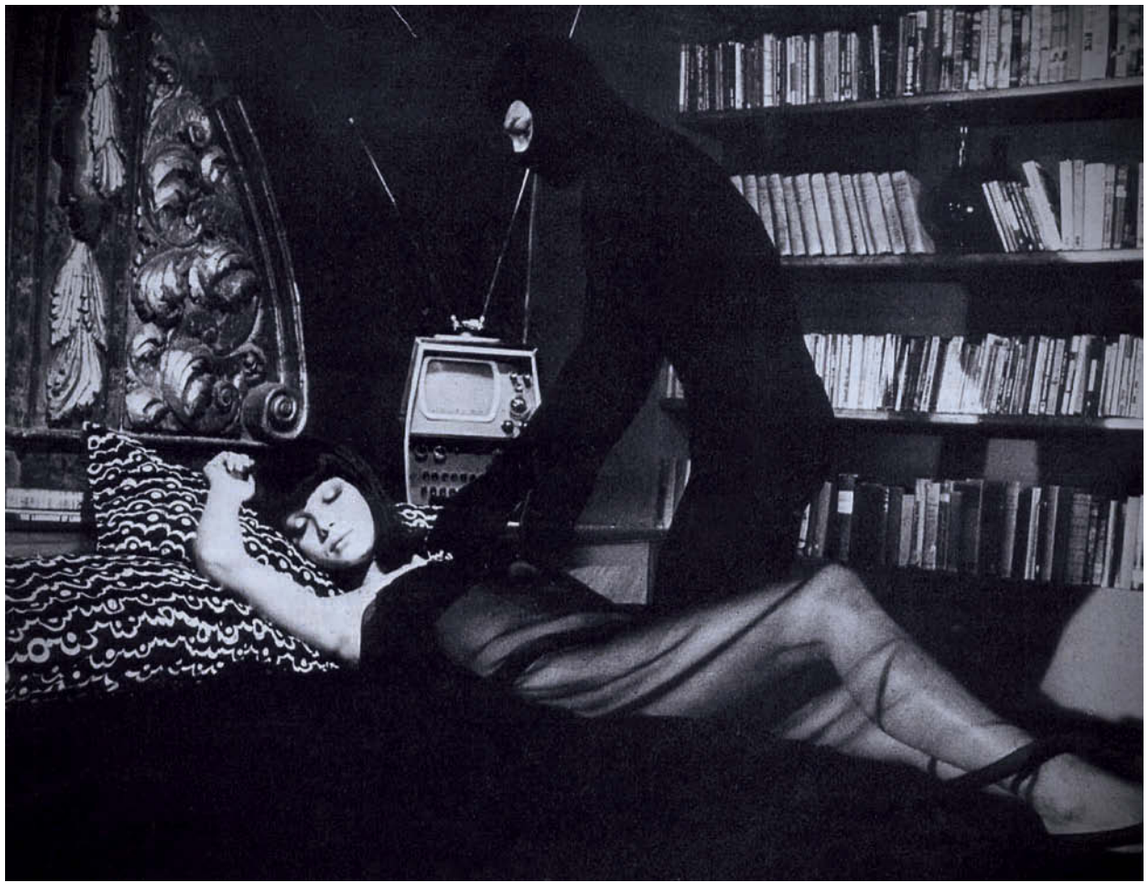
Diabolik's campaign to reach the motion picture screen began in 1964, around the time Gaumont of France launched a new series of Fantômas films, starring Jean Marais, Louis de Funés, and Mylène Demongeot. Directed by André Hunebelle, the initial film *Fantômas* was a tremendous hit, striking a perfect chord of mystery, comedy, Bondian action and gadgetry, and comic book garishness; in retrospect, it anticipates nearly everything that the 1966 ABC-TV series *Batman* would later be credited with originating. When *Fantômas* hit European screens in 1964, Antonio "Tonino" Cervi (1929–2002)—the executive producer of such art house fare as *Boccaccio '70* (1962, an omnibus film with portions directed by De Sica, Fellini, Monicelli, and Visconti), Bernardo Bertolucci's debut feature *La commare secca/The Grim Reaper* (1962), and Michelangelo Antonioni's *Deserto rosso/Red Desert* (1964)—decided the time was right for a Diabolik film.

Cervi assembled an interesting package. The film was to be an Italian/French/Spanish co-production starring Jean Sorel (as Diabolik) and Elsa Martinelli (as Eva Kant), with Cervi sharing the directorial duties with British filmmaker Seth Holt. Holt, a former editor (*Saturday Night and Sunday Morning*, 1960) had proven himself adept at suspense with the Hammer productions *Scream of Fear* (1961) and *The Nanny* (1965). Some interesting publicity stills of Sorel and Martinelli were leaked to the press (including *Continental Film Review* and *Midi-Minuit Fantastique*)[1] but after one week of shooting in Malaga, Spain, in late 1965, the production was shut down.[2] Recently asked about their Diabolik experience, Sorel and Martinelli independently concur that most of that week was spent filming screen tests and posing for publicity photos in ill-fitting costumes. Martinelli recalls that her role would have been "quite acrobatic and lively, with big eyebrows and a sharp haircut . . . dark and shadowy, not at all the way it was eventually played." In 1969, Sorel and Martinelli were subsequently cast in a film [Lucio Fulci's *Una sull'altra/One On Top of the Other*, 1969] opposite Marisa Mell—the actress who would ultimately play Eva Kant onscreen—and after comparing notes, none of them was any the wiser about why the Cervi/Holt version had been aborted.

Possibly Cervi's financing sources dried up, or perhaps he had planned all along to use this week's footage to

1 *Continental Film Review*, January 1966, 22 and *Midi-Minuit Fantastique* 14, June 1966, 67–68.

2 *Variety,* February 1, 1967.



DIABOLIK *(Jean Sorel) creeps up to a sleeping Eva Kant (Elsa Martinelli) in another scene from the abandoned version.*

attract a producer with deeper pockets. For whatever reason, Dino De Laurentiis took over the property in early 1966.

Born August 8, 1919, in Torre Annunziata, Campania, De Laurentiis was arguably the most important Italian producer of the postwar era, and remains a vital force in international film production in the early 21st century. The son of a pasta maker, he set out on his own at the age of 17, attending classes at the Centro Sperimentale di Cinematografica by day and working as a busboy at the Cinecittà commissary at night. A determined and industrious worker, De Laurentiis produced his first film before he reached his 22nd birthday. His first international success was *Riso amaro/Bitter Rice* (1948), starring Vittorio Gassman and Silvana Mangano. In the early 1950s, he joined forces with fellow Lux producer Carlo Ponti to form what would become the most important production company in Italy, Ponti–De Laurentiis. With Ponti, Dino had produced Steno and Mario Monicelli's *Guardie e ladri* (1951, which Mario Bava photographed) and also Mario Camerini's *Ulisse* (1954, on which Bava is likely to have worked as an uncredited special effects and cameraman). After reaching a pinnacle of success with Federico Fellini's *La strada* (1954) and *Le notti di Cabiria/The Nights of Cabiria* (1957), Ponti and De Laurentiis went their separate ways. As an independent producer, De Laurentiis made the occasional prestige picture (*Barabbas*, *La Bibbia/The Bible . . . In the Beginning*), but the backbone of his enterprise was composed of properties of a more pulpish nature. Among his earliest solo endeavors were Carlo Lizzani's *Il gobbo/The Hunchback of Rome* (1960), Mario Camerini's *Crimen/Criminals* (1960), Giacomo Gentilomo's *Maciste contro il vampiro/Goliath and the Vampires* (1961), Tinto Brass' *La disco volante/The Flying Saucer* (1964), and the spy spoofs *Se tutte le donne del mondo/Kiss the Girls and Make Them Die* (directed by *Le meraviglie di Aladino*'s Henry Levin) and Alberto Lattuada's *Matchless* (both 1966).

Once he had acquired control of *Diabolik* from Tonino Cervi, De Laurentiis junked the 1965 Malaga footage, preferring to start over from scratch using his own sound stages at Dinocittà, which were in need of activity.[3] Drawing inspiration from one of his favorite classic Hollywood films—Sam Wood's *Raffles* (1940), which starred David Niven as A. J. Raffles, a charming, internationally notorious jewel thief—De Laurentiis believed that Diabolik had the potential to become a new, young Raffles for the Pop Art era. He commissioned a new screen treatment from screenwriter Adriano Baracco, a former documentarist (1961's *Benito Mussolini—anatomia di un dittatore*) who had some recent experience at writing tongue-in-cheek spy trash (1965's *Berlino—appuntamenta per la spie/Spy in Your Eye*, which featured Dana Andrews as "Secret Agent Z3").

In the meantime, De Laurentiis exploited his screen rights to the Diabolik character by featuring him briefly in the omnibus film *Le streghe/The Witches* (1967), starring his wife Silvana Mangano. In the last of the film's segments, Vittorio De Sica's "A Night Like Any Other," Clint Eastwood plays a dull husband whose wife (Mangano) is too preoccupied with comic-book heroes to pay him any attention. In an elaborate fantasy sequence, Eastwood battles Superman (Armando Bottin), Batman (Pietro Torrisi), Flash Gordon (Angelo Santi), Mandrake the Magician (Paolo Gozlino), and Diabolik for Mangano's affections. In this sequence, Diabolik was played by Italian Western actor Gianni Garko, wearing a black, full-body leotard that looks suspiciously like Jean Sorel's hand-me-downs.

Corràdo Farina, the '60s comic book writer–artist who became a film director in the 1970s (*Hanno cambiato faccia, Baba Yaga*), takes credit for suggesting Mario Bava as a replacement for Seth Holt. "I wrote two stories for the original *Diabolik* comic book series, but the publishers used only one, called *L'artiglio del demonio*, claiming the other was too slow," he recounts. "This was back in 1965, and I remember the Giussani sisters were completely overwhelmed with the movie matter. They came to me and asked if I could suggest a good director for the movie, because they were having problems finding one, and I suggested the name of Mario Bava, because of some great horror and *giallo* movies he had directed, which I had seen."[4]

Lamberto Bava remembers that his father became involved through a personal telephone call from De Laurentiis. "He called my father and told him: 'Let's start again from scratch, because the comic book is good . . .' They had already shot part

of the film with a French actor in the lead . . . they threw it all away and De Laurentiis wanted to remake it big . . . He pursued my father because his movies were already loved at that time by certain intellectuals and cinephiles."[5]

The character of Diabolik was a natural for Bava. Much like the *gialli* he had innovated earlier in the decade, with their minimal plots and lavishly cruel tableaux of violence, the Giussanis' *fumetto nero* ("dark comic book") was controversial, frequently accused of exalting crime and violence. But, as the two sisters reasoned, "When you're playing Cops and Robbers, or Cowboys and Indians, who wants to plays the cops or the cowboys?"[6] Perusing the titles of early Diabolik stories, one is immediately struck by their similarity to the titles of movies that Bava had made, or would make: *Incubo, Terrore sul mare, La casa della paura, Catena di delitti, La Venere d'oro.* In fact, the poster design for Bava's *I coltelli del vendicatore* could have been patterned on the most famous of Diabolik's promotional poses, which depicted the Master of Crime hurling a dagger.

By the time Adriano Baracco's treatment was turned in, Bava had been signed to direct. Bava was responsible for hiring the film's principal screenwriters, Tudor Gates and Brian Degas, with whom he had worked on the aborted *Cry Nightmare*. "We got on very well with Mario during the stint on *Cry Nightmare a*nd he directly recommended us to Dino De Laurentiis," Gates confirmed.

Gates and Degas wrote various drafts of the *Diabolik* screenplay in the latter months of 1966, drawing their inspiration primarily from three of the original *fumetti* stories: *Sepolto vivo!* ("Buried Alive!" *Diabolik* 8, August 10, 1963), *Lotta disperata* ("Hopeless Battle," *Diabolik* 15, March 10, 1964) and *L'ombra nella notte* ("The Shadows of Night," *Diabolik* 35, May 31, 1965).[7] Aware that Diabolik was an unknown commodity outside Italy, they proposed an alternative title for the export market: *Goldstrike*. This unused alternate title, like the relatively straightforward (if gadget-oriented) tone of the script itself, reminds us that this project had become a commercial risk worth taking due to the worldwide success of the James Bond films—particularly the recent blockbusters *Goldfinger* (1964) and, more particularly, *Thunderball* (1965), which had been partially filmed, and was especially profitable, in Italy. Though the script was primarily influenced by the Bond films, one might expect that the US premiere of the ABC-TV series *Batman* in January 1966 had an impact, but it is unlikely that Bava saw an episode before his film went into production. Its true Pop Art influence is more accurately rooted in André Hunebelle's *Fantômas* series, which likewise inspired numerous other Italian imitations—Superargo, Goldface, Fenomenal, Mister X, Kriminal—all of whom were soon punching their way onto theater screens in bold primary colors.

The Gates/Degas script for *Diabolik* was so well-liked by De Laurentiis that the writers were retained to write the final draft of his looming science fiction blockbuster *Barbarella* (1968), based on the popular adult comic strip by Jean-Claude Forest.

Synopsis

Inspector Ginco is summoned to secure a bank transfer of $10,000,000 against theft by the arch-criminal Diabolik. While an armored car is loaded with blank, dollar-sized notes, the real fortune ("the largest amount of single dollars ever moved at 6:00 in the morning") is entrusted to a single Rolls-Royce, driven by policemen disguised—none too well—as diplomats.



DIABOLIK *(Jean Sorel) poses as a wax figure in this publicity pose.*

3 According to actor Brett Halsey, who worked at virtually every Italian film studio during his many years in Rome, De Laurentiis was spared the expense of building his own production facility. As he explains: "I forget what it was called, but there was a government program in place there to encourage industry in the south of Italy. Apparently they drew a line—south of Italy, just below Rome—and Dinocittà was built just on the other side of that line, practically in Rome, but not quite. So Dino got the government to build it for him, but most people didn't want to use it because it was just far enough out of town to be inconvenient."

4 Corràdo Farina interviewed by Luca Rea, January 2001.

5 Manlio Gomarasca and Davide Pulici, "Il Talento di Mr. Bava," *Nocturno Dossier* 24, July 2004, 6–32.

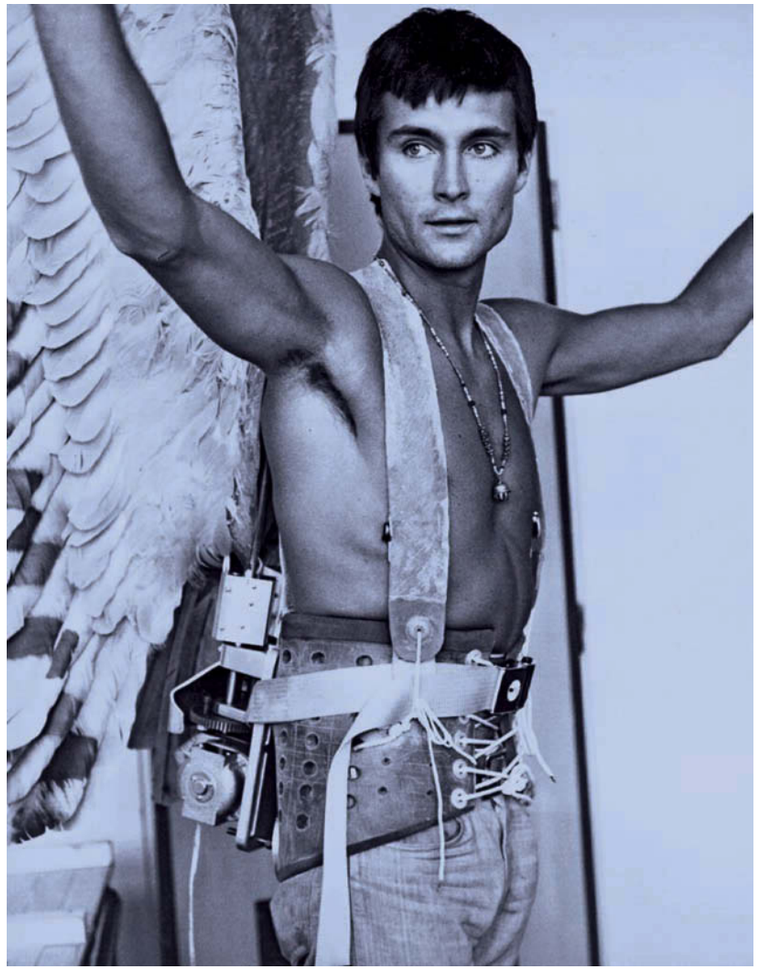
6 *Danger: Diabolik*, Paramount pressbook, 4.

7 By the time of the film's release, *Diabolik* had surpassed its 100th issue.

En route, the Rolls is besieged with multi-colored fog and raised high into the sky by a crane controlled by a chortling Diabolik. Diving with the money into the sea, he makes a daring getaway by speedboat and, after moving to land, in his trademark black Jaguar E-2. Meeting his beautiful accomplice Eva Kant in a tunnel, they switch to a white Jaguar and return to their vast, subterranean headquarters, where they celebrate their victory by making love on a round, rotating bed littered with stolen bank notes.

The Minister of the Interior holds a press conference, announcing the reinstatement of the death penalty. Eva and Diabolik brazenly crash the conference disguised as reporters and use "exhilarating gas" to turn the solemn meeting into a laughing stock. Ginco gets the idea of forcing Diabolik out of hiding by turning the underworld against itself. The police bust one of the teenage drug dens supplied by crime boss Ralph Valmont. They threaten continued crackdowns unless Valmont uses his connections to put Diabolik out of business.

It is announced that a special gala reception will be held at New York's British Embassy in honor of Sir Harold Clark, the British Minister of Finance, and his wife Lady Clark, who will wear her famous Assan necklace of eleven pendant emeralds. Eva coyly lets it be known that she wants the necklace for her birthday, which coincides with the reception. Eva poses as a prostitute to size-up the comings and goings outside the Embassy. Another streetwalker finds her suspicious and delivers her description to Valmont, who uses an Identikit to formulate her likeness, which he distributes throughout the underworld. Meanwhile, Diabolik successfully steals the jewelled necklace by fooling Ginco's security camera with a Polaroid photograph of the room he supposedly has under surveillance. Diabolik makes an apparent escape by using an ancient catapult atop the Embassy to fling himself out to sea, but as the police pursue him, the real Diabolik emerges from the shadows to make his getaway. After driving a short distance, Eva injures her arm while helping Diabolik to set up a mirror-like banner to force their pursuers off the road. Diabolik realizes her injury and tells her that she must see Dr. Vernier as soon as possible.



WHILE *filming DIABOLIK on one sound stage at Cinecittà, John Phillip Law took advantage of down time by going to fittings for the angel wings he would next wear as Pygar in BARBARELLA.*

The next day, Eva is recognized by a stool pigeon at a gas station and Valmont's thugs follow her to Vernier's office. They abduct her, slaying Vernier. Diabolik places a call to Valmont, who demands the stolen money and emeralds in exchange for her safe return; Diabolik agrees. They meet aboard Valmont's private plane. Diabolik hands over the loot, Valmont hands him a parachute and points to a cabin through the open bomb bay doors. Diabolik grabs Valmont and they plummet together toward the cabin where Ginco and his men wait in ambush. Diabolik manages to free Eva and point her to safety, then shoots Valmont with a machine gun. He takes what appears to be a cyanide capsule to elude punishment.

Later, in the morgue, Eva poses as a nurse and injects Diabolik with an antidote. Diabolik poses as Valmont's brother to collect his ashes at the crematorium. Intermingled with Valmont's ashen remains are the emeralds of Lady Clark's necklace—which Diabolik used as machine gun ammunition! Diabolik celebrates his victory by blowing up the Hall of Tax Records, which forces the Minister to plead with the public to pay the taxes they think they owe . . .

To replenish the government, an enormous amount of gold must be transported, which is melted down into a gigantic, twenty-ton, steel-netted ingot—presumably too heavy to steal. Ginco escorts it by train. Diabolik blows the train off a bridge and transports the ingot underwater to his cavern headquarters. After changing into a protective uniform, Diabolik proceeds to melt the ingot down, pouring it into gold bar moldings. Unknown to the criminal, Ginco has radioactivated the gold, which allows him to locate Diabolik's hideout and all his stolen property. As Diabolik prepares to fight off the siege, the gold overheats and the ingot explodes, covering the master criminal in a hardening straightjacket of gold! Eva later returns, dressed in mourning, to visit the body. Ginco is there to arrest her, but she manages to catch a glimpse of Diabolik, secretly conscious and alive in his heat-protective costume . . . winking!

Production & Cast

Mario Bava and Dino De Laurentiis began auditioning various candidates for the lead roles in February. Accustomed to having complete creative control on his previous films, Bava learned during this early process that he would not be "calling the shots" on *Diabolik*, where the stakes were considerably higher. Though Bava would not spend the entire amount, De Laurentiis Cinematografica budgeted the production at approximately $3,000,000—more money than the director had ever seen in his life. But with that money came interference and the end of directorial autonomy. Even in the matter of casting the picture, Bava was allowed to state his preferences, but all final casting was dependent upon Dino's approval.

De Laurentiis' first choice for the lead role was an inspired one: Alain Delon. With his insolent good looks and penetrating eyes, Delon would have made a magnificent Diabolik, but he happened to score a major hit at this time with Jean-Pierre Melville's *Le Samouraï* (1967) and, according to Lamberto Bava, priced himself out of competition.

"Every actor in town wanted to play Diabolik," remembers John Phillip Law, who eventually won the role. As fate would have it, one of the actors in town happened to be the Giussani sisters' original model for Diabolik:



JOHN PHILLIP LAW *as Diabolik, wearing a form-fitting mask made especially for him by Carlo Rambaldi.*

Robert Taylor, who was acting in Luigi Scattini's *La sfinge d'oro/The Glass Sphinx*. Then 56 years of age, and only a year away from death due to lung cancer, Taylor was neither auditioned nor seriously considered for the role.

Born September 7, 1937, John Phillip Law was a Los Angeles native who had entered the business as a child actor, making an uncredited appearance in John Sturges' *The Magnificent Yankee* (1950). He resurfaced in the early '60s playing secondary roles in Italian films, beginning with Franco Rossi's romantic comedy *Smog* (1962). With more Italian than American pictures under his belt, Law had a surprise success in two popular American releases: Norman Jewison's *The Russians Are Coming! The Russians Are Coming!* (1966) and Otto Preminger's *Hurry Sundown* (1967), which gave him the boxoffice cachet to headline subsequent Italian productions. While working with Jane Fonda in *Hurry Sundown,* Law was made aware of her next assignment, *Barbarella,* which was going to be directed by her husband, French director Roger Vadim. Fonda personally recommended Law for the role of the blind angel, Pygar, and while finishing his role in the Preminger film, he immersed himself in the Jean-Claude Forest comics. When *Hurry Sundown* wrapped, Law flew to Rome, where he lived as a guest of the Vadims at their villa on the Appia Antica, where Forest himself was also in residence. Dino De Laurentiis approved of Fonda's choice for Pygar, but *Barbarella* itself had such a lengthy period of preproduction, as elaborate sets were built and costumes were made, that Law was able to fit in two starring roles while he waited to don his wings. The first was in Giulio Petroni's Spaghetti Western *Da uomo a uomo/Death Rides a Horse* (1966), which was immediately followed by *Diabolik.*

"They did *Diabolik* just before *Barbarella,*" Law explains. "They said, 'We have this other feature and we're casting for it.' I got the comic book since I was already into a kind of comic book thing anyway. When I was going to do Pygar in *Barbarella,* I got some old *Hawkman* comics; I was trying to figure out how the wings would look and how to make it look good; I looked at angels on top of churches, and everything else. The distinctive feature about Diabolik from all the little comics were his eyebrows, you know; he had this kind of wild look on his face with these high eyebrows. So I just looked in the mirror a few times and figured out how to talk with the outside of my eyebrows up. When I went in to see Mario Bava the first time, I held my eyebrows like that practically through the whole interview. He kept saying, 'Look! It's Diabolik!' and I said, 'Yeah, yeah! You got it!'" It surely also suited Bava's sense of irony to hire an actor named Law to play the most audacious of criminals.

As with Pygar, Law prepared for the role by immersing himself in the *Diabolik* comics. "I read a few of them," he says. "At the time, I didn't read Italian very well—I still don't, but I speak it pretty well. But I'd stumble through and have my friends translate for me. I had a very strong sense of not wanting to disappoint the public when I was playing a character like that. A lot of actors think of it as a vehicle for themselves, but I never thought of it that way. I thought the deeper I could immerse myself in the character, the better job I would be able to do."

Law quickly became aware that his director and producer had duelling concepts for the film they were about to make. "Dino wanted to do a different *Diabolik*, a commercial movie that could be an international hit, so he told me: 'John, remember David Niven in *Raffles*?' I couldn't figure out what Raffles had to do with Diabolik, and neither could Bava! Dino had one idea, and Mario had another. I fought for us to stay as close as possible to the comic books, although I wasn't as familiar with the character as I was with, say, Superman or Batman. I felt personally obliged to the fans of the comic to recreate the original character, as much as possible. Dino wanted to do an 'international' film about an 'international' thief, trying to elevate Diabolik to 'international' status, you know? In my opinion, this wasn't going to work, because every country has its own fantasies, its own humor . . . Bava wanted to make a darker, more violent film for a more cultish audience. In the end, after a lot of arguing back and forth, it became a sort of hybrid."

The trademark black skin-tight mask that Law wears in various scenes of the film, and the corresponding white one which he wears while scaling the tower of St. Just Castle, were created especially for him by an uncredited Carlo Rambaldi. Rambaldi took molds of Law's face (and also of stuntman Freddy Unger's face) during preproduction and fashioned the masks from the same rubber used to make scuba masks.



JOHN PHILLIP LAW *on the set with the second Eva Kant to be hired, Catherine Deneuve.*

Eva Kant, Diabolik's moll and muse, proved a far more problematic role to cast. "Mario always said there were only two actresses who could play the role of Eva—Marilù Tolo and Marisa Mell—but the front office had different ideas," Law reveals. In all, three different women were cast and filmed in the role. The first—whose name has been forgotten—was the attractive blonde protegé of a major Paramount executive.

"She wasn't an actress," Law affirms. "She was a very beautiful model from New York and a friend of [Charles G.] Bluhdorn, the head of Gulf + Western, the parent company of Paramount at that time. He brought this gal over from New York and she was absolutely gorgeous, but she couldn't act. She looked like Vanna White, but she was obsessed with her teeth. She talked about her teeth all the time. We worked together for a few days, then they looked at the rushes and realized it wasn't going to work."

The second actress they tried was considerably better known.

"I also worked for about a week with Catherine Deneuve," Law reveals, smiling at the memory. "I told Roger Vadim about the trouble we were having, finding an actress to play Eva. I think he was instrumental in approaching Catherine for us.[8] I thought she was fine, and I couldn't get over how sweet she was. One day, she saw a hole in my jeans and sewed them for me. People don't believe me now when I tell them that Catherine Deneuve once sewed a hole in my jeans! She belied that cold, exotic beautiful ice queen look that she has in [her] perfume ads. But Mario had a problem with her."

Catherine Deneuve has never spoken on the record about her temporary casting in *Diabolik*, but when the late Bava historian Carlos Sylva met her at the Cannes Film Festival in the 1980s, he asked her about the experience. These are Deneuve's words, as Sylva reported them to me: "Bava didn't like me at all. I don't like to remember this, but he was actually a little abusive with me. He behaved terribly, calling me a cow in front of everyone and saying that I couldn't act. He didn't seem to find anything about me agreeable, not even the way I walked."

Deneuve's comments indicate that, even before the film was properly underway, Bava was not responding well to the heightened pressures of directing a major motion picture. His impatience with Deneuve may have been curt, but not necessarily unfounded. Anyone familiar with Deneuve's work must admit that she was, even at this early stage of her career, one of the finest actresses of her generation. However, by examining the surviving photographs of her week-long stint on the production, the true nature of the problem is easily grasped. Blonde, knowing and coolly patrician, Deneuve was unable to subdue her own persona to inhabit the character of Eva Kant. Standing beside her clearly enamored co-star in her white vinyl boots and mini-dress, she looks like an Ice Princess to be worshipped—which was not the interpersonal dynamic required between Eva and Diabolik. Deneuve would not have been believable hitch-hiking, or running, or returning to the scene of her lover's death and kneeling before his

CATHERINE DENEUVE *in full Eva attire with Diabolik in his cave.*





LAW *and Deneuve (in a Pop Art dress by Luciana Marinucci and Piero Gherardi).*

gold-shrouded remains; in these photos, it is obviously *she* who is to be adored. Her casting would have badly weakened Diabolik's all-important authority and thrown the film completely off-balance.

At the end of the week, Deneuve butted heads with Bava for the last time when she flatly refused to participate in one of the movie's most celebrated scenes. In short—as John Phillip Law says, laughing—"She didn't want to fuck in the money."

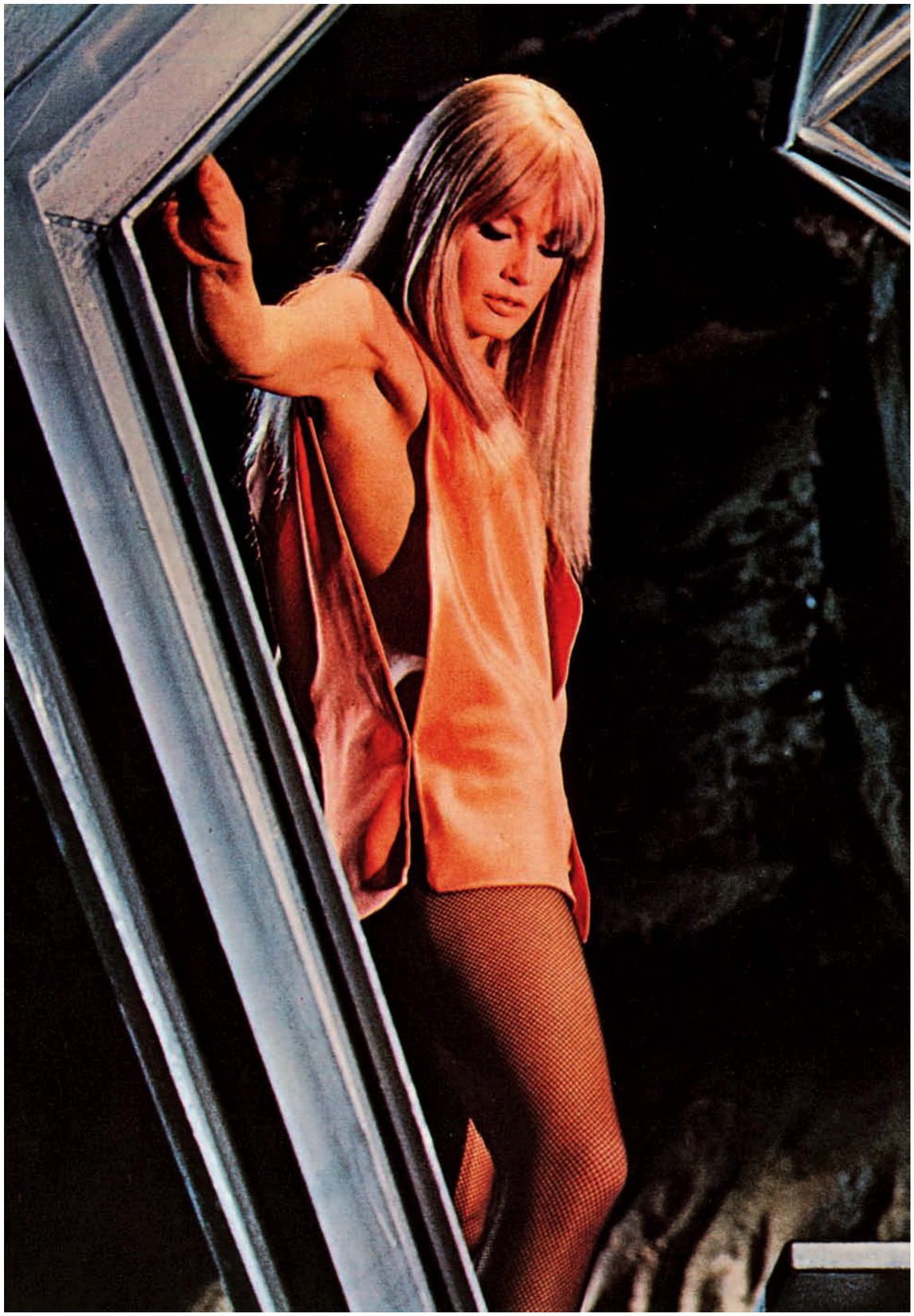
Bava reminisced about his problems with Deneuve to Luigi Cozzi: "She wouldn't allow me to show so much as her ankle or her calf! Don't even *mention* her breasts! So we packed her back off to France, and replaced her with Marisa Mell. And do you know what film Deneuve made as soon as she got back to France? *Belle de Jour*—where they were practically showing every inch of her naked skin under a microscope, so that you couldn't miss a thing! I suppose it takes an actor to understand one."[9]

Perhaps it does. "Catherine may not have been ready for the part," Law reasons. "She had not yet done *Belle de Jour*. I think if she had done *Diabolik* after *Belle de Jour*, she might have been more relaxed, and things might have worked out a little differently."

Law was thinner than usual and had shorter hair in these early stages of production, and he looks this way in isolated shots of the finished film—as Diabolik prepares to deposit the stolen millions in his personal safe before conceiving a better use for the cash, as he drives solo, and as he contacts Valmont from a telephone booth—so shooting evidently proceeded as best it could while a suitable Eva was being sought. With only a minute or two of usable footage in the can after two full weeks of shooting, an exasperated Dino De Laurentiis finally relented on his casting preferences.

8 Catherine Deneuve was, at this time, the ex-wife of Vadim.

9 Luigi Cozzi, *Il cinema dei mostri* (Rome, Italy: Fanucci Editore, 1987), 249–60.

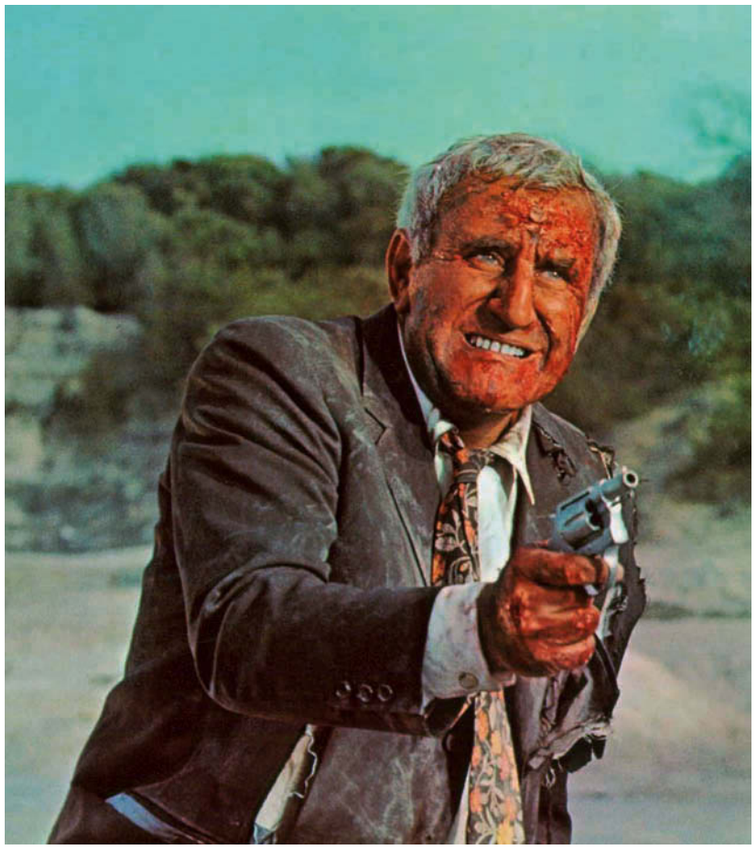


MARISA MELL, *the perfect Eva Kant.*

"Bava wanted very much to have Marilù Tolo, and it was a question of Dino [not wanting her], so then they came to a big compromise with Marisa Mell," says Law. "But from the moment she showed up dressed for work, we knew that everything was going to work out. We fell into each other's arms on the first day, and had a really great relationship on—and off screen, after a while."

Gorgeous Marisa Mell was born Marlies Moitzi in Austria, on February 23, 1939. She graduated from the Max Reinhardt School of Drama at age 17, and had appeared in a number of Austrian and German films (including Helmut Ashley's 1962 Edgar Wallace *krimi Das Rätsel der Roten Orchidee/The Puzzle of the Red Orchid,* opposite Christopher Lee), making a rapid ascent to English and European productions (including Ken Russell's directorial debut *French Dressing,* 1963). At this point, her screen career was unexpectedly derailed for nearly two years when she was involved in a violent auto accident in which she nearly lost her right eye. After undergoing plastic surgery (so successful that even lovers like John Phillip Law were unable to detect that any reparations had been done), Mell returned to the screen in Luigi Zampa's *Le dolci signore/Anyone Can Play* (1966), and probably caught Bava's attention in Giorgio Ferroni's *New York chiama Superdrago/Super Agent Super Dragon* (1966), which featured Bava alumni Luciano Pigozzi and Jacques Herlin. With her naturally dark hair piled under a radiant blonde wig, the 28-year-old Mell was nothing less than Eva Kant come to life. Onscreen, she and John Phillip Law made a remarkable team: magnetic and exciting, revelling in a mutual attraction that was palpable to audiences, and infectious.

"When I started working on it with [Marisa], everything just came together," Law told me. "We had a kiss during our first scene together [the drive into the underground hideout], and let me tell you, that was a great kiss. Up to then, Mario had been very disappointed with the chemistry between me and the other Evas, but



ADOLFO CELI *as the murderous mob boss, Ralph Valmont.*

after that take, he came over to us looking very happy. 'Okay,' he said, 'now I've got my Diabolik and I've got my Eva. I'm a dog of a director but I'm good with the camera, so if the two of you will trust me, I think we've got a picture.'"

For the duration of the production, Mell and Law lived together, adopting a stray black kitten (which they named Diabolik) found on the beach near Anzio where Diabolik's castle-scaling scene was filmed. After *Diabolik,* the couple went their separate ways and Mell began to accept more brazenly erotic roles, making softcore adult films well into her 40s and posing nude for various European men's magazines. A heavy smoker, she succumbed to throat cancer on May 16, 1992, at the age of 53. The following year, Paramount released *Danger: Diabolik* on VHS in the United States and she became a cult figure.

Another actor recommended to the production by Roger Vadim was French actor Michel Piccoli, whom he had directed in *La Curée/The Game Is Over* (1966), and who had experience acting opposite Catherine Deneuve in Jacques Demy's *Les Demoiselles de Rochefort/The Young Girls of Rochefort* (1966). Piccoli was signed to play Diabolik's arch-nemesis, Inspector Gingko—whose name was simplified to "Ginco."

Born Jacques Daniel Michel Piccoli in Paris, on December 27, 1925, he made his first film in 1945 but did not ascend to true stardom until his appearance as the screenwriter protagonist of Jean-Luc Godard's *Le Mépris/Contempt* (1963), opposite Brigitte Bardot. He worked frequently with the Spanish surrealist director Luis Buñuel, beginning with 1956's *La Mort en ce Jardin/Death in the Garden* and continuing with *Le Journal d'une Femme de Chambre/Diary of a Chambermaid* (1964), *Belle de Jour* (1967, in which he played the dull husband of Catherine Deneuve), *La Voie lactée/The Milky Way* (1969, as the Marquis de Sade), *Le Charme Discret de la Bourgeoisie/The Discreet Charm of the Bourgeoisie* (1972), and *Le Fantôme de la Liberté/The Phantom of Liberty* (1974); he also worked for many other notable European directors, including Claude Chabrol (*La Décade prodigieuse/Ten Days Wonder,* 1972), Marco Ferreri (*Liza, La Grand Bouffe*) and Louis Malle (*Atlantic City*). Today, Piccoli continues to act while maintaining a second career as a director–screenwriter in his own right; he has directed and co-written four films since 1991, including *La Plage Noir* ("The Black Beach," 2001). A talented actor, Piccoli was not required to give a standout performance in *Diabolik,* as Ginco is not the film's hero. He gives the role a perfectly serviceable interpretation, bland but authoritative; it is difficult to say whether the film might have been more effective, or further unbalanced, had Diabolik been given a more formidable adversary.

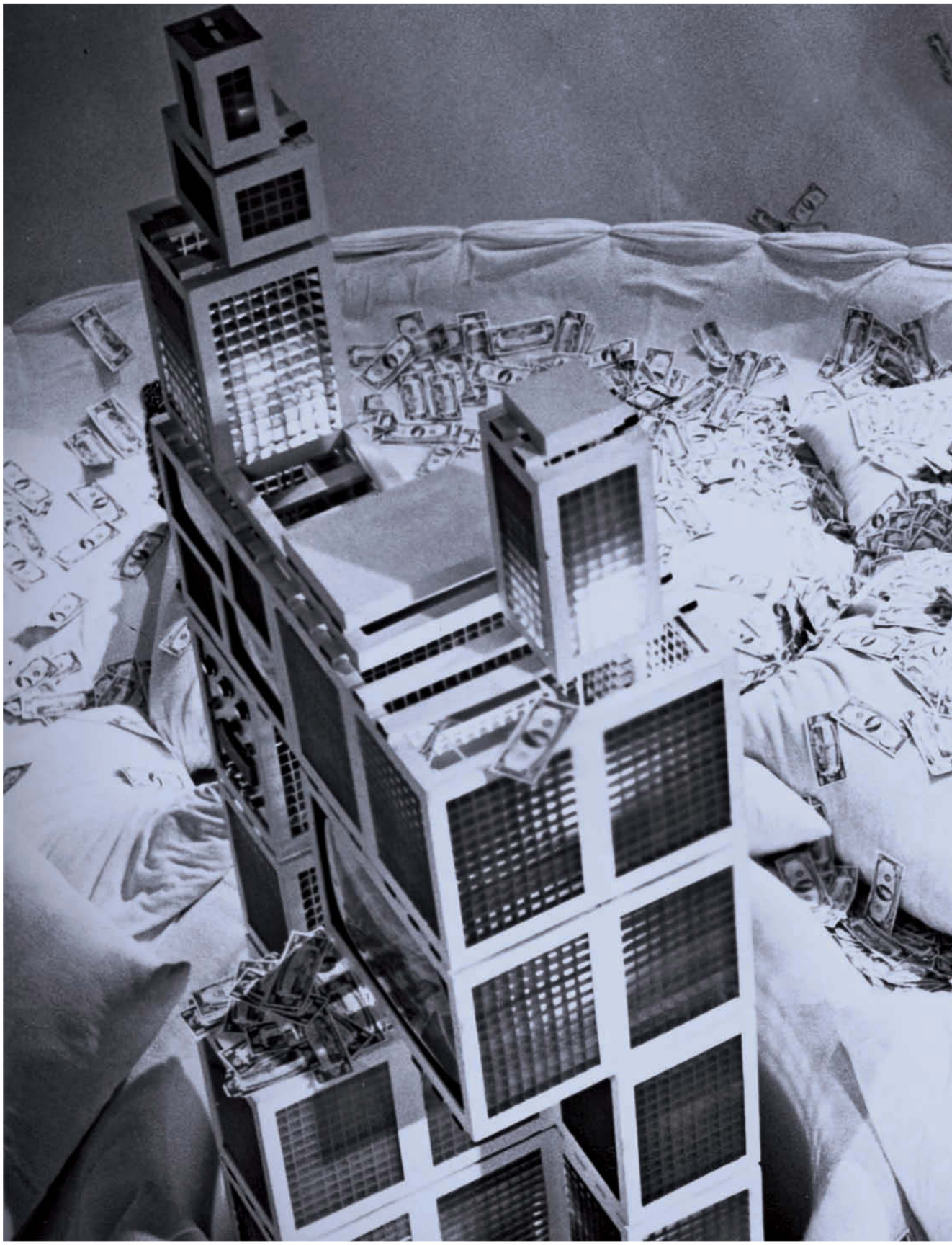
Adolfo Celi, still riding high after his enormously successful portrayal of Emilio Largo in *Thunderball,* was a natural choice to play organized crime boss Ralph Valmont. A Sicilian, Celi was born on July 22, 1922, in Messina and began acting in films shortly after the war. He can be seen briefly as an American soldier in Pietro Francisci's *Natale al campo 119* (1947), photographed by Mario Bava, and he had shared billing with John Phillip Law in the omnibus film *Tre notti d'amore* (1964), co-scripted by *I tre volti della paura*'s Marcello Fondato. His imperfect command of English was still good enough to bring him prominent roles in *Von Ryan's Express, The Agony and the Ecstasy* and *Grand Prix* (all made 1965–66), which brought him to the attention of producer Albert R. "Cubby" Broccoli for *Thunderball,* the biggest James Bond production to date. After that triumph, Celi immediately spoofed his success by lending his presence to Alberto De Martino's *O.K. Connery/Operation Kid Brother* (1967), which took advantage of the Italian residency of some Bond alumni like Daniela Bianchi (*From Russia with Love*) and Celi, and the non-exclusive contracts of Bond series regulars Bernard Lee ("M") and Lois Maxwell ("Miss Moneypenny"), to concoct a one-shot star vehicle for Sean Connery's brother, Neil. Silvery-haired, beefy, and with steely blue eyes, Celi became stereotyped as a crime boss and played the role to the hilt in *Ad ogni costo/Grand Slam* (1967), *Midas Run* (1969), *La mala ordina/The Italian Connection* (1972), and many others. In the 1970s, Celi made a concerted effort to change his image, playing lawyers, generals,

MICHEL PICCOLI *(center) as Diabolik's adversary, Inspector Ginco.*



and police inspectors and he again played opposite Michel Piccoli once again in Luís Buñuel's swan song, *Le Fantôme de la Liberté*. He continued acting through 1985, and died of a heart attack on February 19, 1986, in Rome. Celi's performance as Valmont is believably ruthless and a valuable asset to the film, though his line readings are compromised by his post-synched English.

The international cast was rounded out with the British gap-toothed comedian Terry-Thomas, who filmed his two amusing scenes as the Minister of the Interior and Minister of Finance in a single day. Often cast as a lascivious rogue, rascal, or dandified twit, Thomas Terry Hoar Stevens was born July 14, 1911, in Finchley, near London, and made his earliest screen appearances under his screen name in 1940. By 1949, he had attained enough success to play himself in such films as *Helter Skelter* and *The Queen Steps Out*, and he became a television star in the 1950s thanks to regular appearances on *How Do You View?* (which he also wrote), *Strictly T-T*, and *My Wildest Dream*. After becoming a fixture in sex comedies produced and directed by the Boulting brothers, Terry-Thomas fuelled his celebrity with an autobiography (1959's *Filling the Gap*), and then moved up to large-scale, often international productions, such as George Pal's *The Wonderful World of the Brothers Grimm* (1962), Stanley Kramer's *It's a Mad Mad Mad Mad World* (1963), and *Those Magnificent Men in Their Flying Machines* (1965). Prior to *Diabolik*, he had appeared in a number of spy pictures—including Don Sharp's *Our Man in Marrakesh/Bang! Bang! You're Dead* (1966), Henry Levin's *Kiss the Girls and Make Them Die* (1966), and the makeshift *Man From U.N.C.L.E.* feature, *The Karate Killers* (1967)—which made him very appropriate casting. Terry-Thomas ended his career in the late 1970s with Paul Morrissey's comedy *The Hound of the Baskervilles* (1978, starring Peter Cook and Dudley Moore). In 1980, he announced his retirement by publicly revealing that he had been living with Parkinson's disease for close to a decade. In the late 1980s, the US syndicated series *Entertainment*





Tonight broadcast a tragic story revealing the beloved comedian to be living in nearly destitute conditions, his disease advanced to a completely debilitating stage that required round-the-clock care. He died on January 8, 1990, in Godalming, Surrey.

The bank manager seen in conversation with Ginco in the opening scene is played by Yugoslavian actor Andrea Bosic, who had worked a number of times in Italian films for Riccardo Freda: *Maciste all'inferno/Maciste in Hell* (1962), *Il magnifico avventuriero/The Magnificent Adventurer* (1963), *Giulietta e Romeo* (1964) and *Genoveffa di Brabante* (1965). Bosic's casting in *Diabolik* may have been intended as a wink, as one of his most visible recent roles at the time was as Inspector Milton, the Scotland Yard adversary of the eponymous anti-hero of Umberto Lenzi's *Kriminal* (1966) and *Il marchio di Kriminal* (1967), which were based on another popular Milanese comic book series by the Giussanis' own arch-rival, Max Bunker (a.k.a. Luciano Secchi).

Bava's good friend, stuntman Goffredo "Freddy" Unger, doubled for John Phillip Law in some masked long-shots that didn't require Law to be on-set, and also in some physically challenging shots, such as the drop from the back of the moving truck and the high dive that preceds the main titles. Unger can also be seen, *sans* mask, in the opening scene of the undercover policemen disguising themselves as diplomats in the $10,000,000 autocade; he's the third policeman, the one shown straightening his unmatched socks, and is given a top-to-bottom lookover by the camera as Ginco inspects him.

All casting hung on the approval of Dino De Laurentiis, which shows that he and Bava had sympathetic tastes, as Bava was able to hire some of his favorite supporting players. A bouquet of familiar faces can be found in *Diabolik*, some of them uncredited. Gaunt, scarecrow-like Federico Boido, who played an undead astronaut in *Terrore nello spazio*, appears as one of Valmont's henchmen (he nonchalantly plugs a

DIABOLIK *and Eva are in the money, in the film's most celebrated sequence.*



CRIME *is the ultimate aphrodesiac for Diabolik and Eva.*

machine-gun hole in a jet's fuselage with a wad of chewing gum); Francesco Mulé, who appeared in *Le spie vengono dal semifreddo,* appears anonymously as the crematorium attendant, who discovers the emeralds in Valmont's ashes; and Robert Buchanan (a.k.a. Walter Williams), the court eunuch of *Esther and the King,* can be seen supervising the giant gold ingot shipment with Ginco.

Production

As *Diabolik* was in the preproduction stage, *Le spie vengono dal semifreddo* was released to Italian theaters and became Mario Bava's highest-grossing Italian release ever, which doubtless brought De Laurentiis some joy in his choice of director. Bava took advantage of his success to ensure that he could retain the valued services of his usual camera squad, including Antonio Rinaldi, which Dino permitted in light of their current success, knowing that Bava himself could always step in, were a problem to arise.

Bava also hired, as art director, his old friend Flavio Mogherini, with whom he had not worked since *Le meraviglie di Aladino* in 1961. After the traumatic events of that production, Mogherini had turned his attention to projects less fabulous but more prestigious, including a pair of neorealist films for Pier Paolo Pasolini (*Accattone, Mamma Roma*) and the notable omnibus film *Laviamochi il cervello/RoGoPaG,* jointly helmed by Roberto **Ro**ssellini, Jean-Luc **Go**dard, **Pa**solini, and Ugo **G**regoretti (hence its US title). Between 1963 and 1966, Mogherini appears to have temporarily withdrawn from the cinema, for undetermined reasons. In 1966, he returned to active duty as art director of Pasquale Festa Campanile's *Il marito è mio e l'ammazzo quando mi pare/Drop Dead, My Love.*



MARIO BAVA *prepares the "money bed" scene for filming by arranging some faux American currency around his actors to make it more readable for the camera.*

In fact, the art direction credit of *Diabolik* is shared by Mogherini and Piero Gherardi (1909–71), one of the great veterans of Italian production design, whose past triumphs included King Vidor's *War and Peace* (1956), Mario Monicelli's *I soliti ignoti/Big Deal on Madonna Street* (1958), and several of Fellini's greatest: *Le notti di Cabiria/Nights of Cabiria* (1957), *La dolce vita* (1960), *Otto e mezzo/8½* (1963), and *Giulietta degli spiriti/Juliet of the Spirits* (1965), two of which won him Academy Awards. Gherardi had worked with Bava a few times before, early in both their careers; he designed the sets for two Carlo Ponti productions shot by Bava: *Quel bandito sono io!* and *Miss Italia,* both released in 1950.

Diabolik's resplendent, semi-futuristic sets are more suggestive of the past work of Gherardi, which leads one to believe that Mogherini's talents were applied to the field in which Bava first made his acquaintance: miniatures. The film features extensive miniature work, including the foregrounded radio-controlled rock that conceals the entrance to Diabolik's cave, the tunnels leading into the cave, the model of the exploding train and bridge, and so forth. Mogherini's contribution to *Diabolik* revitalized his career, and he thereafter returned to the cinema full-time. He designed several more pictures—including *Machine Gun McCain* (1968), *Kemek* (1970), and *Homo Eroticus/Man of the Year* (1971)—before making the jump to the director's chair in 1972, a position he held until his death in 1994.



FILM *publicist Chuck Painter introduces John and Marisa to Diabolik's latest comic book adventure.*

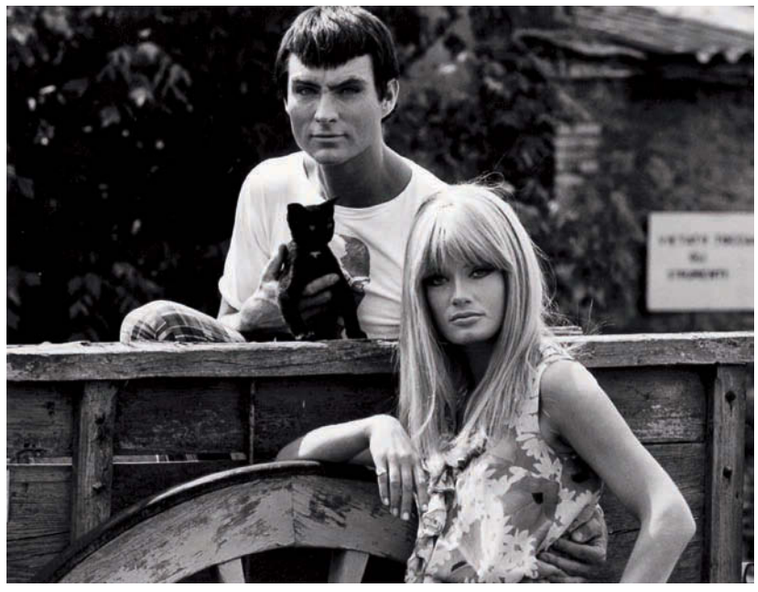
By comparing the second and final draft of the Gates/Degas screenplay (dated December 5, 1966, and titled *Goldstrike*) to the finished film, it is possible to discern Bava's particular contributions to the narrative.

In the pre-credits heist sequence, the script depicts the transport motorcade as an ordinary armored car carrying $10,000,000 in gold; the film uses the armored car motorcade as the first of many sleight-of-hand diversions, with the payload being transported in a Rolls-Royce, in cash. This clever amendment, with the police posing as a foreign diplomat and his entourage, not only shows the extraordinary measures which the law is required to take in order to avoid Diabolik, but by depicting the fortune as cash rather than gold, Bava simultaneously renders the later giant ingot scheme less redundant and sets the stage for the celebrated scene of Diabolik and Eva making love in their stolen fortune. This bed scene, incidentally, is not represented in the script and thus was entirely Bava's own invention.

On page 14 of the script, a color suggestion is made: "In general, all of Diabolik's accoutrements are black, all Eva's—white." Judging from the test stills of Catherine Deneuve, this concept was retained throughout preproduction and early production; it was abandoned at some point after the arrival of Marisa Mell, who wears various colors in the film, particularly orange. However, the black/white scheme is cleverly utilized onscreen with Diabolik and Eva's matching Jaguars. When Diabolik drives his black car into a mountain tunnel, he meets Eva inside with her white car, and they send the original getaway car over the cliff via remote control before continuing in their motorized disguise. Curiously, a similar moment occurs in "True or Falseface," a first season episode of ABC-TV's *Batman*, in which Falseface (Malachi Throne), a villainous master of disguise, drives his dark getaway van behind a building, only to have it emerge on the other side as white, recolored by unexplained, magical means.

Perhaps in a nod to *Dr. No* (1962)—in which the eponymous villain's hideout displayed a painting then in the national headlines as being stolen—the script refers to a wall in Diabolik's cave being stacked with "heaps of money bags," including "the thick grey Royal Mail bags which Diabolik took in the Great British Train Robbery."[10] This may seem an odd detail, as most of the twenty perpetrators of the Great British Train Robbery (the biggest robbery in history, which took place on August 8, 1963, and involved the theft of £7,500,000 in small denomination pound notes) were captured and sentenced to a collective 300 years in prison; however, the mastermind behind the operation—later revealed to be a professional thief named Bruce Reynolds—succeeded in eluding the authorities until 1968. Thus, Gates and Degas were wittily crediting the triumph of this bold crime to Diabolik.

During the press conference which Diabolik and Eva upset with "exhilarating gas," the script has them don small protective masks prior to gassing the room; Bava replaced



JOHN *and Marisa pose with Diabolik, a kitten they adopted during production.*

10 Brian Degas and Tudor Gates, *Diabolik,* final draft screenplay, 16.



these cumbersome devices with "anti-exhilarating gas pills."

A scene of Ginco busting Valmont-employed lorry drivers at the shipping docks for smuggling narcotics inside fish was abandoned.

The psychedelic discothèque seen in the film was scripted as taking place in a casino. Here, a group of old and middle-aged men are described as playing "The Royal Game of the Goose" on a giant board with scantily clad young women as the game pieces.

In the script, Eva reminds Diabolik of her upcoming birthday, whereas in the film, it is Diabolik who reminds her. This is a better approach, as it better underscores Diabolik's devotion to her. As they watch television in their hideout, Eva calls Lady Clark an "ugly bitch" (a line omitted in the film, as it would have made Eva less attractive in character), and her necklace is made not of emeralds, as in the film, but of black pearls. (This allows them to stand out more effectively in the later shot revealing them in Valmont's white, cremated ashes.) The theft of the necklace is also depicted far more crudely than in the film, with Diabolik snatching the necklace directly off the neck of Lady Clark, to whom he says, "Thank you. I hope you're insured."

The script finds Eva injured while working out on an exercise bicycle, not while setting up the makeshift mirror roadblock with Diabolik. She goes to Dr. Vernier, whose receptionist informs Valmont; in the film, she is turned in by Vernier himself—his betrayal of Diabolik's woman underscoring the extent to which he has been intimidated by Valmont. The script contains no suggestions of Eva's guard at the cabin being a sadist, trying to burn her with cigarettes and so forth, so this was also likely Bava's addition.

The scene involving the Minister of Finance was scripted as a conversation between he and Ginco, but was later rewritten as a televised plea by the Minister to the public, beseeching everyone to pay the taxes they *feel* they owe. With Terry-Thomas cast in the role, it made far better use of his comedic talents to restage the scene in this way. Though the scene is very funny, it fades out before reaching any kind of adequate conclusion and makes a disappointing exit from the film for the comedian.

The script finds Diabolik being hailed as a national hero for making fools of the police and government, and he later hijacks the gold ingot from a train with 600 people aboard. The underwater sequence is much briefer and not as elaborate in the script. Diabolik and Eva move the huge ingot inside a prefabricated cottage that communicates with their hideout. In one of the screenplay's most amusing lines, Eva looks at the massive plunder and notes, "As our only piece of furniture, it's rather space consuming . . . !" The proximity between the cottage front and the cave allows Ginco and his men to find their way into Diabolik's hideout simply by finding the ingot. The climax generally plays out as filmed, although Eva does not return to pay homage to her gold-encased lover inside the hideout. Instead, the script finds her seeking out the gold-encased Diabolik in the Hall of Ministry, where he has been placed on permanent display.

In general, a comparison of the script and film indicates that Bava was largely responsible for making all of the characters more real and sympathetic, the situations even more fabulous, and accentuating the film's sense of fun, in its staging as well as its incidental dialogue. Almost without exception, the film's most memorable lines appear to have been added by Bava, including Valmont's line about dropping Vernier "from the human register," and Diabolik's poetic appraisal of his thermal protective outfit: "With this suit, I could swim through the center of the sun." Bava was also careful to remove any hint of negativity from the depiction of his anti-heroes, who comport themselves very much to public approval, in the spirit of surreal anarchists rebelling against the strictures of government—the creative rebelling against the mundane and unimaginative.

For *Diabolik,* Bava was granted the most indulgent budget of his career, but he was kept on a tight leash—in fact, a couple of tight leashes. One of these was the result of his own past experience of making films with more ingenuity than cash, and the other was the arch-conservatism of the De Laurentiis organization.

"The only film I ever shot with true economic ease, without any concern for budget, was *Diabolik*," Bava confessed. "They placed about $3,000,000 at my disposal, but I was so used to working with little money, I spent no more than $400,000!" [11]

With great amounts of money comes great responsibility, whether one uses it or not, and Bava quickly learned that he wasn't cut out for this more responsible level of filmmaking. Though the equivalent of $3,000,000

◀ **DIABOLIK** *prepares Eva for the birthday gift of Lady Clark's emerald necklace.*

BRITISH *comic actor Terry-Thomas has a few amusing scenes as the Minister of the Interior, an exemplar of the corrupt and incompetent government opposed by Diabolik.*



11 Ornella Volta, "*Conversation avec Mario Bava*," *Positif* 138, May 1972, 44–48.

was allotted for the film, every expense had to be proposed and explained beforehand, and accounted for afterwards. Gone was Bava's former freedom to act impulsively on new ideas, to improvise, to throw away the script. Everything that crossed his mind required Dino's okay before it could be put into action. Bava got along quite well with De Laurentiis, according to Lamberto Bava, but he was perpetually aggravated by the fact that Dino was not always available, having other films in various stages of production, preproduction, and post-production at Dinocittà and elsewhere throughout the world, all at the same time.

"Between one thing and another, they kept me dancing for months and months—I, who made *Operazione paura* in twelve days!" Bava later complained. "And it wasn't as if they were paying me extraordinary expenses. I had very few means available to me. Imagine how I had to get by, inventing everything with trickery, because the production company gave me nothing to work with! Nothing!" [12]

This is apparently why, in the name of expediency, Bava resorted to creating some of the film's key sets himself, by means of illusion. For the opening shot, Bava supervised the creation of two hanging maquettes which provide the illusion of the two buildings framing the action of the armored motorcade. The scene was actually staged on the exterior grounds of Dinocittà, where there were no buildings, with the vehicles driving within marked "safe" areas that preserved the illusion. Portions of these maquettes were later reused in the montage of exploding government buildings.

By far the most elaborate of the film's illusions is Diabolik's fabulous underground hideout. In the screenplay, it is described thusly:

> *Camera moves with EVA, away from the garage with its curved, polished steel walls supporting the camouflage of the mound, to the GROTTO with its soft air conditioned hiss.*
>
> *Chromium plated girders bear the weight of the mass of rock and earth above. EVA's reflection shimmers in the blue water of the beautiful appointed swimming pool.*
>
> *She passes through the glass, electrically operated doors into the living room, low-ceilinged. Here the girders are faced by wood panelling, reflecting the warm glow of the concealed lighting. There is a tasteful mixture of superb modern pieces and beautiful antiques, the waiting theme being the rich perfection of everything. Soft music drowns the faint hiss of the air conditioning, a slow, romantic, dreamy version of the DIABOLIK MUSICAL THEME.* [13]

The hideout seen in the finished film is considerably more spectacular than the ordinary basement recreation room described in the script; a *tour de force* of Bava and Mogherini's combined scenic imagination. "I swear to you," Bava assured Luigi Cozzi, "it was all done with mattes—photos that I retouched and cut-up on the spur of the moment, improvising to improve upon the impoverished quality of the sets, which I glued to a piece of glass in front of the camera."

"I remember, one time, they called off work for about three days," recalls John Phillip Law. "I said, 'What's going on?' and they said, 'Never mind, stay at home. Mario's working. We'll call you when we need you.' When I came back a couple of days later, I walked onto this big empty set. There wasn't a set, you know? There was a camera, but there were no props, nothing except the place where they put the Jaguar. Then they said, 'C'mon up here and take a look!' I climbed up [onto the catwalk] and took a look through his camera. He had two big pieces of glass that held all these cutouts of that whole cave where Diabolik lived! And when Dino saw that in the rushes, I remember I was sitting in the back [of the screening room] and he was going, 'Ahhh! I'm going to tell Paramount this set cost *$200,000*!' And he could have easily done it!"

The entrance to Diabolik's cave utilized a combination of locations. The entrance was filmed on a roadside with a natural declension; in the foreground of the shot was placed a miniature, radio-controlled rockbed that could be opened and closed like a box lid from a switchboard. When the miniature was operated, the Jaguar was driven behind it in forced perspective, creating the illusion that it was moving on to a ramp availed by the secret entrance. The Jaguar is next shown driving into actual cavern surroundings, which were shot on location in the caves beneath Rome's Viale

MARIO BAVA *at work on the elaborate glass matte and maquette construction that is Diabolik's cave.*

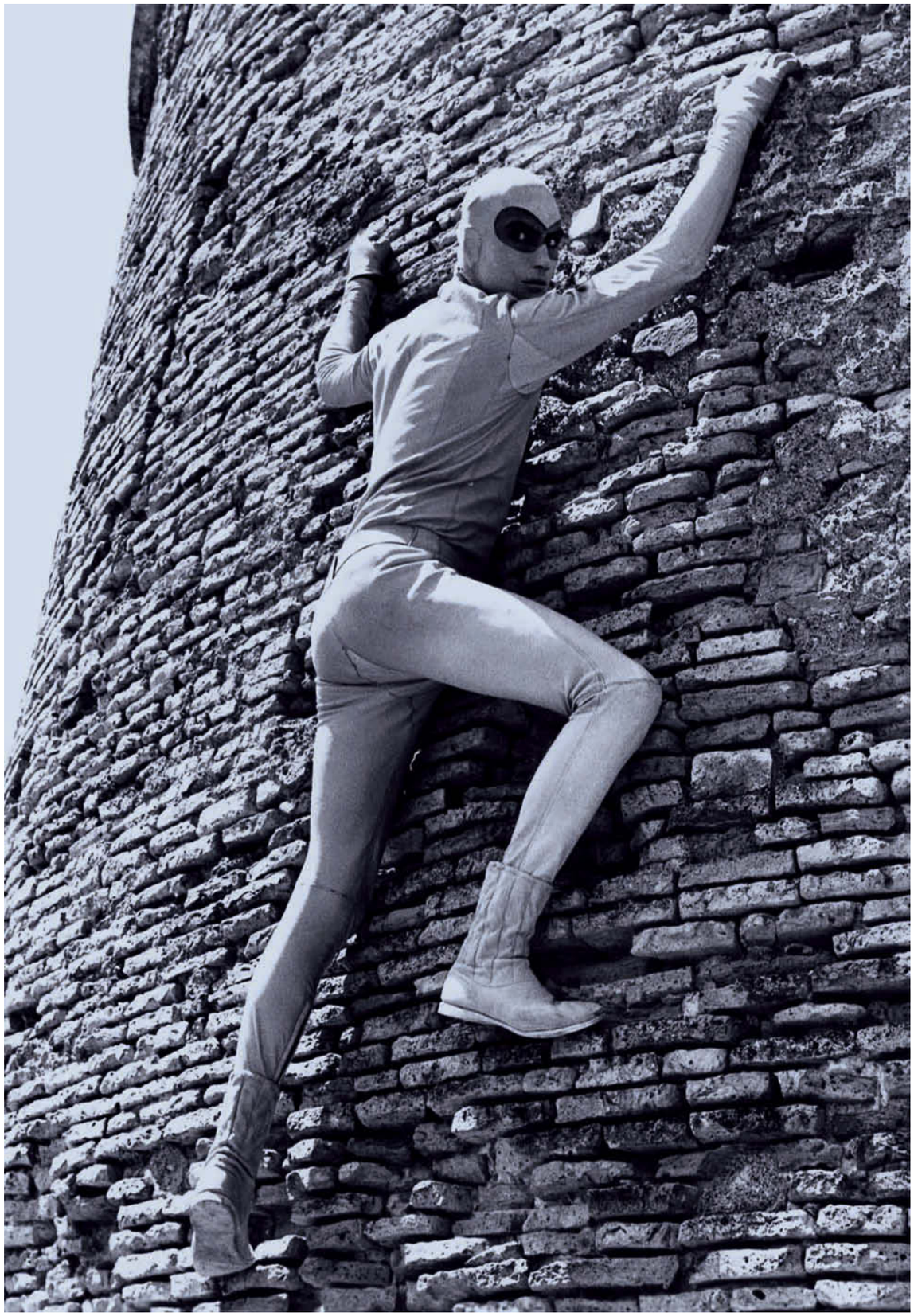


WHO *says crime doesn't pay? Diabolik and Eva relax on their giant revolving bed.* ▶

12 Cozzi.

13 Degas and Gates, 14–15.





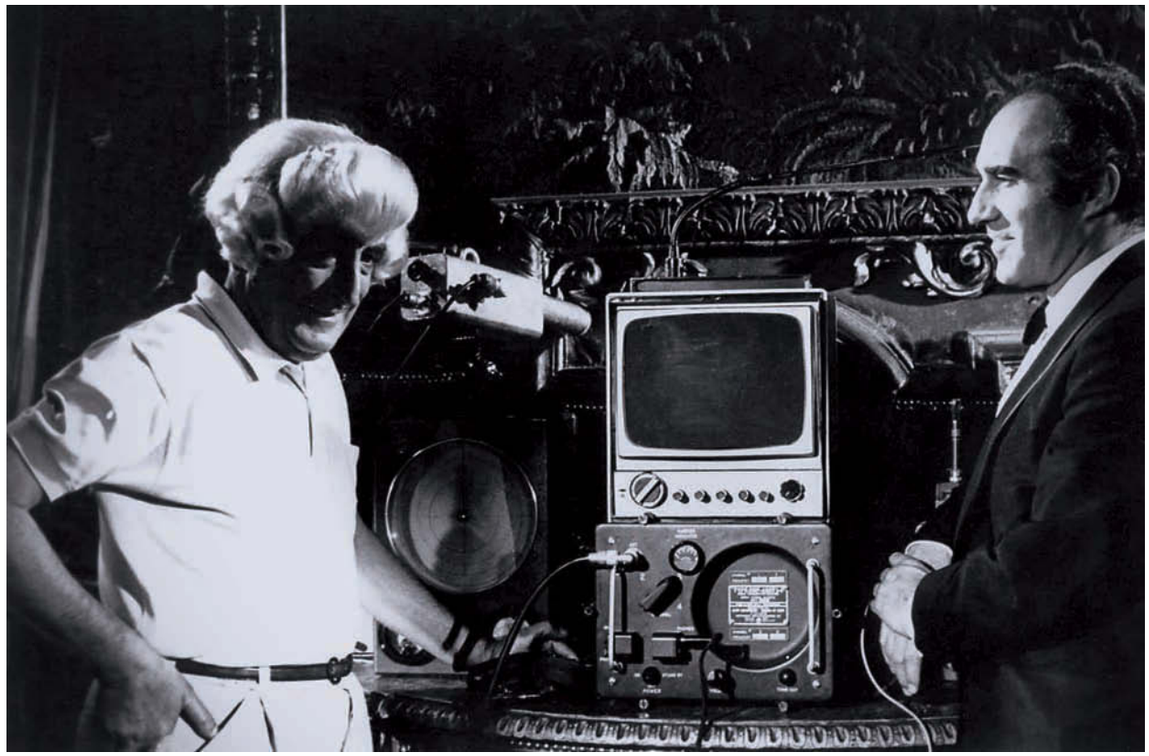
DIABOLIK *changes color to camouflage his climb to the residence of Sir Harold and Lady Clark, in search of a birthday present for Eva.*

Libio, where the climactic scenes of *I coltelli del vendicatore* had been filmed. What follows are a combination of live automobile interiors and miniature exteriors as a toy Jaguar rolls through various fabulous tunnels and elevators. The area where the car finally settles was a near-empty stage, with only the borders of the passage built to keep the car aligned with the mattes, as well as an aluminum-colored stairwell to accommodate Marisa Mell's exit from the shot. She walked up the stairs onto an ordinary backlit catwalk, which was blocked from the camera's view by a hanging maquette of a steel, streamlined passage with opaque windows; as the scene unfolds, she appears to be entering and walking through the maquette. Some of the more fabulous trappings of Diabolik's cave—like his combination safe—had to be built from scratch, but many of the unusual devices on display therein were made up of little more than everyday household items, such as smoke alarms, electric fan grilles, plastic hoops, and art supplies, some of them carried over from *Terrore nello spazio*—including the door of the spaceship Argos, which shows up as a ceiling fixture.

Bava was also pressed into action by the dictum that money can't buy everything. "I could never find the scenery that I wanted, so I took care of that by hanging silhouettes of houses, cut out of cardboard, over a sheet of glass in front of the camera." [14]

Law remembers an instance of this, as well: "We were out on a hillside, one day . . . I was doing the scene where I come down in a parachute, gather everything up and go running up to this cabin to rescue Eva. Mario couldn't find a cabin that he liked. They went out and looked for some cabins, but he didn't like this and he didn't like that . . . Finally, he said, 'Let's break for lunch; give me a magazine' and he cut a little cabin, maybe an inch-and-a-half high, out of a Camel cigarette ad. He glued it on one

14 Cozzi.



MARIO BAVA *camping it up in a footman's powdered wig, to the amusement of Michel Piccoli.*

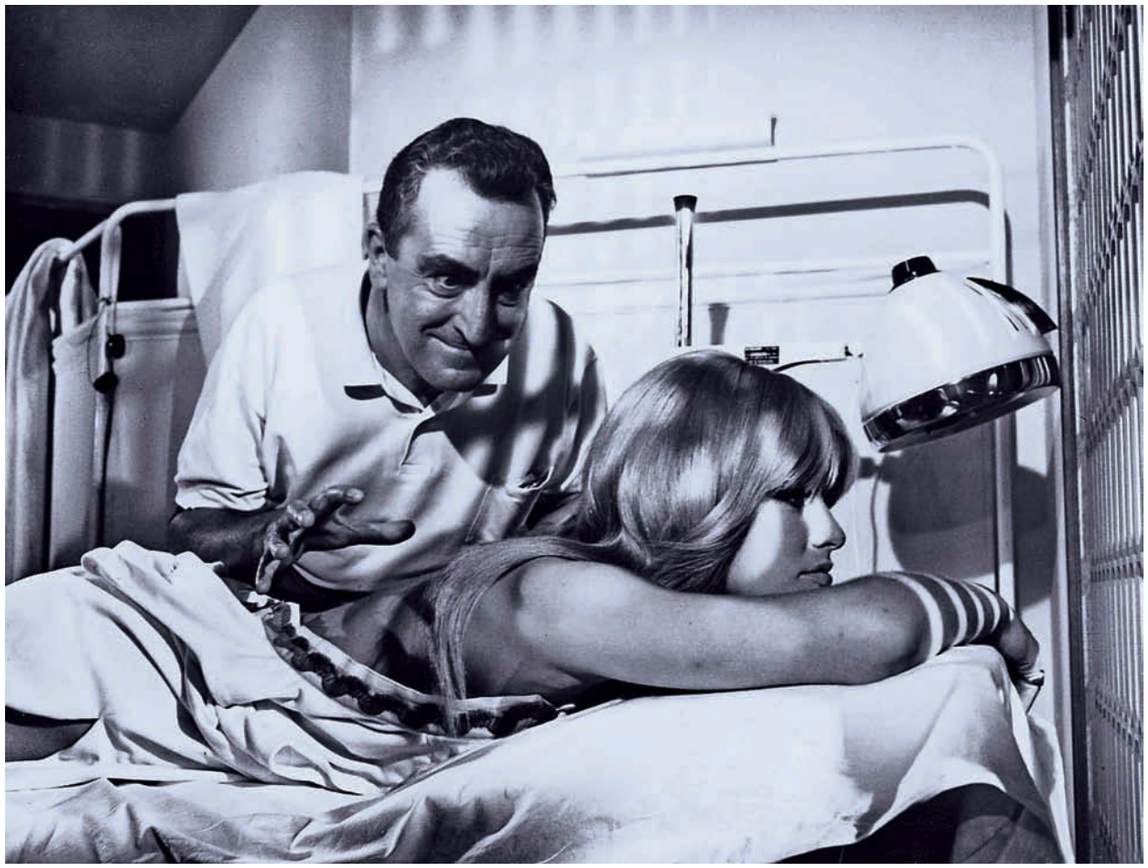
little sheet of glass—you know, about 2' x 2'—stuck it there and then he put a platform up on the hill behind it. He said, 'Look, John—just run up there, walk up those two steps, step forward onto the platform and then *don't move*—because you'll be masked by this little thing on the glass.' Sure enough, I went up there and, you know, [on film] it looked like I was banging on the door and I stepped inside and that was it. The cabin wasn't even there. I was just standing in space there on a little box!"

Bava worked his magic similarly in the earlier scene of Diabolik meeting with Valmont's men outside their private plane. The best way to explain the magic is to state, very simply, that no plane was rented for use in the film. The action on the airstrip was shot outdoors on the grounds of Dinocittà, with the actors standing behind a large glass matte where the wing and a portion of the hull of a prop plane was painted. Production stills reveal that a glass matte was also painted to show the plane in flight, as Diabolik awaited it on the ground below; the plan may have been to move the glass matte on a dolly, to "animate" the plane, but for whatever reason, the shot was sacrificed. The shots of characters dropping through the trap door in Valmont's plane were shot on a miniature floor with an articulated trap door, positioned above a rotating matte painting of the ground below; by stepping through the film one frame at a time, it is easy to identify the falling figures as ordinary store-bought G. I. Joe dolls, redressed in appropriate clothing, but the editing is so precise, the illusion is successful.

John Phillip Law remembers that Dinocittà was revving up for *Barbarella* at this time by acquiring various new-fangled effects equipment for its facility, including elaborate blue screen and front projection systems. The studio was also a warehouse for



"YOU *can tell by looking at this picture how well we got along," says John Phillip Law of this photo from his personal collection.*



LECHEROUS *Uncle Augusto lives again, as Mario Bava pretends to pounce on Marisa Mell in this gag production shot.*

equipment left over from earlier De Laurentiis productions. One piece of archaic equipment that Law remembers less than fondly were a set of "wind machines" that had previously done duty on *La Bibbia/The Bible . . . In the Beginning*—and perhaps in the second World War, as well.

"They were like the front end of B51 Mustangs that had been scrapped after WWII. The wings and the fuselage were mostly gone; it was just like the cockpit and the engine compartments basically, and the propeller. They had this thing out there and the idea was that they would shoot me, lying on my side, opening the parachute with the blue sky behind me; they wanted to see the parachute pop open. They had the wind machine in front of me, and I was wearing a parachute harness while laying on this flatbed truck; they were shooting at just enough of an angle to miss the truck. Well, first of all, it took half a day to get the engine started on this wind machine, so that kind of slowed everybody down and got everybody a bit frustrated. When the guys finally got the thing cranked over, it made a heck of a noise! Bava had earphones on and everything else . . . When it fired up, the wind machine caught the canopy of the parachute, and I was attached to the top of the truck—they tied me to it, so I wouldn't blow off—but they didn't calculate the fact that the parachute . . . I mean, it adjusted every vertebrae in my back from the base of my spine to the top of my neck! When the thing caught, I went 'Wha . . . ?' and they said, 'Roll 'em, shoot'—and I didn't look very much like Diabolik, because I was hollering 'cause they were stretching me out like a rubber band! That thing was really powerful. I was yelling 'Cut! Cut! Cut!' but nobody could hear me, 'cause the guy was so happy after trying for three hours to get this thing going, he was gunning it—*rrrrrr! Rrrrrrr!* There were crew guys running and waving to get him to stop. It took him a couple of minutes to slow it down. I just gritted my teeth and hung on and hoped I wasn't going to be in two pieces by the time it was over."

Law had a much easier time filming the sequence of Diabolik's precarious scaling of the tower of St. Just Castle, home to Sir Harold and Lady Clark. Essentially a contemporary remake of Erik's (Giorgio Ardisson's) suspenseful dagger-assisted climb of Lord Rutford's castle walls in *Gli invasori*, the sequence was achieved in much the same way. The castle itself never existed: the exterior views of the premises were suggested by two glass mattes; the oceanside view utilized a photograph of a castle clipped from a magazine, while the view from the prostitutes' work station and Diabolik's low-angle POV of the tower were both air-brushed paintings. The wall scaled by Diabolik was a convex section of material positioned on a beachfront slope at an angle of approximately 35°, allowing him to scale it easily, without having to be doubled by Freddy Unger. The scene was shot day-for-night on location, with a wide-angle lens for the high-angle shots, to exaggerate their sense of depth and thus create a false sense of height. Close inserts of the suction grips were added later in the studio, as was a side view of the climb which Law re-enacted against a blueback, allowing a background of ocean footage to be optically inserted.

One of the more ambitious trick shots was of the "Operation Goldvan" train crossing over the high bridge rigged for explosion. The bridge was a scale model, the train was a toy train painted to resemble the real one used in the preceding footage, and the set-up was filmed through a glass matte with air-brushed clouds, to layer the illusion. The explosion that occurred on-set, filmed by high-speed cameras, was evidently unsatisfactory, as it was beefed-up in post-production with an animated, optical overlay explosion. While not a realistic bit of demolition, the optical element gives the act of destruction a comic book feel that doesn't seem out of place.

When *Diabolik* was released in January 1968, it earned a not overly impressive 285 million *lire* [$178,000] at the Italian boxoffice; Vadim's *Barbarella*, when it was released the following October, would earn nearly three times as much. However, if one were to compare the expenditure-to-earning ratios of the two films, *Diabolik* was by far the more profitable of the two—at least until *Barbarella*'s greater success in the home video era, due largely to its notorious anti-gravity striptease by Jane Fonda.

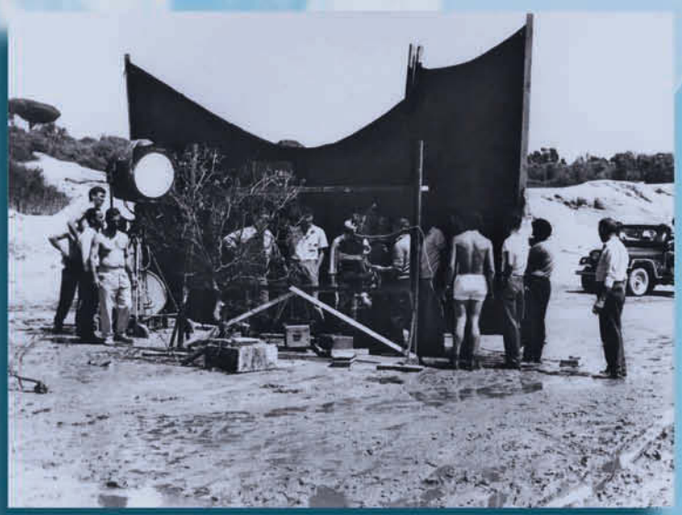
"*Diabolik* wasn't a flop, but wasn't a hit, either," estimates Lamberto Bava. "It did well enough, though De Laurentiis, who loved going into the

DIABOLIK *prepares to meet Valmont's plane . . . but how to film a plane without renting one? Bava and crew gather to execute a layered glass matte painting. Photo in top left corner shows Valmont's jet in flight, a trick shot cut from the final assembly.* ▶













editing room and following the whole process, was certain that *Diabolik* was going to be a masterpiece." Indeed, although De Laurentiis was a frequent presence on the set during production and a regular visitor to the editing room, he was still taken by surprise when presented with the film's final cost, which was in stark contrast to the sum he had allotted. He immediately offered Bava the balance of the budget to produce a sequel. At the time the offer came, Bava was exhausted by the demands made of him throughout the production by De Laurentiis' front office ("Worse than a ministry," he called it) and refused to work again under such strenuous conditions. "I informed [De Laurentiis] that Diabolik was immobilized, that he was suffering from a permanent disability—that he was dead!" Bava explained. [15] In a subsequent interview, Bava suggested the true extent of his identification with the anti-hero: "De Laurentiis tried to cajole me into directing a sequel, but I told him I was sick, sick in bed. *Permanently!*" [16]



THIS PROMOTIONAL *shot of Marisa Mell shows the actress in a bisected Jaguar situated in front of a blue screen on a Dinocittà sound stage.*

Music

Diabolik is remarkable as the only collaboration between the Italian cinema's greatest fantasy director and its most gifted and prolific composer, Ennio Morricone. Born November 10, 1928, in Trastavere, Morricone began composing original music at the prodigious age of 6. At the age of 12, he began his studies at the Accademia di Santa Cecilia, where he studied trumpet and composition. As a musician, his academic performance was above average (he received his diploma in trumpet in 1946, earning 7 out of 10 points), but he truly excelled in orchestration and composition (receiving these diplomas respectively in 1952 and 1954, receiving a respective 9 and 9.5 out of 10). Morricone married in 1956 and worked as a musician, performing in various Roman nightclubs, before progressing to composing and arranging scores for RAI Televizione. From the late 1950s to the early '60s, he worked as an arranger at RCA Records, working on recordings by such artists as Mario Lanza, Paul Anka, and Catherine Spaak. His first film score was for Lionello Salce's *Il federale/The Fascist* (1961). In 1962, he scored Bernardo Bertolucci's first feature, *Prima della rivoluzione/Before the Revolution,* and in the following year, he scored his first Italian Western, Ricardo Blasco's *Duello nel Texas* (1963), which he was obliged to sign with an American-sounding pseudonym, "Dan Savio." These early years were spent repeatedly scoring films for Salce and also Camillo Mastrocinque, for whom he would later score the Barbara Steele horror film, *Amanti d'oltretomba/Nightmare Castle* (1965), which Morricone later declared as one of his own favorite works.

While working at RCA in 1963, Morricone was introduced to an American musician named Peter Tevis, a guitarist and vocalist whose lack of success in his homeland prompted him to explore the opportunities available to him abroad. To make his music more interesting to the European palate, he perfected a blending of American bluegrass and Spanish flamenco, which he demonstrated for Morricone in an audition performance of Woody Guthrie's "Pastures of Plenty." Morricone subsequently arranged for the song to be released on the RCA label in 1963. During this period, Morricone was keen to score the forthcoming film of his childhood schoolmate Sergio Leone, the seminal Spaghetti Western *Per un pugno di dollari/A Fistful of Dollars* (1964), but Leone—who was familiar with the American-sounding scores Morricone had written as "Dan Savio"—was not interested. Morricone then convinced him to visit him, for old times' sake, and played for him "Pastures of Plenty," which came as a eureka to Leone and subsequently became the main theme of *Per un pugno di dollari.* With this vivid reinvention of Western music, Morricone would become the definitive Italian Western composer.

In 1965, Morricone and ten colleagues formed the "Gruppo de Improvisazione Nuova Consonanza," an exploratory musical collective devoted to the study of new musical developments, unusual instrumentation, and instrumental combinations. A kind of classical "super-group," the GdINC would continue, with a revolving door of participants, well into the 1970s, releasing records and sometimes producing music that later resurfaced in Morricone's official scoring work, one notable example being Enzo G. Castellari's thriller *Gli occhi freddi della paura/Cold Eyes of Fear* (1971). Morricone's work with the GdINC was also a notable influence on his contribution to *Diabolik,* which is remarkable for its boundless musical invention and reinvention, as well as its uses of unusual instrumentation.

By the time Morricone came to *Diabolik*, his work had become quite famous in Italy, and he had risen in station to write the music for such important directors as Gillo Pontecorvo (*La battaglia di Algieri/The Battle of Algiers,* 1965), Pier Paolo Pasolini

◀ **DIABOLIK** *emerges from the sea with suction cups at the ready to facilitate a precarious climb.*

15 Volta.

16 Cozzi.

(*Ucchellacci e ucchellini/Hawks and Sparrows*, 1966), and of course, Sergio Leone, notably the remaining two entries in their "Dollars Trilogy." Priding himself on working only with the best in his profession, Dino De Laurentiis signed Morricone to a non-exclusive contract in 1966, beginning with *Le streghe/The Witches*. Morricone would have surely scored *Diabolik* in any case, but it certainly didn't hurt his chances that he had also scored the James Bond spoof *O.K. Connery*.

The *Diabolik* screenplay is full of specific references to various cues, detailed enough in their descriptions to suggest the score may have been written before a single frame was shot. Tudor Gates was insistent, however, that he heard no music in advance of writing. "I always specify music cues where I want them to point up the dramatic action," he explained. "I find composers are more amenable to suggestions than directors. I did not meet Morricone, that I remember, although I may have done and not registered it was Morricone, if you know what I mean."

Just as *Diabolik* itself is a celebration of pop culture, Morricone's score can be read as a celebration of the manic diversity of Italian popular cinema. It takes a main theme and then proceeds to reinvent it, scene by scene—as a lush romantic ballad, a comic jaunt, a psychedelic siren song, a jangly Spaghetti Western anthem with full vocal choir, and so on. There are other cues as well, which pay implicit *hommages* to such signposts of the time as *Batman* (it is possible that Morricone was able to hear Neal Hefti's theme before scoring the film), acid rock, and also Schoenbergian atonality.

The film's main theme, "Deep Down," is a sultry vocal ballad—sung by "Christy" (Maria Christina Brancucci, who had likewise performed the main theme vocal for *O.K. Connery*)—that was recorded in at least three different languages: Italian, French, and English. When I first saw the film in the early 1970s, I found the song cloying and inappropriate, as it made no direct comment on the action preceding the main titles or the film's characters. But the more familiar one becomes with the film, the song becomes increasingly lovable and infectious. The forceful, decidedly sultry vocal line is underscored with an assertive distorted electric guitar (played by Alessandro Alessandroni) repeating a three-note riff, played twice with a return to the first note, which lends the piece an undercurrent of strength and optimism. The vocal lines are likewise repetitive, but the vocal itself is aspiring and passionate, and given additional muscle by a diversion into a trickier time-signature as the song enters its middle-eight. The bridge introduces an unexpected element of sitar, a distinctly Indian flavor doubtless inspired by George Harrison's Indian pop experiments within The Beatles. This Indian coloring of the music, also played by the violins and violas of the orchestral string section, also recurs in other contexts throughout the score, suggesting Diabolik's life of crime as a form of enlightenment, a state of nirvana, a religion. The Italian version of the song was released in Italy as a single on the Parade label, with a track from a different Morricone score on the B-side.

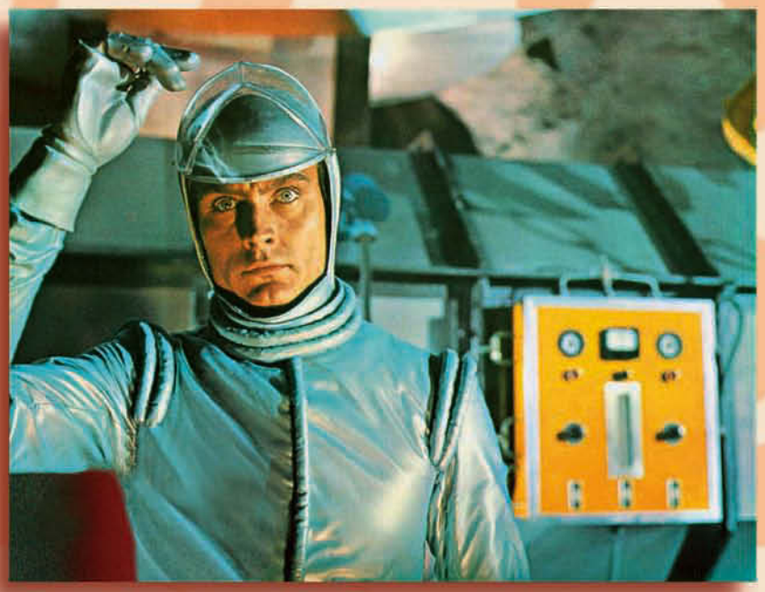


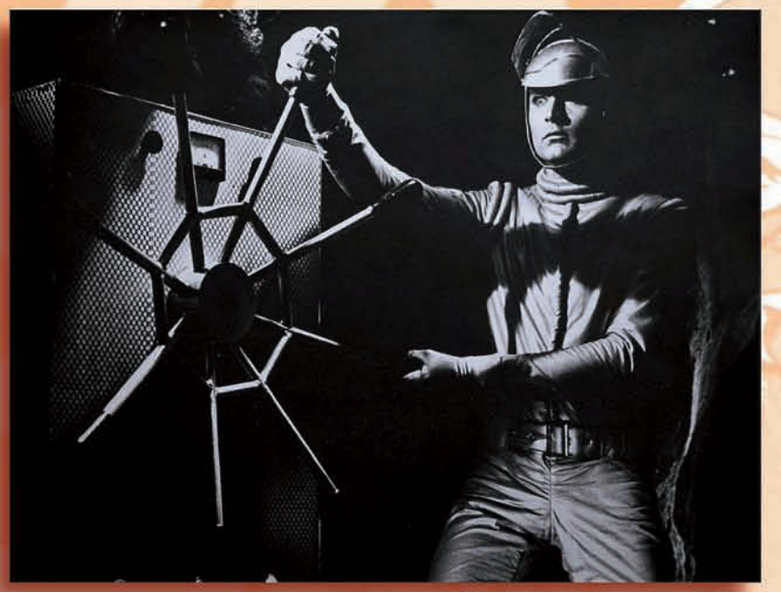
DIABOLIK *composer Ennio Morricone.*

Throughout the film, the "Deep Down" theme is reprised in a variety of guises. As the Jaguar first enters the hideout, it is revisited as a soft and wistful theme with flute, acoustic guitar, sitar and sitar-pitched violin accompaniment, the "Deep, Deep Down" chorus chiming in as the car proceeds down the ramp. A more lush, romantic vocal take accompanies the shots of the two criminals showering. For the lovemaking scene on the money bed, the piece is more strikingly reinvented in the manner of a Spaghetti Western anthem, beginning with ambient, moody organ (played by Bruno Nicolai, who orchestrated and conducted the score) that explodes into the main theme being played on electric guitar as a 4/4 rhythm is tapped out on a high-hat, with a "wa-wa" chorus sweeping in as the full rock accompaniment begins. The theme returns during Eva's swim in the cavern pool as a softer, slower, more melancholy version with Christy singing a melisma in place of the lyrics, over a silken, dreamlike string accompaniment. There is also a spirited, peppier version of the cue heard during the preliminaries of two heist sequences. The final variant, heard as Eva returns to the cave to see her defeated lover, is introduced on solo electric organ with gradual orchestral accompaniment, and finally a luxuriantly warm and loving reading of the piece as she embraces the gold encasing him. A remarkably flexible composition, "Deep Down" becomes, in the final analysis, Eva's love song to Diabolik.

A *Batman*-like chase theme has a rhythm section provided by Alessandroni's double-tracked electric guitar, repeating a frenetic call-and-answer pattern over a high-powered drum kit, while the lead parts are traded between a caterwauling trumpet (anticipating sounds that Miles

WEARING *a protective thermal suit that would allow him to swim through the center of the sun, Diabolik is accidentally covered in an explosion of molten gold—a shrine visited by Eva, in luxurious mourning wear in the final scene.* ▶







Davis would begin to explore with his electric band in the early 1970s) and thunderous, reverberating stings of electric guitar. As the cue progresses, a ghostly, siren-song melisma by Christy is added. A simplified version of the track, perhaps a demonstration recording, is also heard, with the double-tracked guitar playing unaccompanied over a simple staccato high-hat pattern.

A police siren introduces the scene at Valmont's nightclub, segueing into a splendidly anthemic psychedelic number, boldly played in solid 4/4 time with a full vocal chorus providing the only melody over a rhythm section of electric fuzz bass and drum kit. The music, recorded with Phil Spector-like "wall of sound" reverb to make the musical performers sound about five times their actual number, then replaces the vocals with brass, at first playing in concert and then trading parts in a complementary fractured way, before the choir resumes.

During the scene of Valmont's pool party, a vocal song can be faintly heard in the background, playing over a turntable or radio, which the casual viewer may not perceive as an actual Morricone composition—but it is. As if chosen to bring a secret smile to the lips of his most attentive audience, the song is actually Morricone's main theme for an earlier Dino De Laurentiis production, *Thrilling* (1965), an omnibus film co-directed by Carlo Lizzani, Gian Luigi Polidoro, and Ettore Scola. The Polidoro segment, "Sadik," is about the efforts of a neglected husband to win back the attentions of a *fumetti*-loving wife by posing as the Diabolik-like criminal hero of her favorite comic, *Sadik*—essentially the same story later retold by Vittorio De Sica in his segment of *Le streghe*, which featured the very first screen appearance of Diabolik. The vocalist on this cue, incidentally, is not Christy, but Rita Monico.

The film's most experimental cue is heard during the Identikit sequence, consisting of a choppy, atonal electric keyboard "freak out" (to quote one of the bootleg CDs), played by Bruno Nicolai over soft-malleted drums.



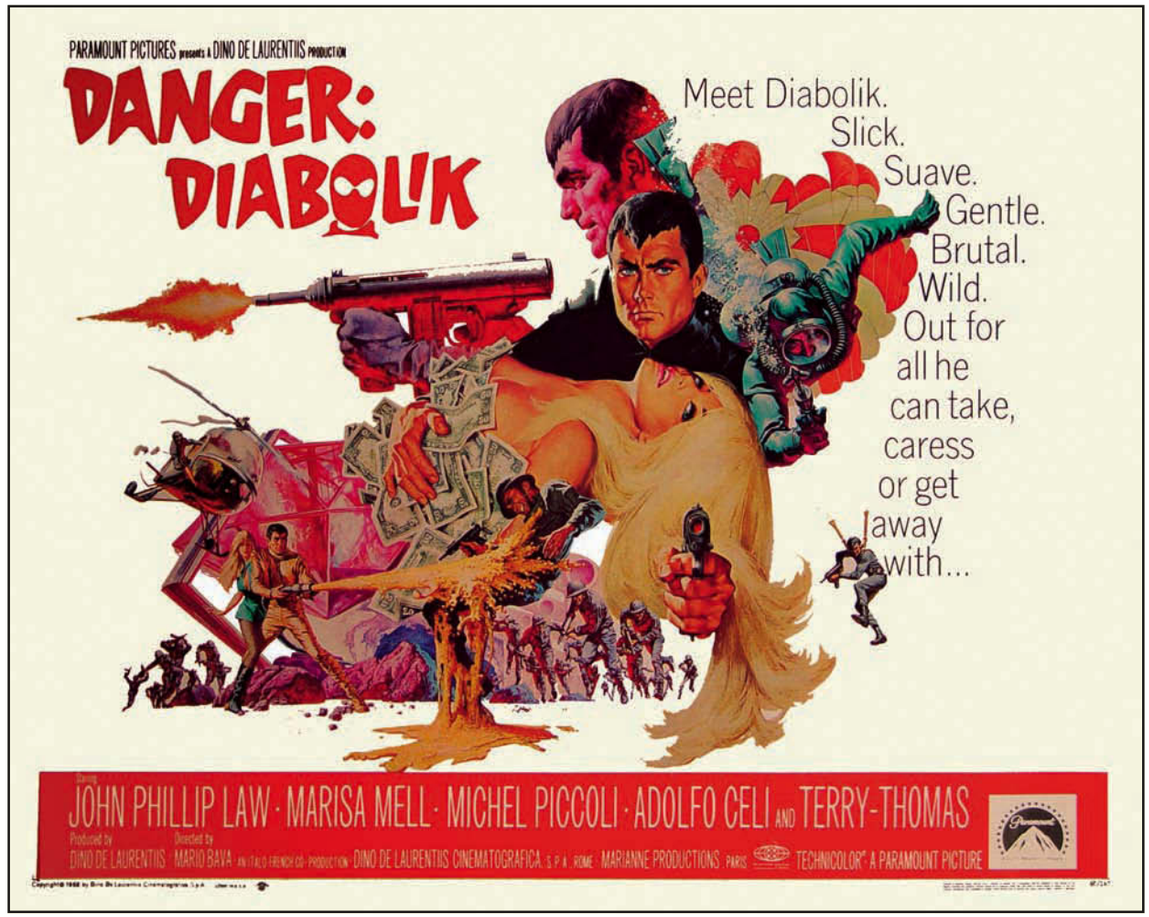
ITALIAN *due-foglia, art by Renato Casaro.*

The scene of Diabolik's ascent up the wall of Lord and Lady Clark's castle is scored by a full orchestra, playing a shapeless, low-key, atmospheric piece in which pulsing woodwinds, made to sound like the nocturnal sighing of birds and crickets, evolves into a subtle orchestral restatement of the sitar-theme from "Deep Down," its mysterioso character occasionally disturbed by thundering reverberations from Alessandroni's electric guitar, synchronized to Diabolik's slipping during his precarious climb.

During the submarine abduction of the giant ingot, another vocal melisma is heard, this time courtesy of the incomparable Edda dell'Orso. Her ethereal scat-singing is initially supported by murky, amorphous orchestral accompaniment, which is then abruptly replaced by a ¾ drum beat and an infectious vocal chorus by his choir, I Cantori Moderni ("Wo-wo-WO-Wo, WO-wo-wo . . ."). After an initial, sparse vocal statement of the theme, a traditional rock band accompaniment with electric piano kicks in to present a fully developed theme that feels closely allied to Morricone's Spaghetti Western work while also feeling perfectly at home in an espionage milieu. Additional parts for brass and woodwinds are heard in the fluttering middle-eight. In a score boasting several outstanding compositions, this one is perhaps the most impressive.

At the time of *Diabolik*'s original release, Morricone's contribution to the film attracted little attention and probably did little for his career. However, when Paramount Home Video first released *Danger: Diabolik* on VHS in 1992, the youth culture was rediscovering '60s "lounge" and "space age bachelor pad" music and Morricone's inexhaustibly rich score suddenly fell on open ears; it was enthusiastically rediscovered and praised as a work at least thirty years ahead of its time. Today, it is one of the *Maestro*'s most beloved soundtracks, and also regarded by soundtrack collectors as a "holy grail" of sorts.

The score's admirers have refused to allow the loss of the original tapes (which are said to have been destroyed in a 1970s warehouse fire) to prevent them from enjoying the music. In recent years, several bootleg CDs have been released, all featuring different configurations of cues lifted from the home video releases. The first of these originated from the VHS release, or an even poorer source, and is the least listenable of the three. The second, working from the cleaner LaserDisc master, is an extremely short production consisting of four "suites" cobbled together from the film music, eliminating the dialogue sound bytes and not including a good deal of uninterrupted music found in the movie itself. The third and most widely circulated of the discs is the best; a limited edition of 2,222 copies, it contains 33 tracks of music and dialogue (and an unrelated, unnumbered bonus MIDI track) and is attributed to Palottolo Foro of Italy. This version, with approximately 39 minutes of music and a total running time of 47:50, is prevented from being an ideal listening experience only by the dialogue excerpts, but can be programmed to skip over the sound bytes. It does an otherwise commendable job of collecting what music from the film is available from various sources. Showing surprising resourcefulness and dedication, Palottolo Foro reached back to the original theatrical release for the English-language version of "Deep Down" (played in a different key than the film version, and given a more sparkling mix), and also included the Italian version directly for its 45 rpm release on Italy's Parade label, throwing in the title cut from *O.K. Connery* (also from its Parade 45 release) as a relevant bonus. At least one of the other bootlegs in release is a repackaged copy of this disc. So great is the potential market for an official release of this music that these unofficial releases have sometimes fetched $60 or more when offered on the Internet auction site, eBay.



US *half-sheet poster, art by renowned Western artist Frank McCarthy.*

Even more remarkably, when the March 2002 issue of the popular men's magazine *GQ* offered a list of the Top 10 Movie Soundtracks of all time, Morricone's officially unreleased *Diabolik* was listed as #3.

Commentary

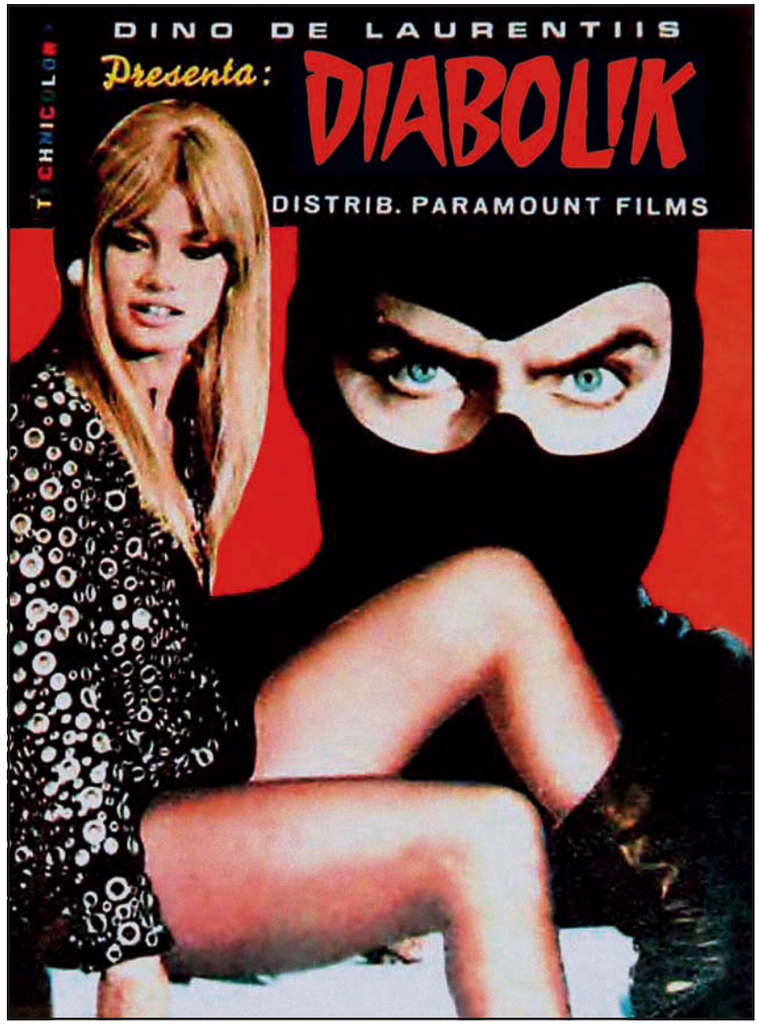
Considered a disappointment at the time of its original release, *Diabolik* has aged remarkably well and is now generally regarded as the best of Bava's light-hearted entertainments. It is more than just an inspired adaptation of the Giussani Sisters' *fumetti,* a fact that only becomes apparent when one realizes that the original comics stories were published

in black-and-white. *Diabolik* defines the correct color template for this black-and-white character, much as Bava redefined the way horror films were photographed in color earlier in the decade. It's not a colorful study in fright and superstition—the sort of film one associates with Bava—but neither is it an impersonal work; on the contrary, the more one is aware of Bava's total control over the film's design, and the abundance of camouflage and trickery that went into its making, *Diabolik* reveals itself to be every bit as personal as *Ercole al centro della terra* or *Terrore nello spazio*, if not quite so autonomous a creation.

Diabolik continues the flowering of a new phase of Bava's *oeuvre*, one that started to bud in *Terrore nello spazio*, which found him breaking away from the gothic horror stories for which he was best known, and forging a new cinematic identity more closely allied with pop art and pop artifice. This was not a unique approach for an Italian director to take in this moment in history, when directors like Fellini (*8½*, *Giulietta degli spiriti*), Antonioni (*Blowup*), Elio Petri (*La decima vittima/The 10th Victim*), Tinto Brass (*Nerosubianco/The Artful Penetration*, *L'urlo*), and others had a shared inclination to invent the times rather than reflect them. The resulting films were not unlike a science fiction spin on the *telefoni bianchi*—the settings became increasingly abstract, the characters (and in many cases, caricatures) grew more stylish and detached, and an implicit challenge was issued to audiences to find something, anything human to grasp onto. In Bava's films, his Pop Art settings and characters are used to depict a shallow society that embraces loveless sex and worships money as a god. *Diabolik* might be expected to run counter to that philosophy, but Bava champions his thieving protagonist because he is that society's enemy—one who steals for love, not greed, and is never "owned" by his acquisitions.

Bava's own feelings about the film were mixed. He hated the additional responsibilities and front office interference that came with working on a "big-budget" film, so much that he would subsequently retreat back into the womb-like safety of anonymous work and low-budget productions; and yet, in one interview, he declared that making *Diabolik* was "one of the most incredible experiences of my life." [17] It contains some flagrant technical imperfections—all the proof one needs of Bava's divided attentions and lack of hands-on control over every department—but no air of compromise. More than thirty years after it was made, it is still considered by many (including some noted comics artists, like Stephen R. Bissette) to be the most successful of all attempts to transpose the comics medium to the screen—quite an achievement, considering its main competition for the honor are Paul Verhoeven's $12,000,000 blockbuster, *RoboCop* (1987) and Sam Raimi's $100,000,000 record-breakers *Spider-Man* (2002) and *Spider-Man 2* (2004).

In any comics adaptation, the saving grace is often dynamic imagery and a command of color, and *Diabolik* has both in spades. In fact, Diabolik is introduced in such a way as to establish his mastery over color and atmosphere, as he clouds the screen during the opening armored car heist with the emissions of three gas cylinders: green, yellow, and purple. By thus identifying Diabolik with color and fog, Bava initiates one of the most amusing indulgences he permitted himself in this production: Diabolik's penchant for crime is almost always illustrated in ways that reflect Bava's own gifts as a filmmaker and illusionist. Just as Bava's greatest pleasure was solving technical problems by the simplest means possible, Diabolik is distinguished as a criminal by finding elegant, audacious and sometimes spectacular solutions to the challenges separating him from his plunder and a safe getaway. When Diabolik drives his Jaguar to the hidden entrance of his fabulous cave, what he does onscreen to open the radio-controlled door is more or less what Bava was doing offscreen to actuate the miniature. More to the point, during the theft of Lady Clark's emerald necklace, Diabolik is shown cheating Inspector Ginco's spy camera by taking an instant photograph of the room and mounting it in the soft wax of a candlestick positioned in front of the camera; thus, he outwits the police by improvising what is, in effect, a matte shot. He subsequently eludes Ginco and his men by catapulting a dummy from the parapets of the castle, and also by stretching a rolled mirror surface across a road to send his pursuers over a cliff; these are both tricks involving deceptions of the eye.



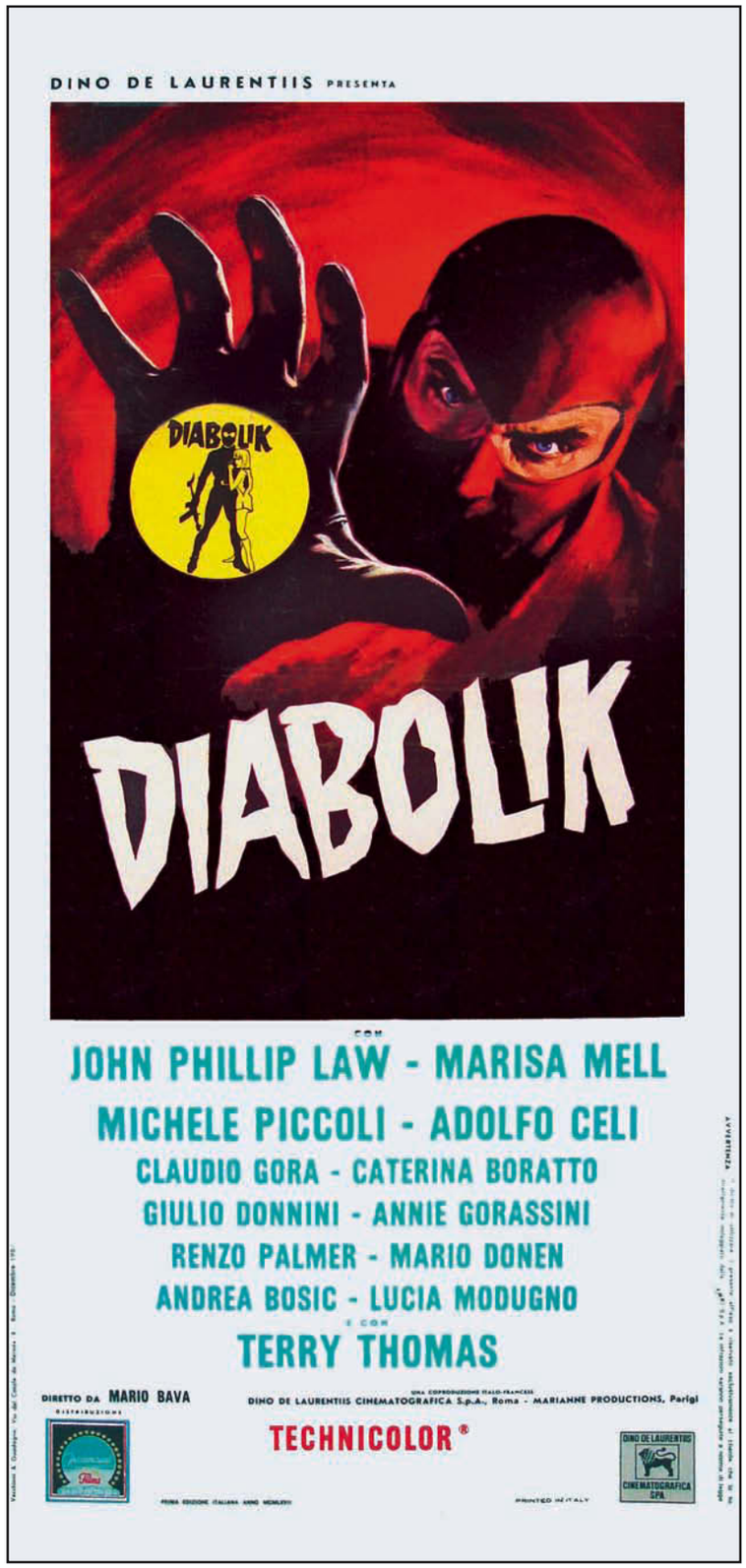
EARLY *promotional art for the film, which accidentally paired the likenesses of Marisa Mell and Jean Sorel.*

In the subsequent pay-off of this scene, Bava slyly conceals a reference to one of his own earlier achievements. As Eva emerges from the subterranean swimming pool, Diabolik presents her with the emeralds from Lady Clark's necklace, arranging them on her chest in a manner identical to the headless, limbless figure in a painting by the French surrealist Rene Magritte. The name of that painting is *The Drop of Water*—and thus does Bava equate Diabolik's career triumph with his own. Bava quotes his earlier work in other instances, too. When Diabolik revives in the morgue, he halts the forensic surgeon's scalpel by reaching out to engulf the camera lens (occupying the surgeon's point of view) with his outstretched hand, its fingers spread to suggest an approaching spider—as Christopher Lee did in *La frusta e il corpo*. Another visual idea from that film, albeit inverted, is used when Diabolik sends Eva away from the cave as it is invaded by Ginco's men. In *La frusta*, Bava repeatedly photographed the apparition of Christopher Lee appearing suddenly from the darkness, as though stepping into

life from the Beyond; in *Diabolik*, as the title character promises, "You'll not be alone so long as I live, Eva!" the film cuts to Eva's face hovering with worry, wraith-like, in the shadows of an exit, which literally swallow her face as she retreats. The shot is rich with ill foreboding, and we are made to know instinctively that this is the end for them. When Eva later reappears, dressed in mourning black, she seems to be garbed in an extrapolation of those very shadows.

Bava also puts his grasp of superstition to work in the earlier scene, not included in the screenplay, of Eva visiting an Esso station en route to see Dr. Vernier. There she is spotted by Rudy, one of Valmont's informants. The gas attendant asks if she would like "a tiger's tail for good luck"—a reference to Esso's trademark slogan of the time ("Put a tiger in your tank") and a promotional giveaway item that Esso station attendants attached to their customers' car radio antennae during the period of that campaign. Eva declines, explaining that she's not superstitious. But it is at this precise moment that her luck takes a turn for the worse.

While *Diabolik* reprises some elements from Bava's past work, it also encompasses the initial statements of some visuals that would recur in subsequent films, notably *5 bambole per la luna d'agosto/5 Dolls for an August Moon* (1970). In the celebrated money orgy sequence, the presence of the couple buried under the cash is signalled by the sudden upward thrust of Eva's feline leg, a bank note clenched between her toes. In a couple of different scenes in *5 bambole*, Bava would emphasize the decadent, animal nature of adultery by showing couples steer motorboats and pass cigarettes with their feet. Likewise, Eva's final visit to the gold-imprisoned Diabolik, in stylish mourning apparel, is essentially reprised in the surprise finale of *5 bambole*, as the former naïf Isabelle (Ely Galleani) visits Gerry Farrell (William Berger) in prison, wearing a spectacular outfit that tells us all we need to know about where the missing millions have gone. This was a scene that



ITALIAN *locandina, art by Renato Casaro.*

Bava later admitted to creating himself, and the similar scene in *Diabolik* also originated somewhere other than in the screenplay. Both scenes are about imprisonment on the surface, but feel more specifically about death and seem to reflect a personal fantasy of premature death and being mourned by a beautiful woman. But is the female in this fantasy just a beautiful woman, reflective of a midlife crisis? Or could she be the artist's muse, or a personification of the artist's work itself? In both scenes, Eva and Isabelle are not just beautiful women, but beautiful women *transformed*—trophies fashioned by the sweat and schemes of the men who loved them. Whatever the personal import of these scenes, they are interesting as romantic scenes in which the male is essentially impotent while the female is at her most attractive—a dynamic most explicitly explored in the climactic necrophilia scene of *Lisa and the Devil* (1973).

Diabolik is one of the most stylishly photographed films of Bava's period with cameraman Antonio Rinaldi, removing (for the most part) the bold colorful lighting of their earlier collaborations and actualizing those colors instead on props, costumes, and set decoration. The most creative lighting in the film is used on the walls of Diabolik's cave, which basically reiterate the color schemes seen in the climactic cavern scenes of *I coltelli del vendicatore*—spots of blue, green, and amber—but are most impressive in the final scenes, after they are covered with molten gold. I find it impossible to tell whether this coloring was done exclusively with amber lighting, or if a replica maquette of the cave walls and ceiling was painted gold and hung in the establishing shots; either explanation seems plausible, but the shots are dazzling, however they were achieved. The film's most interesting cinematographic innovation is its extensive use of wide-angle lenses, which Bava and Rinaldi use to enlarge small sets and to invest individual shots with a greater sense of dynamic comic book frame composition. An excellent case in point is an extended low-angle shot in Valmont's headquarters; the centerpiece of the shot is a telephone (they are waiting for Diabolik to call), but one of Valmont's molls paces through

17 Ibid.

the shot in a miniskirt, which lends the otherwise stationary shot a sense of movement and appeal. When the telephone finally rings, two heads—belonging to Valmont's two henchmen—jut into frame from the left and right periphery to answer it, their unexpected appearance startling the viewer and cleverly reiterating, in a purely visual way, how well guarded this contemptible villain is. Wide-angle lensing would become one of the common signposts of Bava's subsequent directorial phase, used to lend a counterfeit sense of grandeur to sets that were noticeably more humble in actual size, and as an outward reflection of the distorted inner worlds of his protagonists.

Much of the film's sense of magic and fun is generated from the onscreen chemistry between John Phillip Law and Marisa Mell. Apart from looking very much like their *fumetti* counterparts, they are intoxicated by each other's company to an infectious degree; they have an onscreen chemistry that recalls Peggy Cummins and John Dall in Joseph H. Lewis' sexy crime spree drama *Gun Crazy* (1949). Mell and Law's mutual arousal is highly sympathetic, allowing the film to sidestep a more prosaic explication of Diabolik's ethical code. His obsession with Eva forgives his various crimes, all of which are committed with hedonistic flair. Bava (who was marking the 32nd year of his own marriage during this production) couldn't resist occasionally imposing on his criminal couple a sampling of the sometimes trying, seasoned domesticity that was most familiar to him. In the scene where Diabolik asks Eva what she would like for her birthday, she immediately sees and covets Lady Clark's emerald necklace on television. Bava coaxes some wry and ironical emotions from his two young actors, as Eva self-consciously suppresses her pride in feeling worthy of such a tribute, and Diabolik puzzles husbandlike over the extreme measures required to keep this vision contented. After her lover has moved heaven and earth to fulfill her wish, Eva has the gall to purr, "Ahhh, you shouldn't have done it!" It's a delightful counterweight to the film's various caprices, and one of the key instances which connect this glittering confection to the domestic preoccupations that were becoming more pronounced in Bava's work at this time.



POP ART-*influenced French affiche.*

On the negative side, the film contains some blatantly sloppy blue screen work. Two examples are Diabolik placing a call to Valmont from a phone booth, and Ginco lamenting Diabolik's presumed death while driving along ("I can't believe he's really dead"); in both cases, the background plates are poorly color-timed and move independently of the foreground element. These are the kind of shots that cause even those viewers unacquainted with rear-screen projection techniques to howl in pain, and the fact that they survived the final cut shows the extent to which Bava was exhausted and aggravated by the production and forced to relinquish responsibility.

There are also a number of continuity errors, which are surprisingly uncommon in Bava's work. When Diabolik and Eva make love on their bed of stolen money, we can see a discarded black dress adorned with metal-rimmed eyelets, whereas Eva was actually dressed previously in an orange hot pants outfit, and then a bath towel; it is not until the later scene on the same bed—when the duo see the broadcast about Lady Clark's necklace—that Eva is shown wearing this dress (which is either the same dress, or made of the same material, as one worn by Laura Betti in Bava's subsequent *Il rosso segno della follia/ Hatchet for the Honeymoon*, 1970). Eva's birthday is given in this scene as May 5; when Valmont is shot later in the film, after Eva's birthday, an insert shot of his death certificate gives the date as May 3. The necklace is described as being composed of eleven emeralds, but Diabolik victoriously decorates Eva's throat with only nine. This incontinuity could be explained by imperfect marksmanship, but the film says nothing about two of the gems missing their target.

Diabolik was charged by several critics with being a James Bond imitation—which is certainly true in some ways, given the casting of Adolfo Celi and the *Thunderball*-like underwater sequences—but the reverse is equally true. Richard Maibaum and Tom Mankiewicz' screenplay for *Diamonds Are Forever* (1971), Sean Connery's comeback Bond film, mirrors the *Diabolik* script in interesting ways. In one sequence, Bond secretes a cache of diamonds in the body of a corpse, recouping them in a jackpot-like urn while posing as a relative attending the cremation. Later in the film, there is an exact imitation of Bava's foreground miniature of the entrance to Diabolik's subterranean headquarters, as two assassins exit the underground control base of Ernst Stavro Blofeld. Neither scene occurs in Ian Fleming's 1956 novel of the same name. Likewise, Bava's innovative approach to shooting underwater close-ups of Law and Mell—filming them at a higher film speed to slow their movements, through an aquarium foreground—was subsequently adopted for the 1981 Bond film *For Your Eyes Only*, in scenes with Roger Moore and Carole Bouquet.

Release / Variants

In the United States, where the Giussanis' comic never gained a foothold, *Danger: Diabolik* was barely released. Adding injury to insult, it was withheld from a proper British release until January 1969, and then shown in a version reportedly cut by seventeen minutes. As David Hutchison, reviewer for *Films & Filming*, noted: "The result of this delay is that most of the film's content now appears

THIS *German one-sheet poster represents the only photographic advertising generated for the movie, world-wide.*



outmoded and its concentration on thrilling chases, daring robberies, underground hide-outs, underwater sequences and super heroes and villains is more than familiar from the Bond films and the glut of superspy characters." Though not completely flattering to the film, Hutchison made the important point that "the comic strip has a great many affinities with the motion picture; both are a series of separate pictures and take the same advantage of light, shade, color and perspective. Bava is obviously well aware of this and the result is a film strip cartoon which, despite its faults, is generally more successful than either *Modesty Blaise* or *Barbarella* in capturing an elusive comic strip flavor."[18]

Monthly Film Bulletin's anonymous critic was more enthusiastic about the whole: "Bava's superb visual sense stands him in good stead in this comic-strip adventure which looks like a brilliant pastiche of the best of everything in anything from James Bond to Matt Helm . . . Occasionally reminiscent of *Barbarella* in its sidelong sense of humor . . . what it really recalls is Feuillade. Not simply because of Diabolik's penchant for black leotards or for scaling vertiginous walls with hand-operated suction-pads, but because he restores to villainy that long-lost and inimitable touch of good-humored chivalry."[19]

In his 1970 book *Science Fiction in the Cinema*, John Baxter agreed that "Judex is alive and living at Cinecittà." Baxter deserves credit for being the first critic to single out Bava's later work for praise in book form; he calls Bava a "brilliant cinematographer and one of Italy's finest fantasy film-makers," applauds John Phillip Law's "dazzling characterization" and says that Bava gives the film "the visual pace of a streamlined juggernaut."[20]

18 David Hutchison, "Danger: Diabolik," *Films & Filming* 15:7, April 1969, 45–46.

19 "Diabolik (Danger: Diabolik)," *Monthly Film Bulletin* 36:421, February 1969, 31–32.

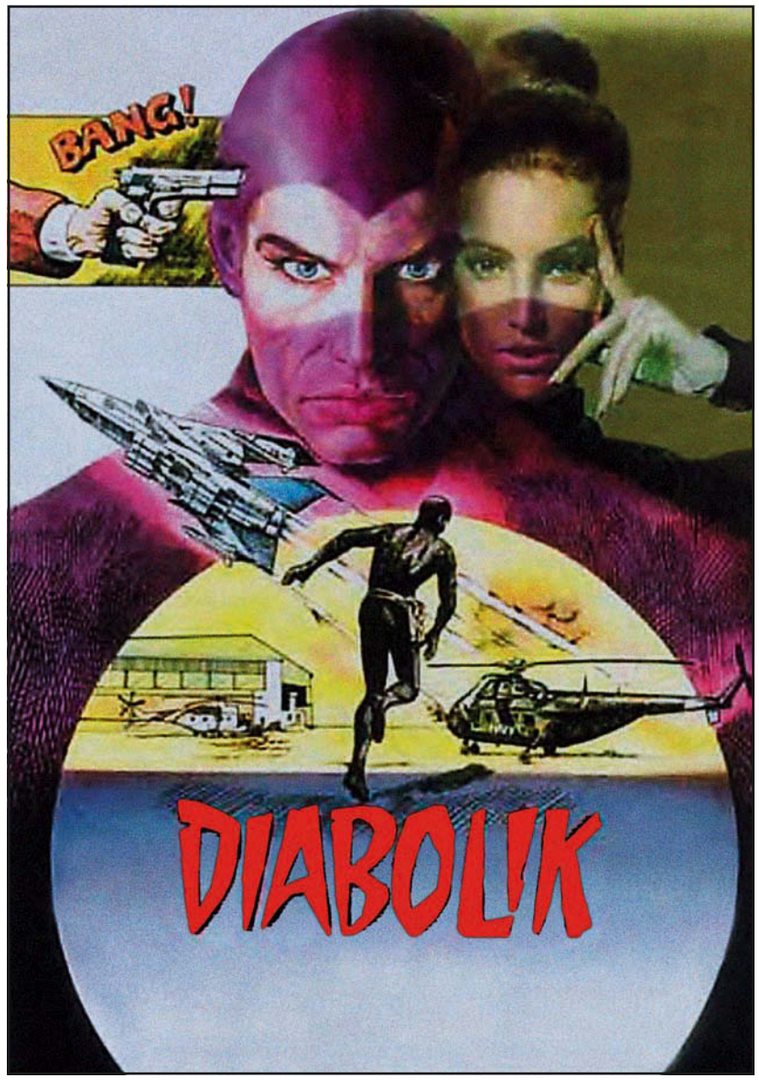
20 John Baxter, *Science Fiction in the Cinema* (New York NY: Paperback Library, 1970), 198–99.

In short, *Diabolik* was enthusiastically received by those lucky enough to see the film when it was still "of its time" and could be appreciated for what it added to the pop culture landscape of which it was very much a part. However, when seen in the context of the more realistic cinema emerging only a couple of years later—*Midnight Cowboy*, *The Wild Bunch*, *Woodstock*, to name a few—*Diabolik* was one of the films that suffered most by comparison; it was not only artificial, but frivolous. As the decades passed, and as culture evolved in new directions, *Diabolik* mutated as well, looking quaintly campy in the 1970s, "interesting" in the 1980s, and finally—miraculously—fashionable once again in the 1990s, when new trends in lounge music, style and fashion caught up with it.

It was just prior to the arrival of the lounge music movement that a fan's letter-writing campaign prompted a hesitant Paramount Home Video to release the film on VHS (as a budget-priced EP speed tape only), and later as a digitally restored, letterboxed LaserDisc in the United States, the latter rumored to have been pressed in an extremely limited edition of only 500 copies. The version of the film presented by both these releases differs dramatically from the currently available DVD edition, and these differences require some notation.

As was discovered by film editor Glenn Erickson, at the time employed in MGM's trailer department, the English soundtrack of *Danger: Diabolik* had to be extensively re-recorded for these initial home video releases. When the tapes were examined, the voice tracks of John Phillip Law, Marisa Mell, and Terry-Thomas were found intact, but the original recordings of the other dubbed voices—including those of Adolfo Celi and Michel Piccoli, all of which were dubbed by British and American voice talent, notably actor Richard Johnson—were lost and had to be re-recorded.

According to Erickson, "When I tried to find a print of *Diabolik* to show at Filmex in 1985, Paramount told me that all rights and prints had been returned to De Laurentiis. When we called De Laurentiis at that time, we were told that all the prints of the film had been recycled for sound fill. I believe, from my experience at MGM/UA, that the 35 mm English-language masters for *Diabolik* were lost, and that the picture had to be reconstituted using an Italian film master and pre-dub audio elements, which accounts for only the principal actors' lines being recovered. Unlike some of our reconstruction attempts at MGM with, say, [Sergio] Leone pictures, *Diabolik* appears to have been produced in several international versions simultaneously. The laser and tape release has music, sound effects, and these three key voices intact, but the rest of the track had to be re-recorded with new talent and remixed."[21]



PROMOTIONAL *art for Rospo Pallenberg's stillborn RAI-2 revival series from 1991.*

Erickson supplied a list itemizing some of the audio differences: (1) in the original theatrical release prints, Diabolik's name was pronounced "Dieabolik," whereas the tape and disc pronounce it "Dee-abolik." (2) A number of minor rewritings of lines have occurred. Celi once said to Dr. Vernier (pronounced "Vern-yay"), "San Francisco dropped you out of the medical register, but if you're lying, I'll drop you from the human register." Now the doctor is "Ver-neer," and the reference to San Francisco has been excised: "Your name was once crossed off the medical register . . . If you're lying, I'll cross you off the human register." (3) The mix also now favors sound effects over music. Originally, every time a Morricone cue was heard, it drowned out most everything else. Now some cues fade in lamely where they used to crash in at full volume; one conspicuous change is the omission of dissonant electric guitar stings to underscore the gold autocade's shadowing by Diabolik's black Jaguar. The music also dips to very low volume as Diabolik and Eva kiss in the car while descending in the hideout's elevator. (4) The soundtrack is generally distorted. "Even my scratchy 16 mm print has a punchier audio dynamic," Erickson observed.

The rewriting of some of this redubbed dialogue is arguably superior to some lines in the original (as in changing "dropped you out of the human register" to "crossed off," which more accurately corresponds to the visual), and the redubbing was sufficiently well-done overall to pass for a vintage job. Unfortunately, the fine performances of Piccoli and Celi suffered in the revoiced version, as did those of the women playing Valmont's molls, who were dubbed in such a way as to make them seem not only vacuous, but completely brainless in a way that only cartoon characters can be.

Paramount's re-recorded version also worked from an Italian digital video master, so the main titles were presented in Italian and sported the *Diabolik* title, though the theme song (originally heard in Italian on Italian and US prints) was still heard in English. Originating from a PAL source, this version was also time-compressed—or, to be more accurate, mastered from a 25 frames per second source that slightly accelerated the action, making the uncut film run shorter.

There were also some noteworthy visual differences between the American theatrical and video prints. The scene of Diabolik and Eva making love under piles of money on the rotating bed, for example, was replaced by a longer and sexier take. In the US theatrical release, the scene stayed closer, showed less of Mell's body and cut to the next scene without the climactic high angle shot. "The music cue for this alternate scene is also different," notes Erickson, "much better, one of the best cues in the track." The early video version also restored scenes

which some observers have noted as being trimmed from the original US prints, including the shower scene that follows Diabolik and Eva's homecoming, the terrifically druggy discothèque sequence (in which some of the set decorations are recognizable as borrowings from the *Barbarella* sets elsewhere on the De Laurentiis lot), and the footage of the cabin guard teasing Eva with the lit end of a cigarette as a prelude to attempted rape.

It seemed a bitter irony that, just as an appreciative American audience for *Diabolik* was finally coming into being, it was no longer available for viewing with its original soundtrack. Happily, in June 2005, Paramount finally surrendered to fans' wishes by issuing *Danger: Diabolik* on DVD. The resulting presentation—produced by Kim Aubry of ZAP Zoetrope Aubry Productions—was nothing less than a unique, definitive edition combining the original, fully-restored English dubbing tracks, the English main titles, and all of the scenes previously exclusive to the Italian version. Mario Bava's *Danger: Diabolik* is now available for viewing in a truly continental version that outstrips all of its predecessors.

Influence

While the studio that financed its production is seemingly oblivious of its importance and legacy, *Diabolik* is currently one of Mario Bava's most beloved films and its influence on filmmakers has been far-ranging. Bava himself declined to revisit his debonair criminal in a sequel, but Diabolik would be heard from again and again.

It says a lot about De Laurentiis' grasp of Bava's unique economical abilities that he did not entrust the sequel to another director. Instead, the torch was passed to the hands of satire. In 1967, Italian comedian Johnny Dorelli starred in a feature film spoof of the Diabolik character, *Arriva Dorellik/How to Kill 400 Duponts*, directed by Bava's old companion in postwar comedy, Steno. The absurd plot finds the world's master criminal, Dorellik, impoverished, abandoned by his sexy sidekick Baby Eva (Margaret Lee), and forced to place want ads for his criminal expertise in the daily newspapers. He is approached by a man named Dupont (Riccardo Garrone) who knows that he figures in a distant relative's multimillion dollar will, albeit pretty far down the line; he hires Dorellik to do away with every other Dupont in France, to clear the field of other pretenders to this vast fortune. It's a miserable film, on the whole, but the funniest parts show Dorellik taunting his dedicated pursuer, Inspector Green of Scotland Yard—played by none other than Terry-Thomas—by disguising himself as almost every person occupying his world.

The next official *Diabolik* adaptation took place in 1972, when Radio 2 RAI broadcast twenty episodes of audio adaptations of various stories from the *fumetti*, produced by Radio Monte Carlo. The series ran every weekday from November 13 – December 8, and featured the voice talents of Luca Ward (Diabolik), Roberta Greganti (Eva) and Francesco Prandi (Gingko, restored to the original spelling of his name).

In 1991, the Italian television network RAI-2 announced a forthcoming TV series of *Diabolik*, to be executive produced by M Films Produzione and directed by Rospo Pallenberg, who began his career as a screenwriter for John Boorman (*Excalibur, The Emerald Forest*). The series was to commence with a special 100-minute pilot episode, but it never came to pass.

In 1999, *Diabolik* became an animated television series co-produced by Saban Enterprises International, France's M6, Italy's Mediaset, and Japan's Toho/Ashi Production Company. Clearly made in response to the success of Bruce Timm's reinvented *Batman* animated series for Fox, *Diabolik* found its title character broadly reinvented to suit a juvenile audience; he dressed the same, but in this incarnation, he and Eva were Robin Hood characters who stole only from other criminals. The series premiered on the French television network M6 in the autumn of 1999. It was announced that *Diabolik* would join the Fox Family Network schedule in America in 2000, but the order for episodes was canceled before it ever reached the air. English-language episodes of the animated *Diabolik* did make it to air in Australia, and bootlegged tapes of the 40-episode series have been known to trade hands on eBay.

It was around this same time that Bava's film was resurrected under unflattering circumstances in America, becoming the last in a long line of films to be ridiculed by the heckling silhouettes of the US cable series *Mystery Science Theater 3000.* Known as *MST3K* by its devoted fans, the program lasted for ten seasons, airing first on the Comedy Central cable network and moving, in 1997, to the Sci-Fi Channel. The fact that such an accomplished film would be singled out for insult and lampoon on the program showed that it was running out of appropriate fodder.

Diabolik has now outlived the two Milanese sisters who conceived his long-lasting reign of terror. Angela Giussani died on February 12, 1987, at the age of 64, and Luciana Giussani died on March 31, 2001, at the age of 72. After their deaths, the rights to the character fell to the French production company Studio Canal +, under whose auspices a new Diabolik feature film is currently in the planning stages. The director assigned to the project is Christophe Gans (*Crying Freeman, Brotherhood of the Wolf*), a horror and fantasy specialist who spent many years working as a film journalist for such French publications as *L'Ecran Fantastique,* before starting his own magazine and video label devoted to Hong Kong cinema.

"I love the [Bava] film as much as anyone," Gans told *Fangoria*'s Alan Jones, "but it was much more a James Bond/Batman parody, the vogue of the time, rather than anything to do with the original Italian comic book. The idea is to get a writer like Donald Westlake [*The Grifters*] to take the character and place him in an erotic, very adult caper movie, as far away from any 'Austin Powers' feel as possible . . . I'd love Mark Dacascos to play Diabolik, and Monica Bellucci would make the perfect Eva. I'm also thinking of Deborah Kara Unger [*Crash, The Game*] to play the KGB assassin the Black Widow, and someone like Billy Crudup for the part of Inspector Ginco—although, in the comic, he and Diabolik are mirror images of each other. I want this stunningly beautiful and handsome cast involved in a classy, clever caper, with darkly perverse relationships and all doing thrilling stunts. The Bava film is unique and I'd never, ever want to copy it. But let's see where we can take Diabolik today for a totally new and different Pop Art experience." [22]

One of the most surprising side effects of the Bava film's cultish rediscovery is Roman Coppola's directorial debut, *CQ* (2001), which debuted at that year's Cannes Film Festival. Set in 1969, it's the story of Paul Ballard [23] (Jeremy Davies), a young American working in Paris on a film called *Codename: Dragonfly.* Dragonfly (Angela Lindvall) is a dynamic female superheroine, and the film is an affectionate tribute to the Pop/Op Art comics films of the 1960s such as *Modesty Blaise* and *Barbarella,* but its most obvious antecedent is *Diabolik.* The film reprises the white jumpsuits, the speeding Jaguars, and the nude bodies rolling in money; also, the story of how Ballard is promoted from the film's editor to its director and special effects designer has an apparent basis in the legend of how Mario Bava was recruited to finish *I vampiri* in 1956. The score by Los Angeles-based retro-lounge band Mellow occasionally alludes to specific passages from Ennio Morricone's classic score, and making the *hommage* all the more emphatic is the participation of John Phillip Law in the supporting role of "The Chairman."

No one could be more pleased with *Diabolik*'s ever-growing fan base than Diabolik himself. "I remember finding a book about science fiction movies and seeing a mention of *Barbarella* and *Danger: Diabolik*," Law told me, while sitting on his front porch overlooking Los Angeles' famous Sunset Strip. "The author said that *Barbarella* was okay, but that *Danger: Diabolik* was the masterpiece. I was amazed because, for years, I'd thought it was probably the other way around. But as time goes on, you know, I can see what he meant. I think *Diabolik* probably *is* the masterpiece."

21 Glenn Erickson, correspondence with the author, January 8, 1997.

22 Alan Jones, "Danger: The Adventurer," article/interview, www.fangoria.com (July 2002).

23 The name "Paul Ballard" is a very deep in-joke on Coppola's part. The name appears on the back of numerous Italian pop cinema stills found in the collection at the library of the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences in Los Angeles, California.



Il pistolero segnato da Dio



ANTHONY STEFFEN *reunited with Mario Bava for the first time since* CITTÀ DI NOTTE *on this little-seen Italian Western.*

ON JUNE 3, 1967, Mario Bava became a grandfather for the second and last time, with the birth of Lamberto and Fiamma's second child, a son named Fabrizio—who nevertheless grew up being called Roy.

"I always thought my name was Roy," he laughs. "That's all I've ever been called by my family! I only found out my real name was Fabrizio when I went to school. The teacher read out the register and I didn't answer when Fabrizio was called—because I didn't know it was my name! Lamberto wanted to baptize me as Roy, but the Church refused because it was a foreign name. Carole Levy, Lamberto's agent, also only knew me as Roy. I was in the same class as her daughter Gioia, and when she went home telling her mother she had met Lamberto's son Fabrizio, Carole made a puzzled call to my father saying, 'When did you have another son? You could have told me!'" [1]

Roy's birth coincided, roughly, with a time of professional reassessment for his grandfather, as is recalled by actor Richard Harrison, who had a personal conversation with Mario around this time. "Bava told me that he got a chance to direct a larger budget film and he hated it," Harrison remembers. "He couldn't make his own decisions; he had to get permission to do everything. He didn't enjoy making movies that way. He needed more freedom, so he went back to making low-budget films."

Just as Bava had followed his directorial debut with a deliberate return to the cinematographic ranks from which he had supposedly been promoted, he now followed *Diabolik*—the biggest production of his directorial career—with a return to anonymous work. This assignment would remain anonymous until 1996, when journalist Robert Monell discovered—while interviewing actor Richard Wyler—that Bava had at least partially photographed a Western that Wyler made in the autumn of 1967: *Il pistolero segnato da Dio* ("A Gunfighter Sent by God," 1968), directed by Giorgio Ferroni under his Western pseudonym "Calvin Jackson Padget."

Ferroni and Bava had known each other a long time. Born in Perugia on April 12, 1908, Ferroni was another filmmaker—like Bava—whose career had begun with short arts documentaries during the second World War. Ferroni directed his first dramatic film *L'ebrezza del cielo* in 1939, the year that Bava became a cameraman. In 1960, Ferroni released his first horror film, *Il mulino delle donne di pietra/Mill of the Stone Women*, one of the finest Italian films of its kind. *Il mulino delle donne di pietra* is frequently cited as resembling the work of Bava or Freda more than his own. Later in his career, after numerous "Calvin Jackson Padget" Westerns, Ferroni directed his second and final horror film under his own name, *La notte dei diavoli/Night of the Devils* (1972), a contemporary adaptation of Alexei Tolstoi's "The Wurdalak," previously filmed by Mario Bava in *I tre volti della paura*.

Credited with the film's cinematography is Sandro Mancori, the son of cameraman-turned-director Alvaro Mancori, with whom Bava worked anonymously on earlier productions. Sandro Mancori's career as a cameraman began just a short time before this assignment—with *Requiescant* (1967)—and he was active as recently as 1987's *Il ritorno di Django*. A single viewing of *Il pistolero segnato da Dio* is all it takes to recognize Bava's visual style, but it is not present in every scene. This, and Mancori's credit, would seem to indicate that Mancori was taken ill, or fell behind during the production, and Bava took over the cinematography as a personal favor to Ferroni and/or the Mancori family.

Il pistolero segnato da Dio was never released in the United States, and no English-language version is known to exist. However, the film is so exceptionally well-told visually, that the narrative is fairly easy to unravel.

Montana, 1880. The ranch of factory owner Jonathan Murphy is raided one night by a team of masked gunmen. Murphy's young son, Tony (Marco Stefanelli), is awakened by his father, who shows him the hiding place of the money he has saved for his future—$30,000. Moments later, a masked man dressed in white shoots Jonathan to death before his son's eyes. The sound of bullets bridges a cut to a later date, when Tony is enjoying a sharp-shooting exhibition by master gunman Gary McGuire ("Anthony Steffen" a.k.a. Antonio De Teffè) in a travelling circus. After the performance, Tony goes backstage to praise Gary and is collected by Manuel, the manservant of his foster family, the Claridges, who were found for him by the attorney Brudi, executor of his father's will. The Claridges try to punish Tony for sneaking out of the house, but proudly, he refuses to be beaten.

As the circus travels to the next town, they find a man who has been beaten and robbed. The townsfolk have heard of Gary's prowess with a pistol and request his help in ridding their town of the robbers responsible. Gary and another man ride out to the gunmen's encampment, and seeing that they are many, the man rides back to town for support. Hiding behind the wreckage of a stagecoach, Gary eavesdrops as the gunmen gloat over the $30 they stole and argue about how to split it up. Owl Roy (Richard Wyler) solves the problem by shooting them all, taking the cash and riding away. Gary has an ideal opportunity to plug Roy in the back, but his hand hesitates . . . Shortly thereafter, the local man returns with help and finds Gary in the middle of the dead gunmen. He is hailed as a hero—an accolade he readily accepts.

Coleman ("Ken Wood" a.k.a. Giovanni Cianfriglia), the town's richest man and the ringleader of local crime, wakes Roy the next morning and tells him that Gary McGuire is taking credit for his kill. That night at the circus, when Gary's performance reaches the point when a planted actor accepts the challenge to outdraw and outshoot Gary (always failing miserably), Roy makes him sit down and accepts the challenge himself. Recognizing the killer, Gary is intimidated to the point of losing his prowess in a spinning target competition. In a second contest, the two gunmen are asked to shoot bells positioned behind their opponent's head, during which Gary becomes so convinced that Roy is going to shoot him that he drops to his knees in front of everyone and runs yellow from the center ring. He is comforted backstage by Mika ("Liz Barrett" a.k.a. Luisa Baratto), a bareback rider, and Gary tells her the story of where his cowardice began—in a childhood incident involving a beating by his father. A whiplash scar on his shoulder remains, never allowing him to forget.

The next day, Roy invites Gary into the local saloon to show that there are no hard feelings—only to embarrass him further. When the next night's circus audience greets him with boos and catcalls, Gary is reassured by Mika, but it's no use: Gary leaves town and turns to drink. His escape coincides with that of Tony, who has decided to run away from the Claridges. Tony meets Gary in a tavern and takes him to meet the Latto family, with whom he plans to stay. As they arrive, they see Mr. Latto being harassed by Owl Roy and his gang, who steal the goods heaped on his wagon. Latto is overjoyed to see Tony and takes him home with Gary. Tony pleads with Gary to adopt him and take him to Boston, where he hopes to attend his father's old college. Embarrassed by his inability to help the adoring boy, Gary feigns meanness by slapping him, then rides to the next town.

At a cantina, Gary gets drunk and accepts a prostitute's invitation to go upstairs. As she removes his holster, Gary boasts that he's a great gunfighter and demonstrates his ability by shooting out a candle and shooting a picture off the bedroom wall. When he passes out, the woman steals his precious silver six-shooters. The next day, Tony traces Gary to the saloon and goes to his room. The prostitute recognizes the boy and eavesdrops at the door, where she overhears Tony informing Gary of the $30,000 concealed at his father's ranch. Before he mentions where it is hidden, they hear a creak outside the door, and the bar's serving girl sneaks away. When Coleman comes in for a drink, she tells him about it.

Tony is summoned to Brudi's office, where he meets Coleman, who

Il pistolero segnato da dio

"A Gunfighter Sent by God"
Filmed at Elios Studios and on location in Rome
Fall 1967
First released: February 29, 1968
Eastmancolor, 2.35:1, 100 minutes

Production: G. V. Produzione. Distributor: Augustus.

Brazil: *O Pistolero Marcado por Deus*, Columbia Pictures, 1969
France: *Deux Pistolets pour un Lache*, "Two Pistols for a Coward," 9/10/69, 80m
Italian reissue: *Due pistole e un vigliacco*, "Two Pistols for a Coward"

introduces himself as one of his father's best friends. The sight of Coleman's ornate watch chain triggers the boy's memory—his father's killer wore the same chain! As Coleman and Brudi try to bully the money's location out of the boy, Gary enters just in time to see Coleman strike the boy with his lash. Memories of his own whipping awakened, he pleads with them to stop—that he will tell them what they want to know. Tony spits on him in disgust. Gary decides not to tell, and is beaten by Coleman's men and taken to a barn where he is restrained. Locked in a room by Brudi, Tony escapes by the window and frees Gary. Brudi catches Tony and slaps him, and Gary retaliates with a punch that kills the man. After recovering his stolen guns, he goes to the town sheriff and tells him that Coleman was the murderer of Jonathan Murphy.

They arrest Coleman at the cantina, but Owl Roy's gang arrive to help him escape. As the gang rides away, they pass the travelling circus as it goes to the next town. There, Gary is pleading with the townsfolk for assistance, but they consider him mad—Coleman is the wealthiest man in town, and thus its future. Coleman finds Tony at his ranch, hoping to recover his fortune. The gang dunks Tony in a well until the boy tells them where the money is hidden. When Coleman claims the money, once again Roy disagrees and shoots him dead, starting a gunfight between Roy's and Coleman's gangs. Tony takes the opportunity to escape, but he is followed by three men. Gary shoots them dead. He tells Tony to go for help and closes in on the ranch.

Gary single-handedly opposes the two gangs, while Roy goes inside to stuff his jacket with money. Help arrives in the form of Gary's circus companions, and the bad guys are brought under attack by a surreal team of acrobats, archers, clowns, and strongmen. Gary disarms Roy



ITALIAN *manifesto.*

1 Roy Bava, interviewed by Alan Jones, April 2000.



ITALIAN *due-foglia*.

with a bullet and then, to establish his bravery, he empties a gun of all but one bullet, spins the chamber and throws it at his adversary. Roy clicks the nearly empty gun as Gary circles him, until a bullet grazes Gary's cheek. His gun empty, Roy begs and pleads for his life on his knees and pulls the stolen money from his jacket. More help arrives from town and Owl Roy, humiliated, is taken into custody. Gary and Mika embrace with Tony, who together form a new family.

"I was told by my agents that Giorgio Ferroni was a first-class director and that I would have a great time working with him," Richard Wyler says, when asked about the film he remembers as *Two Pistols for a Coward*. "I went to see him before I did the film, and he told me I could become the top guy in Italian Westerns if I spent more time practicing—you know, spinning the gun and that kind of stuff—but I guess I was too lazy. It's too bad, really, because I thoroughly enjoyed doing them. The opportunity was marvelous and, because I'm English, I would never have gotten such an opportunity in Hollywood. But I remember being furious with him because he cast me as the baddie, which was not the most important part. I had never played a baddie before, but he told me that I would enjoy it, that it's always more fun to play the villain. Ferroni was a super guy, really intelligent; he knew his job very well and spoke very good English. On most of those Western films, the crews didn't speak English very well, so you just had to learn enough Italian to be polite and carry a conversation.

"It wasn't a low-budget film; it was medium-budget, shot near Rome, and the director was well above the common ranks. The schedule was also considerably longer than that of a low-budget picture; I think it lasted over six weeks. Maybe it just seemed that way: I was not in a good mood on that picture, I was so angry about not doing the role that Steffen got. I remember very clearly being on the set, which was, to my way of thinking, the unfriendliest set I'd really been on. I felt almost like an outcast. I liked the director, but Tony Steffen was a bit of a snob. Also, very, very often in Italy they don't pay you for the last week of filming. I remember saying that I wasn't going to shoot on the last day, because they didn't bring the checks, so I walked off the set and had the chauffeur take me back into town. And on the way, I saw the money coming back up the other side of the street! I turned the car around and went back!

"I'm sure that the man behind the camera was Mario Bava. I wish I'd known more about him at the time. I don't remember what happened to bring him there, but I remember his name because someone wrote it on the clapboard one day. When he looked through the viewfinder of his camera and saw this, he walked round and rubbed it out with his elbow. He gave everyone a stern look, then went back behind the camera as everyone laughed."

Wyler also confirms that Ferroni was present throughout the production. At no time did Bava take over the direction of the picture.

Il pistolero segnato da Dio is an exceptional Italian Western. It may well be the first film to contrast the Old West and the showbiz version of the Old West—later explored in such films as Robert Altman's *Buffalo Bill and the Indians* (1976), Sydney Pollack's *The Electric Horseman* (1979), and Clint Eastwood's *Bronco Billy* (1980). It's also remarkable for its use of the escapism inherent in the showbiz version as a parallel to the main character's psychological dilemma (i.e., he works as a circus cowboy because he cannot function as such in the real world). The film contains some flat performances, notably by Luisa Baratto (of *Il boia scarlatto*/*Bloody Pit of Horror* infamy), but it also offers some good ones, especially those of the spirited *piccolo* Marco Stefanelli (Alain Delon's younger self in Louis Malle's "William Wilson" episode of *Histoires Extraordinaires*/*Spirits of the Dead*), Giovanni Cianfriglia (as the granite-faced villain), and top-billed Anthony Steffen.

Mario Bava photographed two of the three Westerns he directed, and in general, they prove that he obtained his best results in a studio environment. Most of the natural exterior shots in his Westerns could have been photographed by anybody; they are without character and, given that dollies and cranes were beyond their budgets, their reliance on the zoom lens can be distractingly mechanical and crude. The average quality of these parallel works makes it impossible to tell how much of the average-looking footage in *Il pistolera segnato da Dio* was Bava's doing. That said, the film also contains a good deal of exceptional, signature-quality Bava cinematography. The film's distinctly Bavian aura extends, beyond its camerawork, to the incidental presence of Massimo Righi in the supporting cast, and a fear-tinged Carlo Rustichelli score that often sounds like passages on loan from *Operazione paura*'s library score.

The subject matter here, of course, is fear—Bava's favorite subject—and it is in those scenes most reflective of this emotion that he produces the film's most indelible images. The first standout scene is the exterior of Gary eavesdropping on the gang's encampment, which makes marvelous use of scenery never used in any other Western of my acquaintance: a wrecked stagecoach, half buried in dirt. At first sight, it suggests an Old West translation of the wrecked alien spacecraft in *Terrore nello spazio*. The camera's close attention to Steffen's facial expressions in this scene elevate the film to a new level of psychological insight, without which his later actions would seem cartoonish and lacking in dimension. This same technique, almost inquisitional in its study of the character's facial landscape, is also utilized in many of the later scenes—most remarkably, as Gary is seized by fear and self-doubt during the shooting match, or as he relates the story of his childhood beating. A veteran of countless Italian programmers of all sorts, including the Bava-photographed *Città di notte*. Steffen never gave a better performance than this one—perhaps because he was working here with a cameraman who understood the degree to which a face registers emotion.

In the case of Giovanni Cianfriglia's performance, the opposite is true—with equally effective results. Cianfriglia doesn't change his facial emotion once in the entire picture; even when he laughs, he laughs as a statue would laugh. Clearly, Owl Roy is a man who has never known a second of self-doubt. This not only enhances his own presence as a figure of fear, it enhances Steffen's performance by making his emotions seem all the more obvious and deranged.

The final showdown is also remarkable, as Owl Roy and his gang are opposed by the circus folk. The imagery of this sequence provides not only an unexpected jolt into the realm of the fantastic, but also to the plane of our hero's psychology. When the circus rides to Gary's aid, it is a visual reinforcement that he has recovered the courage that he has lost—the environment that surrounds his victory is the environment that witnessed the successes that made him famous. In another director's hands, the sequence might have appeared jarring or (even worse) Felliniesque, but Ferroni and Bava invest it with psychological shadings that are immensely satisfying. It's better than the arrival of the cavalry; it's the return of a man's soul.

For those familiar with Bava's career as a cameraman, one scene in particular stands out as a moving, autobiographical touch. When Tony finds Gary drunk in a hole-in-the-wall tavern, he blames his pessimism on his sordid surroundings and offers to take him out of there, to "the most beautiful place on Earth." We then cut to the two of them, at rest, reviving their souls beside that most picturesque of all Italian film locations: the Cascate di Montegelato—the extraordinary waterfall that appears in *Orlando e i paladini di Francia*, *Le fatiche di Ercole*, and so many other films associated with the Golden Age of Italian Fantasy. In context, the scene has nothing to do with the story, but the scene has an extraordinary effect, as if the point of the whole journey was really just to bring us back here, one last time.

After the peak achievement and point of retreat that was *Diabolik*, Bava contentedly zooms into the splashing waters of Montegelato, symbolic of the attractive naiveté of Italian film production in the 1950s. In this sublime moment, the tormented scenario of *Il pistolero segnato da Dio* seems interrupted by a sweet yet fervent wish that things could once again be as simple as they used to be.



ITALIAN *due-foglia, art by "Moz" [De Bernardinis].*

ODISSEA
LE AVVENTURE DI ULISSE

The Adventures of Ulysses

WHILE *BARBARELLA* was in production on the sound stages of Dinocittà, Dino De Laurentiis determined to top himself. He would now improve upon his own 1954 production of *Ulisse* with a new, truly epic retelling of Homer's poem, *The Odyssey.* De Laurentiis conceived the new project as an extended serial for television, consisting of seven episodes that could be shown nightly for one week, or stretched out over as many weeks; it was a visionary plan, coming a full decade before the term "miniseries" was coined in America. Represented by producer Vittorio Bonicelli, Dino De Laurentiis Cinematografica entered a partnership with Jadran Film of Yugoslavia (where the location shooting was done), and also sold broadcast rights with Bavarian TV of Munich, ORTF of Paris, and of course, RAI-Radiotelevisione Italiana—and proceeded to make what *Variety* would term "the costliest TV venture in Italy to date." [1]



BEKIM FEHMIU *as Ulysses, seen here in the series' closing moments as he reunites with wife Penelope (Irene Papas).*

Mario Bava was a major contributor to this production, but not in the role of director—at least not initially. After the experience of *Diabolik*, Bava realized that expensive productions took much of the fun and creative spontneity out of filmmaking; he much preferred to direct in a low-budget environment that did not oblige him to account for every penny that was spent. Given Bava's background in "lower" forms of Italian cinema—horror, science fiction, Franco and Ciccio comedy—it is unlikely that he would have been invited to direct such a prestigious endeavor, in the first place. The direction of *Odissea* was ultimately entrusted to 48-year-old Franco Rossi, who in the past year had directed segments of two omnibus films for De Laurentiis: *Le streghe/The Witches* (1967, co-directed with Mauro Bolognini, Vittorio De Sica, Pier Paolo Pasolini, and Luchino Visconti), and *Capriccio all'Italiana* (1968, with Bolognini, Mario Monicelli, Pasolini, Steno, and animator Pino Zac).

Born in Florence on April 28, 1919, Rossi had started in the film business as an assistant director, working for Aldo Vergano (*I fuorilegge*) and Luis Trenker (*Barriera a settentrione*) in 1949–50. He quickly graduated to directing his own features, beginning with *I falsari* (1950, co-scripted by Ugo Guerra and Leopoldo Trieste) and, just as rapidly, established himself as a specialist in erotic comedies, including *Il seduttore* (1954), *Amici per la pelle/Friends for Life* (1955), *Odissea nuda* and *Smog* (1962, the Italian debut of *Diabolik* star John Phillip Law). In the mid-1960s, Rossi co-directed the sexy omnibus *I bambole/Bambole!* (1965) with Mauro Bolognini, Luigi Comencini, and Dino Risi. This all-star sex farce, with its climactic near-nude scene by the iconic Gina Lollobrigida, proved so popular at the boxoffice that it breathed renewed life into the multi-part film tradition launched with *Boccaccio '70* in 1961, and stereotyped Rossi as a filmmaker to some degree. Over the next few years, he seemed to work exclusively as a contributor to such films, beginning with *I complessi* (1965, co-directed with Luigi Filippo D'Amico and Dino Risi), which then led to the two projects for De Laurentiis and, by extension, *Odissea*.

Odissea

"Odyssey"
Filmed at Dinocittà (Rome) and on location in Rome and Yugoslavia
Fall – Winter 1967
Miniseries, 8 episodes
First broadcast: March 24 – May 5, 1968.
640 minutes

Le avventure di Ulisse

"The Aventures of Ulysses"
Condensed Theatrical Version
First released: August 13, 1969
Technicolor, 1.37:1, 105 minutes

Production: Dino De Laurentiis Cinematografica (Rome), RAI-Radiotelevisione Italiana (Rome), Jadran Film (Zagreb), ORTF (Office de Radiodiffusion Télévision Française, Paris), and Bavaria Film TV (Munich). Producer: Vittorio Bonicelli. Directors: Franco Rossi, Mario Bava and Piero Schivazappa. Assistant directors: Nello Vanin, Lamberto Bava. Teleplay: Giampiero Bona, Fabio Carpi, Luciano Codignola, Mario Prosperi, Franco Rossi and Renzo Russo, based on the work by Homer. Continuity: Flavia Vanin. Director of photography: Aldo Giordani. Camera assistant: Sergio Bergamini. Additional photography: Mario Bava (uncredited). Production design: Luciano Ricceri. Set decoration: Mario Altieri. Special effects: Organo Thomas, Mario Bava (uncredited). Special mechanical effects: Carlo Rambaldi (uncredited). Wardrobe: L. Contini. Costume design: Dario Cecchi. Makeup: Maurizio Giustini. Makeup assistants: Gianni Amadei, Luciano Giustini. Hairdresser: Anna Gora Ziosi. Production manager: Giorgio Morra. A.D.C. Production assistants: Eros Lanfranconi, Vittorio Serafini. Chief machinist: Franco Solitario. Chief electrician: Duzo Zecchi. Editor: Giorgio Serrolonga, with Olga Petrini. Editorial assistants: Franco Lettri, Mauro Bonanni, Armando Pace, Giancarlo Morelli, Massimo Cingalani. Music: Carlo Rustichelli, conducted by Bruno Nicolai [published by "Dino"]. Sound engineer: Vittorio Trentino. Distributor: Paramount Pictures Corporation in all territories unless otherwise noted.

Bekim Fehmiu (Ulysses/Odysseus), Irene Papas (Penelope), Renaud Verley (Telemachus), Ivica Pajer (Eurylochus), Sime Jagarinec (Eraclios), Constantin Nepo (Antinous), Nona Medici (Iphthime), Jaspar von Oertzen (Nestor), Barbara Gregorini [Barbara Bach] (Nausicaa), Roy Purcell (Alcinous), Marina Berti (Arete), Kyra Bester (Calypso), Michèle Breton (Athena), Juliette Mayniel (Circe), Fausto Tozzi (Menelaus), Scilla Gabel (Helen), Mimmo Palmara (Achilles), Samson Burke (Polyphemus), Luciano Rossi (Theoclymenus), Maurizio Tocchi (Leocritus), Giulio Tomei (Priam), Marcella Valeri (Euryclia), Otto Alberti [Karl-Otto Alberty] (Eurymachus), Rolf Boysen (Agamemnon), Petar Buntic (Philoetius), Husein Cokic (Eumaeus), Giulio Donnini (Tiresias), Bianca Maria Doria (Anticlia), Hrvoje Svob (Phemius), Sergio Ferrero (Peisistratos), Enzo Fiermonte (Demodocus), Stefanella Giovannini (Cassandra), Vojislav Govedarica (Philoctetes), Gérard Herter (Laocoon), Peter Hinwood (Hermes), Ilija Ivezic (Ctesippus), Branko Kovacic (Laertes), Vladimir Leib (Aeolus), Corràdo Monteforte (Amphinomus), Ada Morotti (Cyane), Duje Novakovic (Elpenor), Laura Nucci (Antinous' mother), Silvano Spada (la ciurma), Gianluigi Crescenzi (il Proci), Franco Balducci, Franco Fantasia, Orso Maria Guerrini, Franco Indovina, Tiberio Mitri, Giancarlo Prato, Miodrag Loncar (Irus/Amaeus).

Additional credits: French langauge dubbing directed by Jacques Souvant. Adaptation: Jacques Souvant, Edmond Bernard, Jacques Muller. Voices: Rene Roussel (Ulysses), Julia Dancourt (Penelope). English-language dubbing directed by Mel Welles. Voices: Dan Sturkie (Ulysses), Carolyn De Fonseca (Penelope), Mel Welles (Polyphemus, others). German language dubbing directed by Leonard Steckel.

France: *L'Odyssée*
Germany: *Die Odyssee,* 10/19/69
Spain: *Las Aventuras de Ulises,* Filmax S.A., 8/16/71



PENELOPE *has sworn to take a new husband when she completes her weaving.*



WASHED *ashore by punishing waters, Ulysses initially mistakes the lovely Princess Nausicaa (Barbara Bach) for a goddess.*

Rossi was an excellent choice to direct the project for several reasons. First, he was a serious filmmaker with a shown affinity for the amorous subjects that were most popular among Italian audiences; he was that rare filmmaker who could tell a romantic story in realistic, 3-dimensional terms, without becoming sappy or melodramatic. He had worked with many of Italy's greatest stars, had also directed films outside Italy, and though he had never had a major success entirely his own, he was considered good enough to share equal billing on the omnibus films with some of the greatest Italian directors of his time. Perhaps most importantly, Rossi was a writer as well as a director, and one of the Italian cinema's most experienced practitioners of short form storytelling. This discipline made him particularly adept at deciding how to tell Homer's epic story segmentally, without the audience losing interest as time elapsed between one chapter and the next.

Given the European complexion of the cast, De Laurentiis was unable to strike a co-production deal with an American network, so as *Odissea* went before the camera in the latter months of 1967, it proceeded with a dual plan. Once the teleplays were written, a feature-length screenplay would be distilled from their contents, allowing the series to be re-edited into a condensed motion picture version for theatrical release abroad. De Laurentiis' distribution partner on *Diabolik* and *Barbarella*, Paramount Pictures Corporation agreed to distribute the feature version worldwide, knowing that it would be commercially viable even in areas where the complete miniseries had been shown on television. Though American network television was broadcasting exclusively in color by 1967, European networks transmitted solely in black-and-white until the early 1970s. Therefore, anyone in Italy, France, and Germany who saw the debut broadcasts of *Odissea* saw them in black-and-white, and might be intrigued to see how well their favorite scenes played in Technicolor on a large theater screen.

RAI-TV hosted the premiere of *Odissea* on Sunday night, at 9:00 p.m. on March 24, 1968. The series finally consisted of *eight* one-hour episodes, and continued in its prestigious timeslot for the next six weeks, concluding on May 5 with a special two-hour finale (which led to the program's mistaken description as a seven-episode series in some references).

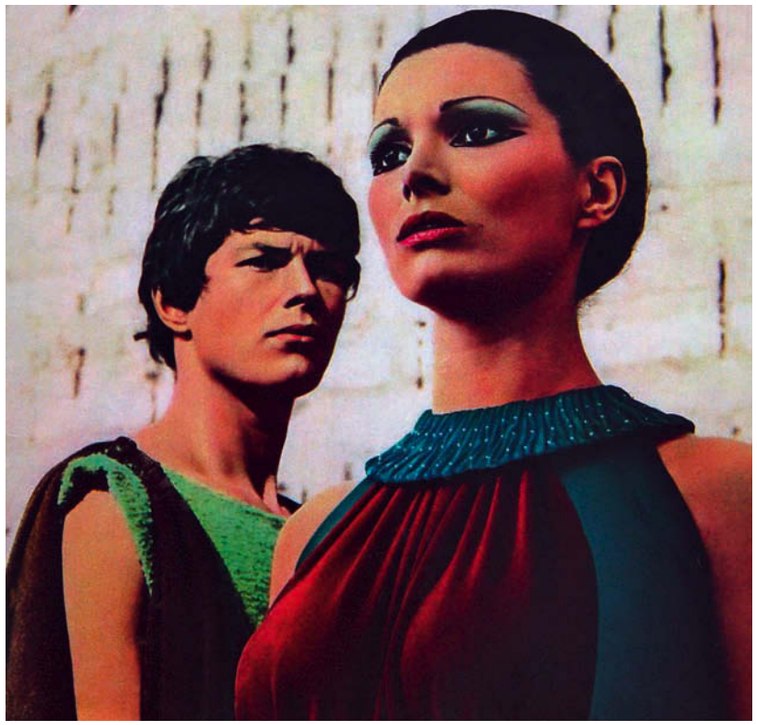
Episode 1: *The focus of this initial segment is on the house of Ulysses, King of Ithaca, where his wife Penelope and teenage son Telemachus find their faith in the voyager's promised return beginning to falter after a passage of twenty years. The palace is invaded by a group of arrogant kings, princes, and soldiers of other cities, led by the insolent Antinous, demanding that Penelope select a new husband from among them. Telemachus assembles men from his father's kingdom for a secret meeting, beseeching their support in his plan to repel the invaders. Word of the meeting gets out, and the would-be suitors disrupt the proceedings and heckle the young prince's futile attempts to oust them. The next morning, Telemachus sets sail with a few others in the hopes of finding his father or, at least, stories of his whereabouts. He arrives at the isle of Phylos, where he is greeted with a great ceremonial meal by King Nestor, a former comrade of his father's, who advises him to seek his answer from King Menelaus of Lacedaemon. Meanwhile, Penelope is distraught by the discovery of her son's departure, and wails at her now complete abandonment. That night, she is awakened by the sudden flaring of a bedside brazier and sees the ghost of her dead sister Iphthime in the flames. Iphthime assures her of the eventual safe return of Telemachus—and Ulysses, who still lives. Indeed he does, but he is the last survivor of his original crew, fighting for survival aboard a small raft in a treacherous, accursed sea . . .*

Episode 2: *Ulysses emerges from the sea after losing his raft to tumultuous waters. He spies a beautiful woman onshore, whom he mistakes for a goddess. This is Nausicaa, the daughter of King Alcinous of Drepane; she arranges for him to bathe and redress and, noting his regal bearing, invites him to have an audience with her parents. Ulysses meets King Alcinous and Queen Arete, who offer him a meal and note the sophistication of his table manners. After eating his*

1 Hank Werba, "Italo TV 'Odyssey' Hits a Homer," *Variety*, May 22, 1968.



TROY *is left in flames after Ulysses and his men penetrate its fortress walls inside the Trojan Horse.*



TELEMACHUS *(Renaud Verley) meets the former Helen of Troy (Scilla Gabel) while searching for his lost father.*

fill, Ulysses explains that he is the king of his own land and requests that a ship be built to return him thence. The request is granted. As its construction gets underway, Ulysses reminisces to Nausicaa (clearly enamored of the handsome stranger) about his most recent adventure, his stranding on the isle of Ogygia, after his ship sank and drowned all his companions. He lived there for seven years in the companionship of the beautiful nymph Calypso, until Zeus finally granted him freedom to leave. Calypso offered him the gift of immortality if he would remain there with her, but he took advantage of the reprieve and built the raft that eventually brought him to Drepane. At an athletic competition, Ulysses is challenged to participate by two of the contestants, who openly suspect he is not what he claims to be, that he is nothing but a deserter. He bests every last one of them in swordfighting, but declines to kill anyone, winning the King's admiration . . .

Episode 3: *Nausicaa leads a blind man into the presence of Ulysses and her parents. A survivor of the siege of Troy, he recounts the story of how Ulysses and his men hid inside the Trojan Horse to gain access to the city. The story brings Ulysses to tears and he admits his identity to the blind man. Back at Ithaca, the suitors of Penelope grow more impatient and belligerent, and begin to run riot with wine, violence, and abuse of the maids. Meanwhile, Telemachus arrives in Sparta to meet with his father's friend and comrade, King Menelaus, and his wife, the former Helen of Troy. Menelaus receives him warmly as the mature son of an old friend, but he cannot enlighten him as to his father's current whereabouts. Helen remembers her meeting with Ulysses, covered in blood, on the night of the sacking of Troy. Back at the palace of King Alcinous, Ulysses is asked about his travels in the many years since the fall of Troy, and he reminisces about his dead crew members. He explains that they set sail from Troy and next landed on an island where his men became enslaved to a white, addictive powder which they found and consumed in quantity; he had to force their departure when they became*



THE CLOUDY-*haired subjects of King Aeolus, god of the winds.*

lazy and disobedient, and it took many weeks for them to throw off their need and recover their health. They next came ashore in a land teeming with wildlife, where the smoke of a controlled fire attracted their attention. Ulysses suggested that they meet their host, to make sure they have not been stealing from a god, and they enter his cave. There they find an enormous supply of milk and cheese, and a giant axe. The men are frightened and want to leave, but the sound of the cave's returning inhabitant makes it too late for escape . . .

Episode 4: *Returning to his cave, with a full flock of sheep, is the giant cyclops Polyphemus. Ulysses and his men watch in awe as the giant seals the entrance of the cave with a massive boulder and starts a fire with two stones. An accidental sound alerts the monster to their presence, and Ulysses bravely steps forward. Polyphemus soon kills two of Ulysses' men for a meal, breaking their bones to a powder in his massive fist, bashing their brains out and ripping them limb from limb like game hens, devouring them behind his turned back—as the others look on in horror and revulsion. The giant then bathes his face and sleeps. The next day, while tending his herd, the men set to work clearing the branches from a tree, which they hone into a long spear. They draw straws to see who will give their lives for the success of the others' escape, and when Polyphemus returns, these two dash for cover in a recess within one wall of the cave; the monster reaches inside and, once again, makes a grisly meal of them. Ulysses then offers the cyclops a vat of drugged wine, which is so well liked that Polyphemus promises Ulysses that he will be the last to be eaten. As the giant falls into a deep sleep, Ulysses and his men light the end of the spear and impale the cyclops through his eye, blinding him. The men flee the cave by attaching themselves to the undersides of the sheep, which the blinded giant sets free to graze. Polyphemus becomes aware of their escape, and hears Ulysses boasting his own name as the defeater of this cruellest son of the gods. Enraged, the cyclops begs his father Poseidon, god of the oceans, to curse the ship of those who blinded him and ensure that it never reaches its home port. Terrible weather conditions follow, with tidal waves and furious winds, which run Ulysses' ship aground near the kingdom of Aeolus, the god of the winds. Ulysses scales a wall and finds himself in the banquet hall of this god—fat, owl-browed, with a head full of silvery, frizzy, cloud-like hair—and his identical family members. After hearing of Ulysses' troubles, Aeolus contains the winds working against his progress in a large parcel. With the wind no longer working against him, the ship very nearly reaches its home port—but as Ithaca comes into view, Ulysses' men come to believe that the parcel contains a treasure, and they rip it open—releasing the foul, accursed winds and driving their ship far, far out to sea . . .*

Episode 5: *Ulysses' crew is sent ashore to collect fresh water and hunt for provisions, but when they do not return, the captain follows in search of his men. He finds only his first mate Eurylochus, who explains that the others were all invited by a woman to dine with her. Eurylochus, sensing a trap, declined and tells Ulysses that he observed as the men were transformed into swine by their hostess. Setting off in search of his enchanted men, Ulysses first encounters the god Hermes, who presents him with a flower that will offer him some protection against the wiles of the enchantress, Circe. After penetrating a wall of flame, Ulysses spies a woman at work on a loom, whom he initially mistakes for his wife, Penelope. He touches her shoulder, and Circe turns to face him. She plies Ulysses with a drugged potion, which he resists. He demands that Circe take him to his men, and she escorts him to a pit full of pigs. She insists that they are happier than they've ever been in their lives, and that by reverting them to men will cause them to be revisited by all the problems and woes of the human condition. Ulysses orders that they be made men again, and Circe complies. He orders the crew to ready their ship for sail, but by the time it is ready, Ulysses himself has fallen under Circe's spell and become her lover. The men are loyal to their captain, and a full year passes before Ulysses is made aware of his*

SEEKING *answers from the ghost of Tiresias, Ulysses is besieged by restless spirits thirsting for blood, including the spectre of his own mother.*





JULIETTE MAYNIEL *as Circe, whose siren song reaches out to Ulysses.*

enslavement. He begs Circe for his release, and she advises him to visit the land of the Cimmerians, where he should sacrifice a goat to summon the dead and ask the ghost of Tiresias, the prophet of Thebes, for a glimpse of the future awaiting him outside her protected realm. The blood of the slaughtered beast attracts many wandering ghosts—including that of Achilles, and that of Ulysses' mother, of whose death the wanderer has been unaware. Tiresias drinks of the goat's blood and reveals to Ulysses the curse that Polyphemus placed on Ulysses and his men, through his father Poseidon; the seas will never grant them safe passage home. He is cautioned about Penelope's suitors at the palace in Ithaca, and told that he must return home well-disguised and not reveal his identity to anyone until the time is right to reclaim his throne and family. When Ulysses emerges from the Kingdom of the Dead, he rejoins his men and discovers that one of his crew—one whom he regarded as a brother—has died after falling from a tree. Ulysses realizes that the death was do to his neglect, and he determines to continue their homeward voyage even if they fail, because it is better to die in the attempt than to live as a slave.

Episode 6: *As Ulysses and his men sail away from Circe's island, they must pass through the treacherous area where countless sailors have been run aground by the song of the Sirens. After filling the ears of his rowing crew with beeswax, he asks Eurylochus to tie him firmly to the mast of the ship—he wants to hear the song, but not be able to respond to it. Eurylochus, his own ears plugged, watches in pity as Ulysses experiences the torment of temptation, one of the voices imitating that of his wife, Penelope. The crew looks on in horror as they see the rocks and ocean floor scattered with the bones of the seamen who never cleared this area. They escape the Sirens, proving to Ulysses that there are ways in which men can overcome the will of the Gods. When they next sight land, the crew come ashore and find it well-stocked with longhorned cattle; Ulysses warns his men that these are the sacred cattle of Hyperion and not to be touched. But while Ulysses sleeps, the men slaughter and eat the cattle. This forbidden act raises the ire of Zeus himself and, as the men return to sea, the ocean is used as a veritable weapon against their ship . . . and the Argos sinks, claiming the entire crew—except for Ulysses. This concludes the story of how Ulysses came to arrive in the kingdom of Alcinous, who immediately judges that his guest should no longer have to postpone his return to Ithaca. Instead of finishing the ship that is being built for him, the King orders that Ulysses be escorted home that very day by his own navy. He is delivered to the shores of Ithaca and, according to the warnings of Tiresias, he re-enters his country as a commoner. He is immediately recognized by a goatherd, who turns out to be Athena in earthly disguise, one of many guises she has assumed in watching over the twenty-year journey of Ulysses. She explains that she has secured his release from his curse, but that the battle awaiting him is purely mortal. Ulysses finds his way to a small farm, the home of his old friend Eumaeus, a swineherd, who invites the stranger to share his humble fare. Once inside, Eumaeus is quick to recognize his long-lost king. When he hears that Telemachus has returned to Ithaca from Sparta, Eumaeus invites the young prince to his home—to see if Ulysses can resist revealing himself in the presence of his son. Ulysses struggles in vain to retain his secret, and father and son soon embrace in a clutch that lasts literally from day into night.*

Episode 7: *As Ulysses approaches his palace, disguised as a beggar, he is immediately recognized by his old dog, who dies shortly after seeing him. Inside, Telemachus covertly orders that the beggar be fed, and Ulysses pockets his bread and sets about pleading*

for crumbs from the various suitors to test their charity and strength of character. All rudely refuse him, with Antinous demonstrating his offense by hurling a wine gourd at the beggar's turned back. Of all the suitors, only one approaches Ulysses in secret to apologize for his public rudeness. Antinous suggests that the beggar be given a chance to share in the meat served at dinner and challenges him to a fight against one of the most physically formidable men; Ulysses bests him, but refuses to eat the meat. Eumaeus comes to the palace, and together with Ulysses, they reveal his identity to Ulysses' faithful neatherd Philoetius and plot their moves. As night falls, the princes depart for the evening, but Ulysses stays behind, having asked for an audience with Penelope. She asks him to sit opposite her in a chair, but he refuses politely, clinging to the shadows; she recognizes him nevertheless, and cannot fathom his determination to not reveal himself and save her from her circumstances. As he is bathed by his old nursemaid Eurynome, she discovers a telltale scar on his right knee and recognizes him, but he orders her to keep silent. The next day, Penelope—hoping to force her husband out of hiding—announces to the assembled princes that she will marry the man capable of drawing the string of Ulysses' great antlered bow and firing an arrow through the apertures of twelve axe handles—a task which only her husband was ever able to perform. Ulysses himself sets the axe handles in place . . .

Episode 8: *One by one, the suitors fail miserably at their attempts to master Ulysses' bow. Finally, the beggar steps forward and asks Penelope for permission to participate. Antinous objects, but the Queen consents. Outside, Eumaeus barricades the doors of the palace to trap everyone inside. As Ulysses lifts the bow, Penelope leaves the room for her private quarters. By subjecting the antlered bow to heat, and by lubricating its hemp string, he makes it easier to manage and thus wins the competition. He then fires a second arrow into the chest of Antinous and signals to Telemachus and Philoetius to let righteous punishment fall upon the heads of the suitors. The main hall of the palace erupts in violence. Melantho, Penelope's maid, who has been cooperative with the princes, rushes to their rescue and throws axes into their hands over the very head of her master. When every last suitor has been slain, the weeping maids who whored themselves to the princes are forced to shroud them and Melantho is put to death for her betrayal. Eurynome informs Penelope that Ulysses has returned and vanquished their enemies, and she runs below into the arms of her son, grateful to find him still alive. "Why do you not greet my father?" he asks. Penelope replies that she does not recognize this man as her husband, and demands that he prove himself by speaking of something which only Ulysses would know: the olive tree. Ulysses explains that Penelope had a favorite olive tree as a child, and loved it so much that he arranged to build their home around it so that their marriage bed would actually be cradled in its boughs. Penelope melts into his embrace. The next day, Ulysses and Telemachus travel to see his father, Laertes. Theirs is a tearful reunion. As Ulysses shows his father the spear and bronze dagger he took as souvenirs of his victory, Laertes' property is visited by a legion of Antinous' grieving people, including his father, who demand satisfaction for his murder. A voice from a tree, that of Athena, advises Ulysses to surrender his prizes and bow to the grieving king for mercy. Finally learning to put aside pride and accept humility before the wisdom of the gods, he does so, and is able to return that night to his palace, to his marriage bed and the arms of his loving wife.*

Eight hours of cerebral, heroic drama, *Odissea* represents the maturation and high watermark of the "sword and sandal" genre which Mario Bava had been instrumental in revitalizing in the 1950s. Every other film of this type which had come before—including the still-admirable version of *Ulisse* which Dino De Laurentiis co-produced in 1954—limited its scope to violent action and the exploitative values of monsters to be defeated and beautiful women to be romanced. *Odissea* finds the genre coming of age, venturing



ULYSSES *demands that he be tied to the mast but be allowed to hear the sirens' song as the Argos passes the isle of Calypso.*



NAUSICAA *(left) introduces her parents, King Alcinous (Roy Purcell) and Queen Arete (Marina Berti), to Ulysses.*

beyond mere spectacle into more intellectual, philosophic, and existential concerns, depicting Ulysses as a hero determined to understand his world and himself. This stance is not only essentially true to the original Homeric texts, but represents the personal attitudes of young filmgoers of the late 1960s.

Cast as Ulysses was Yugoslav actor Bekim Fehmiu, who had recently played a supporting role in Karel Reisz' black comedy *Morgan! A Suitable Case for Treatment* (1966). Fehmiu was in early ascent as an actor, but he was handsome, talented, adept at physical action, conversant in English, and a Yugoslav—thus satisfying the co-production agreement with Jadran Film. His Ulysses is a mindful adventurer, initially arrogant, sometimes blasphemous if not entirely atheistic, who is determined to test the limits of man's freedom in a world traditionally ruled according to the will of the gods. We are encouraged throughout to ponder the hero's motivations: is he subjecting himself to these tests of character to make himself a better king to his people? To avoid his responsibilities to his wife and son? Is he trying to unshackle himself from the chains of ignorant superstition, or is he envious of the knowledge of the gods and needful of tasting as much of life and experience as possible, damn the consequences? As such, Fehmiu's Ulysses shares many characteristics with the young people of the 1960s—questioning tradition, religion, and family, making mistakes, learning from them, and seeking answers to the eternal questions via a series of "trips" into his inner self. The sequence in which Ulysses demands that Eurylochus bind him to the mast of his ship, that he might hear and resist the song of the Sirens, is a particularly emphatic parallel to the then-contemporary users of LSD, seeking glimpses of alternative realities and personal insights from the security of controlled experimentation.

The renowned Greek actress Irene Papas is no less remarkable in the role of Penelope. Born Irene Lelekou in Chilimodion, Corynth, on September 3, 1929, Papas made early screen appearances in Pietro Francisci's *Attila* and Riccardo Freda's *Teodora, imperatrice di Bisanzio* (both 1954, and both Bava side projects), before achieving greater international fame in such productions as *The Guns of Navarone* (1961), *Elektra* (1962), and *Zorba the Greek* (1964). Her few scenes with Fehmiu, particularly their first reunion when Ulysses refuses to admit his identity, are never less than gripping and sometimes emotionally wrenching; indeed, it is a tribute to the power of the reunion scene that it (alone of all the scenes in the miniseries) was carried over to the condensed feature-length cut virtually intact.

The remainder of the cast is a fascinating patchwork of experienced talent and promising newcomers from the various co-production countries involved, who spoke their lines in French, Italian, German, or English, according to their own convenience. Notable among them are Scilla Gabel, absolutely stunning as a *haute couture* Helen of Troy; Juliette Mayniel (who gave her face to science in Georges Franju's *Les Yeux sans Visage/Eyes Without a Face*) as Circe, the sorceress who turns men into swine; Renaud Verley (later the star of Claudio Hill's cult horror film *La Campaña del Infierno/A Bell From Hell*) as Telemachus, the son of Ulysses and Penelope; Gérard Herter (from *Caltiki il mostro immortale*) as a Trojan citizen demonstrating against the acceptance of the Horse as a gift from the Ithacans; Michèle Breton, later a member of Mick Jagger's *ménage a trois* in Donald Cammell and Nicolas Roeg's *Performance* (1970), as Athena; and, as Nausicaa, the young princess who falls in love with Ulysses during his penultimate port of call, a young American actress identified as Barbara Gregorini (her married name at the time), who would later achieve greater fame as an actress and model under the name Barbara Bach and marry the former Beatle, Ringo Starr.

As the principal director of *Odissea,* Franco Rossi must be credited with the series' overall success, though he also brought to it a number of self-conscious touches which have not aged well—among them the recurring interruption of narration over dialogue (which conveys the unfortunate sense of a "patch-up") and the final episode's use of a literal Greek chorus. These are minor complaints in the context of what is, overall, a magnificent achievement. Rossi's direction is at its best in



MISTAKEN *for a deserter by Alcinous' soldiers, Ulysses must prove his courage in a test of hand-to-hand combat.*

the final episode, whose violent climax, in retrospect, presages the most bloody, cathartic passages from the films of Sam Peckinpah—particularly *Straw Dogs* (1971), in which an intellectual (Dustin Hoffman) is called upon to protect his wife (Susan George) and home from a siege of local men fuelled on drink, lust, and machismo. Though not as gory as *Straw Dogs* or *The Wild Bunch* (1969), this sequence was unusually bloody for television of its day, with one of Ulysses' victims shown literally vomiting blood onto the pale stone floor as he tries crawling to safety. As Ulysses fires arrow after arrow into the bodies of his fleeing enemies, his gray hair and beard appear to darken, as though literally rejuvenated by the catharsis of revenge—or the reclamation of a long-denied identity.

Mario Bava's contribution to *Odissea* was principally in the realm of special effects, but his duties were eventually enlarged. The series' special effects are credited to "Organo Thomas," with Bava (and his associate, Carlo Rambaldi) receiving no screen credit whatever. As both men are properly credited in the feature version, it would appear that Bava and Rambaldi—as seasoned cinema professionals—were reluctant to be noticed "slumming" for television. In addition to supervising the photography of live miniature effects (Ulysses' ship being tossed by stormy seas, tidal waves, etc. in Episode 4) and executing matte paintings on glass (the city of Troy seen in the tracking shot that introduces the Trojan Horse in Episode 2, and the city of Sparta lining a diagonal hillside in Episode 4), Bava extended second unit photography support to credited director of photography Aldo Giordani (b. 1914)—who had previously photographed such films as Anton Giulio Majano's *Seddok (L'erede di Satana)/Atom Age Vampire* (1960), Silvio Amadio's *Teseo contro i Minotauro/The Minotaur* (1960, which also featured a Rambaldi monster) and Andre de Toth and Riccardo Freda's *I Mongoli/The Mongols* (1961). In the context of Giordani's comparatively straightforward work, Bava's second unit shots are fairly easy to identify, either from characteristic use of the zoom lens for shock effects, or from their use of melodramatic lighting or plays on perspective, all of which would be out of character for Giordani. The final episode, in particular, contains some distinctly Bavian images: the Nevenka-like shots of Penelope seeking refuge in her bed, caressing the empty portion of the mattress where her husband once lay; a shot attending Ulysses' search for his fellow Argonauts on the isle of Circe, which is photographed entirely in the upside-down reflection of a lake; a frightening shot that occurs shortly before the slaughter of the suitors, when Ulysses dips his fingers into a cup of wine and raises them to veil his glowering at the hated Antinous, whose face is thus obscured (from his perspective) by drippings of blood-red wine; and the painterly arrangement of the dead suitors, ravaged and bleeding, on the steps and floor of the main hall.



ITALIAN *manifesto.*

Bava's presence is most palpable in *Odissea* in the scenes featuring the giant cyclops, Polyphemus—and with good reason. "My father created all of the special effects for the 'Polifema' episode," explains Lamberto Bava. "To create the effects involving the cyclops, he had to storyboard all the effects shots in advance and decide where the camera would be placed. Franco Rossi soon realized there was not much left for him to do. After the first day of shooting, he came to Mario and asked him to take over as director."

When all was said and done, Bava directed slightly more than one full hour of the eight-hour series. It may seem contradictory that Bava would refuse to direct another film for De Laurentiis, and yet ended up doing (more or less) exactly that, but in this case, Bava's rank protected him from unnecessary distractions. He was answerable only to Rossi, who knew the best results would be obtained by leaving him alone. Bava was therefore was able to enjoy the best of both worlds, being able to focus fully on his creative work, while all of the dealings with the front office fell on Rossi's ready shoulders.

Ulysses' encounter with Polyphemus is, without question, the highlight of the miniseries; it is permeated in a terror-rich atmosphere that is so particular to Bava's genius, we immediately feel that he not only directed the segment and supervised its special effects, but was also in total command of its lighting and cinematography. Elsewhere in the series, Rossi and Giordani's collaboration gives *Odissea* a bright and naturalistic look, in which even dark scenes are always illuminated by golden flickering candles and roiling braziers. The result is generally realistic. In the Troy scenes—which Rossi turned over to his second unit director Piero Schivazappa (subsequently the director of the extraordinary *Femina ridens/The Laughing Woman*, 1969)—there is a sudden infusion of shadowy, pensive mood lighting and wide-angle lensing, and during the encounter between Ulysses and Helen of Troy, there is a memorable instance when the invader places a bloody hand on her milk-white throat, but such visual *frissons* are employed sparingly. When elements of the fantastic crop up later under Giordani's watch, they tend to be expressed on the plane of makeup, wardrobe, or set design, as in the cases of the surfboard-like thrones of King Alcinous' court, or in the frankly Felliniesque appearance of Helen of Troy or King Aeolus and his lookalike family, which evoke futuristic fantasy rather than the ancient past.

However, when Ulysses and his men sally forth into Polyphemus' cave, *Odissea* is catapulted into a realm of dark, hallucinatory fantasy: the cavern walls are splashed with blue, green and amber light; the camera angles leap high and drop low; the scattered flames lick the air with unreal movement (photographed at a slightly higher speed to give them a sense of





SAMSON BURKE *as Polyphemus, wearing a radio-controlled mask devised by Carlo Rambaldi. In the bottom shot, an actor is held in a giant hand built to scale, positioned in front of a perfectly matched rear projection plate.*

immensity); and shadows are dramatically employed to make oversized objects (like Polyphemus' axe) appear even more astonishing, to heighten the story's visual drama, and to romance to the surface the growing, gnawing terror of the captive men.

Cast as the man-eating Polyphemus was Samson Burke. Born Samuel Berg in Montreal, Canada on April 6, 1930, Burke was another of the North American bodybuilders who sought motion picture fame in Italy. Standing 6' 4" and weighing 245 pounds, Burke had won the titles of Mr. Canada 1952, Mr. Muscle Beach 1960, and Professional Mr. Universe of 1961. Afterwards, he ventured into the world of wrestling, but withdrew after failing to win the world heavyweight title four times. Burke found his fortune when he was cast in the role most bodybuilders of his era aspired to play, in *The Three Stooges Meet Hercules* (1962). Producer Norman Maurer made the strategic mistake of allowing the film to be shot in black-and-white, which deprives it of much of the splendor found in the genre it's spoofing. Nevertheless, it holds up best of all the feature film projects of stooges Moe Howard, Larry Fine and "Curly" Joe Di Rita. Burke took advantage of his stardom in the picture to seek a continuation of his cinematic fortune in Rome. He was quickly cast as Ursus in Luigi Campiano's *Le vendetta di Ursus/The Revenge of Ursus* (1961), and as Maciste in Fernando Cerchio's inevitable *Totò contro Maciste* (1962). Among his other efforts were Umberto Lenzi's *Il trionfo di Robin Hood* (1963) and Harald Reinl's two-part remake of *Die Niebelungen* (1966), in which he played Blo-Edin.

Polyphemus was one of Burke's last known film roles, and he gave his entire performance while wearing a mechanical, one-eyed, foam latex mask built by Carlo Rambaldi. Burke's own mouth was exposed, but everything else about the face was operated by cables; it was such a cumbersome apparatus to wear that Burke "nearly suffocated under it," according to Bava.[2] Also constructed by Rambaldi for the episode was a giant-sized mechanical hand, which was used for the shots of Ulysses' men being picked up, crushed to death, and trapped under its massive palm. The prop was approximately seven feet in size and covered in foam latex. Likewise, a twelve-inch mechanical doll was made for Burke to hold and abuse, and its limp, yet believable human weight and movement are remarkable, far more convincing than similar human animation figures seen in the feature films of acknowledged masters like Ray Harryhausen.

Samson Burke looks back on his participation in the episode with bemusement: "I don't remember Bava. They got me at the last minute . . . and I never had a chance to remember the script. I was in a scene with these little lambs, so I put the script under them and could see [it]. I was reading from the script and petting the lambs and reading for about 15 minutes. I couldn't remember the whole thing at once—it was too heavy—so I just read it. Two or three full pages, of just me talking! The strangest part was, the cameraman [Bava] and everyone on the set was clapping and yelling 'Bravo! Bravo!' You never heard a roar like that in your life; you'd think it was the start of an opera or something. They didn't know how I'd remembered all that dialogue. I did a Marlon Brando thing!"[3]

Some years later, while appearing with Rambaldi on the RAI afternoon talk show *L'ospite dalle due,* Mario Bava was asked to comment on the creation of his special effects for *Odissea.* "To put it simply," he tried to explain, "there was an immense cave, the cave of Polyphemus, where the actors interacted; it was as big as an entire sound stage. From this, we made an exact copy of the cave, reduced in size, so that the actor who played Polyphemus, with Rambaldi's mask on his face, almost touched the ceiling with his head. So we had the same set



in two proportions. It's too complicated to explain; it would be easier with some drawings . . . I don't know, let's take my face as an example: we cover half of it and here [on the other side] we expose the big Polyphemus in the small cave, so that he seems enormous. Then we wind the film back, cover the other [exposed] half, and we match the proportions to those of the men in the real cave. The difficult part of it is that the alignment of the two sides must be precise, hidden by something that keeps the seam invisible."

When Bava's stammering, uncomfortable explanation of double exposure photography resulted in general confusion on the talk show dais, he begged off further elucidation. "Ultimately, I think it is more important to see the effect as it appears than to explain like how it was done," he reasoned. "It can only be a disappointment, after all; it's better to keep the illusion, the dream, alive. I would have to talk for two hours, to explain it properly. We would have to talk about blue back, front projection, matte shots—difficult terms that I would also have to explain, one by one."

The illusion of Polyphemus' great size is masterfully organized, stated first in realistic terms before blending reality and illusion—with the men's awed reaction to various oversized props, like the humongous mound of cheese, the mammoth axe, and the bed that Ulysses traverses (approaching the camera from a starting point of depth) in more than a dozen great strides. Then, before Polyphemus enters, he is proceeded by a shock as a large heap of trees is hurled inside the cave for kindling, followed by the casting of a towering, macabre shadow on the stone wall. The first onscreen appearance of the Cyclops is depicted with a slowly executed reverse zoom, allowing the ogre to blossom before our eyes into the full, astonishing scope of his immensity. Reaction shots of the men's terror bolsters the sense of dread. The revelation of the monster's single eye is withheld till last, and Bava is extremely careful never to play the same special effects card twice; the double-exposed, meticulously matched shots which show Ulysses and his men dwarfed by their host and his crackling fires are used only once, and reappear only when a new angle can refresh them. The shots of the two men being lifted and killed in his hand are effective not only by virtue of the craftsmanship evident in the props, but by the actors' performances, and the unexpected cutaway to a startling blue-back shot that seamlessly merges the actor in the giant hand to the gigantic head and shoulder shot of Polyphemus added to the background. The merging is perfected not only in the alignment of the elements but in a perfect continuation of atmospheric lighting. Most frightening of all is the moment when Polyphemus turns away from the other men, brains the two captives by clubbing their heads against a rock, dangles them over an open flame, and then rips them apart like roast poultry—a process articulated almost entirely through the muscles in Burke's turned back, and the nauseated, despairing reactions of the onlookers. Later—in a scene that hearkens back to the staking of Dr. Kruvajan in *La maschera del demonio*—when the men succeed in ramming a flaming spike into the sleeping monster's eye, Bava milks the actual blinding for all its worth, depicting Polyphemus from the men's point of view, the wobbling stake extending toward the viewer in a pseudo-3-dimensional composition that conveys a sense of the full range of human sight. Burke evokes genuine pity as he flails about in pain and dotes the next morning over the sheep he must now trust to graze on their own.





TWO SHOTS *illustrative of Mario Bava's split-screen technique. Top: Polyphemus is made to tower over Ulysses and his men by a seamless split that follows the edge of the cave wall along the bottom of the brazier. Bottom: Here, the foregrounded wooden post in the center of the frame marked the territory of the separately photographed elements.*

If Bava was entrusted with the direction of the Polyphemus segment because his special effects duties placed him in complete control of the camera placement, he must have also been the *de facto* director of Ulysses' encounter with the spirits of the dead in Cimmeria. This disturbing passage—with its hero engulfed by legions of mournful, bloodthirsty ghosts, led by Tiresias with his mouth mottled with blood—is photographed with a highly mobile camera, which would preclude the obvious, more static solution of matching on-set action to action reflected from an adjacent stage onto a pane of glass angled in front of the camera. Instead, it would appear that the various shots were meticulously blocked and timed to allow for the seamless combination of two separately filmed elements: one of Fehmiu acting in the studio, and the other of the dead, photographed on the same set after it had been blanketed in black. Some of the individual shots, particularly those in which Ulysses rests his head on the lap of his mother's ghost and when Tiresias' face overlaps with that of the hero to speak through his mouth, are perfect in their execution.

While perhaps the most outstanding showcase Bava ever had for his special effects ingenuity, *Odissea* also deserves recognition as a high

2 Bava, *L'ospite dalle due*, RAI-TV.

3 Samson Burke as quoted in "Canadian Hercules," Larry Anderson and Gordon Harmer, *Spaghetti Cinema* 75, June 2004, 7-11.

point of his directorial career. The Polyphemus episode is, in many ways, the heart of the entire drama as it is here that Ulysses brings upon himself, and his men, the curse of Poseidon that prevents their homecoming. It is also in this episode that Fehmiu most embodies the hero of legend—scheming, physical, resourceful, boastful—rather than the mortal man seasoned by remarkable experience whom Rossi sought to capture. Without Bava's fantastical imagery, the series' overall construction would have been greatly diminished. As it is presented in the serial version, the Polyphemus story is mildly damaged by its commencement near the end of Episode 3, which imposed a week-long disruption of the suspense which Bava built into the scenes leading up to the demigod's arrival in Episode 4. The entirety of Bava's footage was not shown, as a whole, until a 1995 retrospective of his work on RAI-3 TV.

The Polyphemus episode, and the series at large, also shares another important component with Bava's most memorable work: the music of Carlo Rustichelli. Rustichelli composed some unmistakably characteristic music for the series, all arranged and conducted by Bruno Nicolai (a former amanuensis of Ennio Morricone, and a brilliant composer in his own right), including a tyrannical march theme accented with stings of distorted electric guitar (played by Alessandro Alessandroni), used to introduce the opening invasion of Penelope's suitors; an ethereal romantic theme, interwoven with spectral melismi from a female vocalist (likely the legendary Edda dell'Orso), which recalls the nostalgic music composed for Chris Marker's *La Jetée* (1962) by Trevor Duncan; and, for the Bava episode, a chilling suite of churning strings that evokes potent memories of the *Maestro*'s misterioso cues for *La frusta e il corpo* and *Sei donne per l'assassino.* In fact, some of the music heard in the grim final episode, in particular, is nearly identical to some *Sei donne* cues, with Alessandroni's guitar replacing the former's lead alto saxophone. It is not Rustichelli's most original score, but it is an effective one, and familiar enough to enhance one's awareness throughout of Bava's presence on the set.



ULYSSES *and the Argonauts prepare to blind Polyphemus with a red-hot stake as he sleeps.*



BLINDED *by the voyagers, Polyphemus raises a boulder to sink their escaping ship.*

Regrettably, *Odissea* would mark the last collaboration between Mario Bava and his greatest musical ally. Reflecting on the value of their fruitful partnership, Rustichelli had no explanation for why it did not continue past this final triumph: "I never quarreled with Bava, as far as I can recall. I don't know why our paths didn't cross again. Maybe it was because, after we worked this last time, I began to work abroad—in Russia, Japan, France, and the United States, conducting orchestras. Maybe another reason we didn't meet again was the Italian tendency to economize; they began to do the soundtracks utilizing only electronic instruments. I took a more synchronous approach to film music; I 'clothed the actors with music,' in a manner of speaking. I respected that synchronism. Today, synchronisms are ignored by the musicians and groups that do so many of our soundtracks; all they have to do is play loud.

"I'm sorry, but I have no other recollections of Bava," Rustichelli concluded. "I don't believe we met again after our collaborations. Surely, we never had any disagreements; we were both able to control our temper. I've always been very good at working with directors, even bad ones . . . This wasn't the case with Bava, of course! With the bad directors, I always let them believe that I was doing exactly what they told me, while at the same time doing precisely as I wanted."

Le avventure di Ulisse

In August 1969, more than a year after the first broadcast of *Odissea*, Paramount Pictures released the condensed, feature-length version of the material, entitled *Le avventure di Ulisse/The Adventures of Ulysses.* Though this theatrical edition represents the cutting of more than 500 minutes of screen time, the removal of many important supporting characters, and the omission of some key scenes, the film not only survives its radical reduction but compares favorably to every other feature adaptation of the story made to date.

Le avventure di Ulisse could be said to vulgarize the TV version to some extent because it reorders the original version's involuted approach and renders it more or less chronological, after the initial scenes of Penelope's home being invaded by her suitors. While the original series gives the viewer (and the characters) space in which to breathe and think, the feature version quickens the pace of the storytelling, as befits a movie of this kind, but without betraying the intellectual, introspective tenor of the material. The feature drastically shortens the material it accommodates, but unlike the series, it allows that material to unfold without serial interruption or cutaways to Ulysses telling these stories in the present tense. Some changes were made to the film in terms of dialogue, in response to the cutting of certain sequences. For example, the entire sequence of the reunion of Ulysses and Telemachus at the farmer's home was omitted, so the dialogue was retooled to deceive audiences into perceiving their later meeting at the palace as being their reunion. Nevertheless, some of the shot transitions evince such cleverness that it is hard to imagine that the component shots were not initially conceived to complement one another; a good example is the shot of the angry suitors discovering the nightly unravelling of the shroud Penelope is weaving for Laertes, which they throw to the floor and trample, which cuts to a shot of the same woven fabric serving as the sail on Ulysses' ship. The images synchronize well in this alternative montage, though they appear a few episodes apart in the serial presentation.

The value of Mario Bava's contribution to *Odissea* is particularly evident from the fact that *Le avventure di Ulisse* devotes more than twenty minutes of its screen time to the Polyphemus story: although reduced by two-thirds of its original running time, it accounts for roughly one-fifth of the feature's length, in contrast to the series, of which it occupied approximately one-eighth of the total length. The Polyphemus episode also contributed more than any other highlight to the film's advertising campaign, which depicted Ulysses' men preparing to blind the sleeping monster.



ITALIAN *locandina, highlighting Mario Bava's "Polyphemus" segment.*

Despite securing distribution from Paramount, *The Adventures of Ulysses* appears to have gone without a proper theatrical release in the United States. One-sheet posters, theatrical stills, or heralds for the picture never turn up on the collector's market. The few Americans who have seen this condensed version did so in the late 1970s, when it premiered, edited and with commercial interruptions, on *The CBS Late Movie,* with Mario Bava prominently credited onscreen as director of the Polyphemus scenes. This version found Bekim Fehmiu's performance dubbed by Dan Sturkie (who previously voiced John Richardson in the ELDA dub of *The Mask of Satan,* and Reg Park in *Hercules in the Haunted World*), Irene Papas looped by the ubiquitous Carolyn De Fonseca, and the booming voice of Polyphemus provided by the man who supervised the dubbing sessions, actor–director Mel Welles. For this late night broadcast, repeated once again in 1980, the slaughter of the suitors was removed in its entirety by the network censors, rendering the entire presentation pointless.

When asked what he believes to be his father's greatest achievement, Lamberto Bava points to the "Polyphemus" episode of *Odissea* without hesitation. This opinion may surprise Bava's American admirers, since the program is today almost completely unknown in the United States. In the three decades since its Italian premiere, it has never been broadcast in its entirety in the US, despite the existence of an English-dubbed version, *The Odyssey,* which was shown in Canada and made available for a while as a 16 mm rental for use in classrooms. However, in Europe, it was a phenomenal hit, never to be forgotten—especially by young viewers who got their first taste of cinematic terror at the feet of the towering Polyphemus. Such was the impact of this episode that, nearly a decade after the filming of *Odissea,* Mario Bava would be identified in the advance trade ads for a stillborn project, (*Baby Kong*) not as the genius behind *La maschera del demonio, Sei donne per l'assassino,* or *Diabolik,* but as "the inventor of Polifema."





JOHN HARRINGTON *(Stephen Forsyth) requires wedding apparel as a talisman for murder in* IL ROSSO SEGNO DELLA FOLLIA.

IL ROSSO SEGNO DELLA FOLLIA

Hatchet for the Honeymoon

PUBLISHED FILMOGRAPHIES of Mario Bava's work disagree about the order in which his next two films—*Il rosso segno della follia* and *Four Times That Night*—were produced and released. Both productions were troubled, and neither film would receive a general release until years after it was completed. However, by comparing the various recollections of those involved, it is possible to reconstruct the likely order of events.



LAURA BETTI *with longtime friend, writer–director Pier Paolo Pasolini.*

The best place to begin is with actress Laura Betti, who plays the major female role in *Il rosso segno della follia*. She was born Laura Trombetti in Bologna on May 1, 1934, and began her career as a jazz vocalist, performing under the name Laura Sarno. After releasing an album of Kurt Weill songs, she became the darling of Rome's literary set and had lyrics penned especially for her by such admirers as Alberto Moravia and Mario Soldati. In 1958, she met the poet and novelist Pier Paolo Pasolini, and this association would change her life. As one of Pasolini's inner circle, Laura became a prominent figure of Rome's *avant garde* and was nicknamed "*la Giaguara*" (the Jaguar) by the press for her platinum helmet-shaped hairdo and comma-shaped eyebrows, which she drew on near her temples.

Her notoriety landed her a role in Federico Fellini's *La dolce vita*, which led to other film appearances in Giuseppe Bennati's *Labbra rosse* ("Red Lips," 1960), Roberto Rossellini's *Era notte a Roma* ("It Was a Night in Rome," 1960), Gianni Proia's *Ecco* [*Il mondo di notte n. 3*, "The World by Night 3," 1963], and several Pasolini omnibus films, including *Le streghe*/*The Witches*. In September 1968, her disturbing yet poignant performance as the mute servant in Pasolini's *Teorema* was recognized by the Office Catholique International du Cinéma, which awarded her the prestigious Volpi Cup for Best Actress. In a perverse gesture of triumph, she celebrated her victory by telephoning Mario Bava, whom she did not know personally, and asking for a part in his next film.

"I used to adore horror films, as I still do, because they made me laugh," she explained. "And so I used to see the Bava films . . . and I could see that his horror films were very ironical and the way he was shooting them was . . . well, as you know, many great directors copied Bava. Do you remember the short Fellini film with Terence Stamp? Anyway, in Italy, I was always considered an intellectual actress. Bava, in my opinion, was a fantastic director, but he was also the opposite, let us say, of an intellectual filmmaker. After my victory—after that *consecration*—I called Bava and said, 'Here it is, my Oscar, my prize, and now I want to shoot something with you!' And he immediately got my joke, do you see? He knew that he wasn't an intellectual, but he had the same ironical point of view, as I do, about intellectuals. So that was the beginning of our friendship. Immediately—and I do mean *immediately*—he found a film and we shot it."

Because *Four Times That Night* is documented (in the personal diary of its star, Daniela Giordano) to have been in production from October to December 1968, Betti's stressing of the word "immediately" must be taken seriously. This would mean that Bava was already in preproduction on *Il rosso segno della follia* at the time Betti contacted him, and addressed himself to the task of working into the finished script a new role suitable for an actress of Betti's stature. He began shooting just a short time after Betti won the Volpi Cup, but the production ran out of money before it was

Il rosso segno della follia

"The Red Sign of Madness"
Working title: *Un'accetta per la luna di miele,*
"A Hatchet for the Honeymoon"
Filmed in Barcelona and Rome
September – October 1968, completed early 1969
First released: June 2, 1970
Eastmancolor, 1.85:1, 88 minutes

Production: Pan Latina Films (Madrid) and Mercury Films (Rome), Peliculas Ibarra y Cia S.A. Producers: Manuel Caño Sanciriaco, Giuseppe Zaccariello (uncredited). Associate producer: Enzo Ferla. Director: Mario Bava. Assistant directors: Lamberto Bava and Ricardo Walker. Screenplay: Santiago Moncada [Other sources add Mario Bava and Mario Musy]. Continuity: Patrizia Zulini. Director of photography: Mario Bava. (Some sources credit Antonio Rinaldi as D.P.) Camera operators: Jaime Deu Casas and Emilio Barriano [Varriano]. Camera assistants: Avelino Carla and Marcello Anconetani. Art direction: Jesús Maria Herrero. Makeup: Elisa Aspach and Piero Mecacci. Wardrobe: José M. Tresserra. Production supervisor: Jaime Fernandez Cid. Production assistants: Pedro Villanova and Graciano Fabiani. Editor: Soledad Lopez Ramirez. Music: Sante Romitelli, [RCA]. Stills: José Adrian and Giuseppe Parrabano. Distributor: Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer.

Stephen Forsyth (John Harrington), Laura Betti (Mildred Harrington), Dagmar Lassander (Helen Wood), Jesús Puente (Inspector Russell), Femi Benussi (Alice), Antonia Mas (Louise), Alan Collins [Luciano Pigozzi] (Vences), Veronica Llimera (Betsy), Guido Barlocci (John as child), Silvia Lienas (Vicky), José Ignacio Abadaz (Jimmy), Gérard Tichy (Dr. Kalleway), Elina De Witt, Fortunato Pasquale, Bruno Boschetto, Montserrat Riva (bride on train).

Additional US credits: N. W. Russo presents a University Associates Production. English dubbing directed by Mel Welles. Voices: Rodd Dana (John Harrington), Mel Welles (Inspector Russell).

Spain: *Un Hacia para la Luna de Miel*, Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer Ibérica S.A., 9/14/70, 83m
UK: *Blood Brides*, Tigon British World Services, 2/73, 87m 33s, Certificate "X," passed with no cuts
US: *Hatchet for the Honeymoon*, GGP Release, Color by Movielab, 2/9/74, 88m. TV: Embassy Pictures Corporation



CANADIAN *actor Stephen Forsyth as John Harrington, paranoiac.*

completed, and was temporarily left unfinished while its producer sought additional funds. It was during that window of time when Bava—needing the money—accepted the invitation to direct *Four Times That Night*.

Il rosso segno della follia was initiated by an independent Spanish producer named Manuel Caño. Born Manuel Caño Sanciriaco in 1931 in Tamames, Salamanca, Castilla y León, Spain, Caño became a producer after working for nearly a decade as a narrator and voice actor on various films, establishing himself with a trio of internationally successful Tarzan films, starring Los Angeles Rams linebacker Mike Henry: *Tarzan in the Valley of Gold* (1966), *Tarzan and the Great River* (1967), and *Tarzan and the Jungle Boy* (1968), which were directed by Robert Day in Mexico and South America.[1] Caño went on to become a not-particularly-distinguished director in his own right, later helming the Florida-made *Swamp of the Ravens* (1973, scripted by Santiago Moncada) under the pseudonym "Michael Cannon," and then, under his own name, *Vudu Sangriento/Voodoo Black Exorcist* (1974). He is still active in films today, and has racked up an impressive number of screen credits in the capacity of actor, writer, producer, director, and composer.

Laura Betti revealed that although his name does not appear on the picture, *Il rosso segno della follia* was in fact co-produced by Giuseppe Zaccariello, an Italian producer–director with whom Bava would work again on future projects. Born in Campania, Zaccariello started out as a *magliaro*, a travelling salesman of cheap fabrics, in which profession he travelled the breadth and width of northern Europe and made many contacts. When he returned to Italy, he married the daughter of a tile factory magnate. "Having come into some money, he returned to Rome with the idea of being a producer," explains screenwriter Filippo Ottoni. "Of course, he only wanted to produce films in order to romance the actresses. He had the worst motivations that you can imagine, but he was a very sweet character . . . rather uneducated but, at the same time, very intuitive." Zaccariello's earliest productions were typically international co-productions of a soft erotic nature, such as *La scuola della vergine* ("The School for Virgins," 1966), and he veiled his participation in them by adopting the pseudonym "Josef Zachar."

A chance restaurant meeting with director Elio Petri, who needed 80 million *lire* to complete his work-in-progress, led to Zaccariello (who, as legend has it, had the money on him) becoming the *de facto* producer of *A ciascuno il suo/We Still Kill the Old Way* (1967), a popular success. Zaccariello subsequently produced *Femina ridens/The Laughing Woman* (1969), a delirious Pop Art bondage fantasy starring Philippe Leroy and Dagmar Lassander, written and directed by Piero Schivazappa, who, like Bava, had directed an episode of *Odissea*. The special effects of this Italian/German/French co-production were devised by Carlo Rambaldi, and it is possible that Bava and Zaccariello crossed paths while visiting, counseling, or assisting Rambaldi on the set. The production team itself included a number of artists and technicians who would subsequently join the Bava squad—editors Carlo Reali and Roberto Sterbini, and composer Stelvio Cipriani, to name a few.

The shooting script—entitled *Un hacha para la luna de miel* (literally, "A Hatchet for the Honeymoon")—was the work of the aforementioned Santiago Moncada, whose byline would subsequently appear on some of the most intelligent horror films to originate from Spanish-language territories in the 1970s and '80s: Claudio Guerin Hill's *La Campaña del Infierno/A Bell From Hell* and Juan Antonio Bardem's *La Corrupcion de Chris Miller/The Corruption of Chris Miller* (both 1973), Jess Franco's *Solo Ante del Terror* (1981) and many others—dark psychological thrillers whose uniformity (and perversity) of vision reflect a true genre *auteur*. Moncada's name also sometimes appeared on films that he reportedly had nothing to do with, presumably to attract Spanish co-production funds; a case in point being the Spanish-language print of Sergio Martino's *Lo strano vizio della signora Wardh/Next!* (1971), which Ernesto Gastaldi insists he scripted himself.

"It was a story that came from Spain almost pre-packaged," remembers Lamberto Bava. "The producer, a Spaniard, was a con man, known throughout Spain as someone to be on your guard about, but my father always liked producers who were a little dodgy."

The title *Il rosso segno della follia* may have been coined by Bava himself. Though it has no reference to anything in the picture itself, it recalls a line from Oscar Wilde's novel *The Portrait of Dorian Gray*: "Suddenly there had fallen upon his brain that tiny scarlet speck that makes men mad."

Lamberto Bava remembers that his father revised the script for this picture more extensively than any other he undertook. Moncada's original screenplay was more straightforward, presenting "Juan" as a mannequin fetishist who murders the women who betray him (i.e., the models who abruptly leave his employ to be married) on their wedding nights, thus preserving the innocence symbolized by their lily-white apparel, and reducing them to mannequins incapable of

1 For some reason, the producer credited on American International's domestic prints is one Sy Weintraub.

rebuffing his affections. He is compelled to murder by visions triggered by his death-dealing blows, which progressively unlock the door that suppresses a childhood trauma; in order to know himself, he must continue to kill. Juan is lured into a genuine relationship with one of his models, who is eventually revealed (in a twist derived from Edgar Wallace, or possibly Edgar G. Ulmer's *Bluebeard*) to be a policewoman, the sister of an earlier victim, working undercover to entrap him. Bava was attracted to the script despite its redundancies, knowing that he could develop it into something personal—exactly the kind of small, intimately personal horror film he was craving to make. One of the personal touches he added was to give the heroine the talismanic name shared by his sister and daughter, Elena—which became "Helen" when the film was later dubbed into English.

When Laura Betti surprised Bava by ringing him up and asking for a part in his next movie, he was flattered and intrigued—but her request also put him in a difficult position. Moncada's script had no role suitable for an actress of Betti's type—short, in her mid-thirties, more striking than glamorous—only a series of sexy fashion models ripe for murder. But Bava accepted the challenge and worked with Betti to develop a suitable role for her to play, and to restructure the existing story around her presence. In the process, Bava's marital aggravations were joyously vented in entirely new second and third acts that owe something to Noël Coward's *Blithe Spirit* (or, more likely, David Lean's 1945 film of the play). Thus was born the memorable character of Juan's—now John's—shrewish wife Mildred, and thus was Moncada's story transformed into a delicious *comedie noir* lamenting a murderer's inability to escape his "better half."

JOHN*'s mother at the moment of her death—a haunting memory which John seeks to better understand through acts of murder.*



Synopsis

A handsome man creeps along a train corridor, exchanging furtive glances with a young boy who is studying his actions. Using a pass key, the man lets himself into a private compartment where a honeymooning couple stand in the early stages of lovemaking. He slaughters the husband and wife with a small cleaver, which he cleans afterwards by wiping the blood onto the female victim's bridal veil.

The killer, John Harrington, is the affluent director of the House of Harrington, a Parisian fashion salon specializing in women's wedding apparel. The female victim is Rosy Miller, a former Harrington model—the third to be murdered on her wedding night in less than a year, while four others have disappeared without a trace—having been fed to the incinerator in John's hothouse, their ashes fertilizing his tropical flowers.

John inherited his salon from his mother, who was murdered on the night of her second wedding, and his wife Mildred's business sense has turned it into a thriving operation. Impotent and a self-described "paranoiac," John has never consummated his marriage, a deprivation which has turned his frustrated wife's attentions to spiritualism and the hope of establishing contact with her late, first husband—also named John. John Harrington is likewise preoccupied with the dead: a witness to his mother's murder, he cannot remember the details . . . and so, whenever a model from his salon quits to be married, he slays them on their wedding night, a therapeutic act which helps to bring the events of that fuzzy trauma a little more into focus.

John is suspected of the murders by Inspector Russell, who has no evidence on which to arrest him. Shortly after Rosy's murder, a new model—Helen Wood—is hired to fill the vacated post. Helen senses that John's marriage is troubled and tries to seduce him, without success. Mildred, suspecting John of infidelity, pretends to visit an ailing sister but flies back home the same night, expecting to surprise him with another woman. Tired of her incessant nagging, but unable to commit murder without the talisman of a wedding gown to trigger his violence, John dons a wedding veil himself and kills Mildred with a hatchet! Her screams are overheard by Inspector Russell, paying an unexpected visit, but John explains the cries by turning on the television—where a local station is running Bava's I tre volti della paura!

That night, John buries Mildred in the garden . . . but the next day, he learns that, despite her murder, Mildred remains visible to everyone but him! Crazed with paranoid anxiety, he exhumes her body and incinerates it, placing her ashes in a dusty satchel. Taking the "old bag" to a local bar for some much-needed refreshment, John is aghast when the waiter asks the bag what Madam would like to drink! At wit's end, John scatters the ashes into a river, after which Helen seeks him out and tries to offer some consolation. The temptation to solve his internal puzzle becomes overwhelming, but Helen dodges the hatchet as it falls—and summons the lurking Inspector Russell as John lies helpless, reaching the only possible answer to his

Oedipal puzzle: that it was he who murdered his mother and stepfather in a jealous rage on their wedding night. Russell commends Helen—the sister of the late Rosy Miller—for her bravery in agreeing to entrap her sister's murderer, as she breaks down in tears.

John is placed under arrest and committed to a mental institution for the rest of his life. As he is driven away in a paddy wagon, an attending officer places a familiar satchel beside him—and the sound of Mildred's cackling laughter tells John that he will be haunted by the old bag for the rest of his life!

Cast

Canadian actor Stephen Forsyth—born in Montreal on September 22, 1938—had worked in the Italian cinema for several years before being cast as John Harrington. He made his debut as Golo in José Luís Monter's *Genoveffa di Brabante* (1964), an Italo/Spanish co-production scripted by Riccardo Freda. Forsyth eventually ascended to the second male lead in *La morte non conta di dollari/Death at Owell Rock* (1967), a Western directed by Freda under the pseudonym "George Lincoln." Of the dozen or so films he made, the one of which he is most proud is Valerio Zurlini's *Seduto alla sua destra/Black Jesus* (1968), a violent political drama starring the American actor Woody Strode. He is aware that *Il rosso segno della follia* is the film he's best remembered for, and admits with good humor that his friends are fond of teasing him about his performance as the wedding-veiled hatchet man, and of quoting his immortal opening line, "My name is John Harrington . . . I am a paranoiac."

Forsyth is also aware that his performance has taken some knocks over the years for its perceived shortcomings. He has been accused of being stiff and inexpressive, but, in fact, he gives a *fumetti*-style performance that was deliberately cultivated in Italian thrillers of this period. The idea was to cast attractive people, put them in attractive settings and involve them in deeds revolting and unattractive—like murder. In the particular case of *Il rosso segno della follia*, Forsyth's seemingly wooden performance is a critical element in suggesting a man whose interior life is his entire life, and in echoing his relationship to the mannequins in his private collection.

"I read something recently, where someone said that I was a 'singularly colorless' actor," he chuckles. "I told my friends about it, and said, 'Well, at least I was *singularly* colorless!'" When I told him that I thought he was quite perfect in the film, he said, "Well, to be serious, Bava must have thought so too, because he cast me and he never told me I was doing anything wrong. So it must have been what *he* wanted."

In hindsight, Forsyth wishes that he had more instruction from his director: "I really didn't get *any* direction from Bava, which was very isolating for me, as an actor. One day, I went up to him and said, 'Mario, you've never said anything to me—ever.' He had never really directed me, or made a correction to me, of any kind. So I said, 'Listen, Mario, if there's anything you don't like, or if there's anything you might want to tell me or explain to me . . . [please do.]' He smiled and he said, 'Listen, if you were doing anything wrong, if there was anything I had to tell you, I would tell you.' Much more time was spent preparing the sets, the lighting. I was shooting almost every day, and I would get there in the morning and most of the day had gone by, by the time they got the sets ready. It was the same, whether we were in Italy or Barcelona. The day shots were a little different, because we needed to get them done while it was still daylight, but for the interiors, it took an incredible amount of time. I'd be made up and ready to go, but by the time they got ready for me, I was asleep somewhere!"



JOHN *in his mannequin menagerie.*

Czech actress Dagmar Lassander—born in Prague on June 16, 1943—appears to have skyrocketed to stardom by appearing frequently nude in *Andrea—wie ein Blatt auf Nackter Haut* ("Andrea . . . Like a Leaf on Naked Skin," 1968), directed by Hans Schott-Schöbinger.[2] Afterwards, she relocated to Rome and starred as the abducted heroine in the aforementioned *Femina ridens*. *Il rosso segno della follia* was her first work outside the erotic cinema, to which she briefly returned in Luciano Ercoli's *Le foto proibite di una signore per bene/Forbidden Photos of a Lady Above Suspicion* (1970). Her subsequent career consisted of secondary (and eventually, character) roles in such horror films as Riccardo Freda's *L'iguana dalle lingua di fuoco/Iguana*

2 A well-publicized shot of Lassander in this film, reclining on a bed with leaves strategically covering her nude body, may have inspired a similar shot of Elke Sommer in Bava's *Lisa and the Devil.*





FEMI BENUSSI *as Alice, a model at John's salon who makes the mistake of announcing her engagement.*

With the Tongue of Fire (1971) Lucio Fulci's *Quella villa accanto al cimitero/The House By the Cemetery* (1981), and Lamberto Bava's *Oceano rosso/Devilfish* a.k.a. *Monster Shark* (1984).

Today, Lassander remembers *Il rosso segno della follia* without affection. She was told by the film's producers to lose approximately twenty-five pounds before filming commenced, and after meeting this difficult goal, she arrived on the set only to discover that the lead role (which she expected to be hers) was now being played by Laura Betti. She remembers that Betti was "extremely rude" to her on the set, and as she spoke only German and a little English at the time, she found it "extremely difficult" to communicate with her director. The paramour of producer Manuel Caño at the time of filming, Lassander later took legal action against her ex-lover when he failed to make good on his agreement to bill her above Laura Betti on all advertising, and emerged from the litigation with enough cash reward "to let me live *la dolce vita* for a while." (The film's original export trailers only added salt to Lassander's wounds by labelling a shot of Laura Betti as "Dagmar Lassander," and vice versa!) Lassander takes a measure of satisfaction in remembering that, when she next crossed paths with Betti in a Roman clothing store in the early 1980s, she was able to snub her in return.

Cast in the minor role of the ill-fated model Alice was Yugoslavian starlet Femi Benussi (b. Eufemia Benussi, 1948), who had previously appeared as similar window-dressing in *Il boia scarlatto/The Bloody Pit of Horror*. As the freedoms of the screen increased toward the end of the decade, Benussi—sometimes billed as "Femy Benuzzi" or "Femy Martin"—began to specialize in more frankly erotic roles. Among her later films were Alfredo Rizzo's *La sanguisuga conduce la danza/The Bloodsucker Leads the Dance* a.k.a. *The Passion of Evelyn* (1975) and Antonio Margheriti's *Finalmente . . . Le mille e una notte/1001 Erotic Nights* (1972). Veronica Llimera, who appears briefly as Betsy (one of John's "near-victims"), later appeared in Amando de Ossorio's *La noche del Terror Ciego/Tombs of the Blind Dead* (1971). She has no particular recollections of working for Mario Bava today.

Two familiar faces of the Italian horror film can be found lurking in the background of *Il rosso segno della follia*, in thankless roles. "Alan Collins" a.k.a. Luciano Pigozzi—last seen as La Fôret in *Nude . . . si muore*—here plays Vences, much the same role he played in Bava's *Sei donne per l'assassino* five years earlier. Sadly, the "Italian Peter Lorre" is poorly represented in the final cut, appearing in only two short walk-ons, given one thankless line ("Mr. Harrington, we'd like to have you take a look at these sketches") and not a single close-up. Gérard Tichy—the star of Alberto De Martino's *Horror/The Blancheville Monster* (1963), to which Bava may have contributed some uncredited special effects—is given the even more anonymous role of Dr. Kalleway, Mildred's spiritual advisor, appearing all but offscreen during the brief seance he oversees.

And then there is Laura Betti, who gives one of the finest performances Mario Bava ever committed to film. When I first wrote to her, asking for her recollections of Bava, she responded with the following letter:

"I deeply loved Mario Bava, both as a director for his irony, which wound through even his most horrific films, and as a person for his human charge.

"He was a very sweet man—the sweetest. He knew cinema like nobody else, like a Renaissance artisan, a real craftsman. He could simplify anything. His splendid special effects were done with almost ridiculous means: a planet was achieved by pouring a small maize pudding on a wooden table. He could make me fly in the air, instead of walking, by simply lying himself on the floor with his camera and waving his hand up

and down in front of it—I flew! A dark forest where there was none? On location on a long desert beach, he agitated one or two tree branches in front of the camera lens and created the thickest woods. Half a pound of tripe, animated at a distance by two electrical wires, resulted in the most terrifying monster, climbing up model stairs and walls.

"He was in love with his dog, a basset hound so long that the poor thing could not turn around on its legs by itself. So when we were walking him and were supposed to go back, we had to stop and lift the back end of the dog, who could then trot in the right direction. He nursed the dog like a baby. With his love for the cinema and animals, he made me realize that acting is a deed of love, of giving rather than receiving.

"I could talk about Mario for days on end; by letter, it is too difficult. To sum things up, I would say that his films mirrored his purity. In his own way, he was a poet." [3]

Production & Special Effects

Il rosso segno della follia was filmed in September and early October 1968 in Barcelona, Rome, and Paris. Two short years after Dino De Laurentiis had placed him at the helm of a multi-million dollar production, Bava was back to making another three-week horror programmer, budgeted between $100–150,000 . . . entirely by choice.

Although he denied being afraid of success, Bava had deliberately retreated from the level of filmmaking where more dollars equalled more creative interference. Ironically, and much to his annoyance, the location chosen for Chez Harrington—the Barcelona villa of none other than Generalissimo Francisco Franco—required Bava to put up with as much production interference as he had suffered with De Laurentiis.

Bava compared the two experiences himself: "While we were making *Diabolik*," Bava recalled, "that famous lawsuit against the sadistic comic magazines was going on in Italy. To avoid controversy, De Laurentiis had insisted that not one drop of blood be shed in the film! Can you imagine—with a character like Diabolik? When I was in Spain making *Il rosso segno della follia* in Franco's villa, the city guard was looking over my shoulder every minute, making sure that we didn't stain the staircase with blood!" [4]

Likewise, one of Laura Betti's abiding memories of the shoot was "lots of police." The constant vigil of armed security guards ensured that Manuel Caño's production respect its agreement not to shoot on the private upstairs floors of the villa, and not to damage the property or its furnishings in any way; they also brought an oppressive gravity to the process of filmmaking that worked against Bava's usual festive on-set atmosphere.

Not only did Bava rework the script in advance of shooting; he also improvised on the set whenever the spirit moved him. "We would rewrite scenes *together*," Betti laughed. "Mario pretended that the script was nothing, that we had to work on the set to improve upon what was written before. This is something that is not considered normal in America, yet I must tell you that *all Italian directors do this*. Even Fellini, Pier Paolo [Pasolini], and Bernardo [Bertolucci]. They all improvise; it's typical of the Italian style. I used to tell Mario, 'Now you are behaving like Pier Paolo!' and he became defensive, saying, 'Yes? Well, he is an intellectual and I am not.' And I would laugh and say, 'Well, you are doing the same thing anyway!'"

The revision of the script resulted in unhappy consequences for the film's intended lead actress, Dagmar Lassander. "Bava and I had rewritten



ALICE *is added to John's menagerie after trying on a wedding dress presented as a gift from her employer.*

3 Laura Betti, letter to the author, April 23, 1985.

4 Ornella Volta, "Conversation avec Mario Bava," *Positif* 138, May 1972, 44–48.



MILDRED*'s sexual frustrations are maliciously teased by John as a prelude to murder.*

the film so that I was the female lead," recounted Betti. "Dagmar Lassander was sort of . . . 'protected' by the producer, you understand. We were expected to be very kind to her, very nice, *et cetera*. In Italian scripts, each page is divided in two; on the left is the action, and all of the dialogue appears on the right. What actors are most interested in is their dialogue. So, I think this girl had never read the shooting script—maybe only the columns of dialogue. At a certain moment, she began to realize that I was in the film more than she—that I had all of these scenes without dialogue!—and she began to make awful scenes, accusing Mario in front of the entire crew of being in love with me! Finally, Mario had enough and he told her, in front of everyone, 'Look, make love with as many producers as you like, but in the future, try to read *both* sides of your script pages!'"

To soothe Lassander's ire, one or two scenes were hastily added to increase her screen time, such as the one in which John introduces his salon's newest model to the eternally envious Inspector Russell.

In terms of her own performance, Betti discovered that working in a low-budget horror film required a different acting discipline than that which she had developed by working in more upscale, "intellectual" fare. "I found it difficult to try to really act in this kind of film," she confessed, "because everything was so over-the-top. It is difficult to maintain a good level of acting—very difficult. The best you can do is to approach everything as if it was true. But I didn't care, because on this film, I was feeling very happy."

Betti's happiness came from her realization that Mario Bava—the name behind the ironic horror films that made her laugh—was himself a serious artist, the equal of any film director she had worked with before, yet wonderfully devoid of ego. "The thing I most admired about Bava was . . . this is very difficult to explain in English . . . you know, when you do everything by yourself, with your own two hands? Mario was an *artisan*. I can remember a scene in which I was supposed to appear as a ghost. He wanted me to fly instead of walk, which was rather difficult for me! I couldn't quite make it, so I climbed the staircase instead and he placed the camera on the top stair but very low, on the level of the floor, and he kept the focus going in and out, in and out, in and out—and that was the way he made me float in the film!"

While Betti doesn't exactly "float" in the shot described, Bava's camera is successful in suggesting that Mildred's ghost is materializing like a spiteful nebula out of thin air. What is so interesting about this particular shot is that, by being captured "in the camera," without post-production opticals, it has a certain organic quality that makes it all the more believable, especially as a subjective hallucination. Of all the horror and fantasy films directed by Bava, *Il rosso segno della follia* had the least available time and money for special effects. The film's most dazzling instances of visual trickery—the delirious flashbacks to John's seminal act of matricide—were accomplished entirely within the camera, shot through wavy glass, distorted lenses, faceted crystal, and bisected mirrors that split apart with the onscreen fall of the hatchet. The film's greatest effects expense would appear to be a fog dispenser, which is wed to red lighting to suggest the pulverizing heat of John's boxlike incinerator, and the infernal power of Mildred's ashes, which appear at the top of the staircase after John has scattered them to the four winds, back in their old satchel case, cackling and fuming with smoke.

Betti also remembered that there was no insurance money set aside in case of accidents. "I had a big argument with Mario because they wanted to use a double for the scene where my character was killed," she recalled. "He wanted a big jump down the stairs or something like that. I wanted to do it myself, but he didn't trust me to pull it off, so he hired a double. I took him into another room and I jumped for him. He said, 'That was awful.' I said, 'I'm telling you, it's much better jumping than my double will do!' Mario finally confessed that they *had* to use the double, because if I hurt myself doing the stunt, the production wouldn't have the money to pay me anything."

It must have been an embarrassing moment for Bava—admitting to the Volpi Cup winner how threadbare their little project truly was, and the level to which he had deliberately fallen in the short time since his break with De Laurentiis.

In the final cut, the jumping stunt doesn't appear onscreen; instead, the scene cuts away at this point to another matricidal flashback—indicating that the entire flashback motif may have been conceived later by Bava and introduced in the editing. By examining her death scene frame-by-frame, the viewer can also see that Laura Betti's argument with Bava must have been solved amicably, as she struggles throughout her set-ups to keep her face averted from the camera. As the hatchet finally fell on Mildred Harrington, with Bava

coaxing her performance loudly from behind the camera, Laura Betti couldn't keep herself from laughing.

At some point during the Barcelona filming, Bava had a chance encounter in his hotel corridor with his old friend, Cameron Mitchell, who was astonished to find "*Signore Solamente in Italia*" on foreign turf.

"The last time I saw Mario was in Spain," Mitchell remembered. "I was doing a film there at the time—I don't remember the title—and, one day in the hotel, there was Mario! I couldn't believe my eyes. I said, 'Mario! What are you doing out of Italy?'

"'Slumming.' That was his answer."

Not all of the film's interiors were photographed at Franco's villa. The discothèque scenes, two interiors and one exterior (as John is thrown out), were filmed at Balcazar Studios in Barcelona. Bava's crew were forbidden to film upstairs at the villa, which necessitated the addition of scenes filmed later at Villa Frascati, one of Italy's perennial horror film locations—a short drive northeast of Rome. This explains why the film's credits list two individuals, one Spanish and one Italian, for some of the key crew positions. In truth, some of the credits exist simply to fulfill co-production quotas; Lamberto Bava, for example, worked as his father's assistant in Spain as well as in Italy, and was also responsible for all the second unit shooting in Paris.

The Frascati footage includes John's encounter with his "inner child" before meeting with Alice afterhours in the salon, the seance sequence with Dr. Kalleway, the scenes in the Harringtons' bathroom and bedroom (note that the camera never moves from the staircase directly into the bedroom), and the scenes in John's toy- and mannequin-haunted menagerie. For the climactic scene of Inspector Russell bursting into the menagerie to save Helen from John, Bava was faced with the problem of inserting a Spanish actor (Jesús Puente) into an Italian location scene where he was not present. This was done by filming Dagmar Lassander reaching toward a similar door that was acquired for the shooting at Villa Frascati, and then cutting to a tight zoom shot of Puente bursting through the door, which was shot back at the Franco villa. By viewing the scene frame-by-frame, the viewer can see that the two doors are similar but not the same. Another instance of Bava inserting an illusion where one is not readily apparent.



JOHN *and Mildred will remain married till death do they part—or do their vows endure beyond the grave?*

Attentive viewers may also notice that the Harringtons' bed is the same one that appears in the boudoir of the Duchess Du Grand in *I vampiri*, in Rosy's apartment in the "*Il telefono*" segment of *I tre volti della paura,* and also in a scene of *Le meraviglie di Aladino*. Seen here, the formerly empty area of the ornate headboard has been cheaply filled with a sheet of wallpaper, which rattles visibly when John drops onto the mattress, exhausted.

Despite the Spanish and Italian locations used for *Il rosso segno della follia*, and the English names given to its characters, producer Manuel Caño decided to further confuse events by setting the story in Paris, the European hub of high fashion. To drive the point home, Stephen Forsyth and a second unit crew led by Lamberto Bava travelled to Paris to capture some exteriors, at which point the production ran out of funding.

"It wasn't really a cheap production," Forsyth insists. "All of the costumes I wore were made specifically for me; they really spared no expense. In fact, I still have the belt I wore in that movie. But they did run out of money after we got to Paris. All of the exteriors were shot in Paris, but if you look closely, you'll notice that my character is always shown in the distance in these shots, because that was a double; I didn't shoot at all in Paris. I stayed in my hotel room because they hadn't paid me for two weeks! They didn't stop shooting; they just put a double into those scenes. But he wasn't able to wear my costumes, because I was up in my hotel room, holding them hostage, while waiting for my check! You see, I had an agreement that I would be paid for each week of work at the end of the preceding week. I made sure I was paid something up front, and then I was paid the balance week by week. By the time we got to Paris, I had already worked one week for nothing and, as we came to the end of another week, I think they seriously didn't have the money; otherwise, I'm sure they would have given it to me. And that was basically how my acting career ended, with me in my hotel room waiting for the check that never came. That's how the movie ended, actually; I never did shoot those last scenes. But I've talked to Lamberto since then, and he's forgiven me for that."

In the final cut of *Il rosso segno*, not too many Paris exteriors survive. In the end, Mario Bava salvaged the failed Paris shoot by inserting a shot of the Eiffel Tower, grabbed by Lamberto while on location, and a newspaper headline printed in French—the sort of tricks he had used in *I vampiri* more than a decade earlier.

After his star turn in *Il rosso segno*—a role that required him to kiss nude

department store mannequins and corpses bound for cremation, to slaughter women while wearing lipstick and a bridal veil, and to work for two weeks without pay—Stephen Forsyth withdrew from acting to pursue a new career as a musician and composer.

"It was getting to the point where I was being asked to do stranger and stranger things, things that had nothing to do with acting really, and I was also feeling the frustration of having no control over the outcome of my work," he explains. "Just before *Hatchet*, I made a movie about LSD [*Acid—delirio dei sensi*, 1968] and the director [Giuseppe Maria Scotese] wanted me to do a nude scene, wanted to paint my body red and shine strange lights on me, and make me look like an embryo in the womb . . . and I refused. I did the movie anyway, but it wasn't really something I wanted to tell my parents about. To this day, I haven't seen it.

ITALIAN *fotobusta collage featuring Stephen Forsyth, Dagmar Lassander, and Laura Betti.*

Hatchet was much better for me. Of all the films I did, it's the one people still talk about."

After the production ran out of money in Paris, *Il rosso segno della follia* had to be left unfinished until more money could be found. In the interim, Bava accepted an invitation to direct another picture, only completing the earlier film months later, after the intermediary project was completed and Manuel Caño had secured additional funding.

Two years later, Bava was still smarting from the experience of shooting at Franco's villa. "I'll never go back to Spain, I promise you!" he railed. "But the film is good; I'm rather pleased with it. It's the same old story about a madman, but I took great care in making it and photographed it meticulously."[5]

Lamberto Bava's feelings about the film are more ambivalent: "It's a very strange film, for which the leading man was all wrong, although he was a friend. The parts with Betti were good, but the screenplay was rather obvious."

Commentary

Actor and director Mel Welles, who knew Mario Bava in the 1960s and was responsible for directing the English dub tracks of several of his films, had a unique opinion of the director. "Bava was the least passionate filmmaker I ever met," he stated boldly. "By which I mean that he was, outwardly, quite stoic for an Italian. He was staid and reserved, not at all passionate. His earliest movie, *Black Sunday*, I never thought was very exceptional; it doesn't quite prepare you for the brilliance of some of the later movies like *Blood and Black Lace*. *Hatchet for the Honeymoon*, in particular, I felt was a wonderfully inventive picture that showed what marvelous things he could accomplish with rather ordinary material."

From its very beginning, *Il rosso segno della follia* declares itself as one of Mario Bava's most personal films. The declaration, however, is cagey because at this point in his career, Bava had yet to reveal anything of a personal nature to the press, leaving even his most attentive followers in the dark about the relevance of any aspect of his art to his own life. What better place for a shy man to bare his soul than in a low-budget horror film which no one would ever see, much less take seriously?

The film opens with an unusual animated title sequence, in which high contrast photos of Stephen Forsyth (John) and Guido Barlocci (John as a child) are projected onto ever-shifting patterns of blue and pink powders, which repeatedly erode and rebuild the images of the two players. Shown in concert with Sante Romitelli's main theme, though we know nothing as yet about the story to follow, the effect is immediately and woundingly nostalgic. A few years later, Bava reminisced in a rare interview about one of his earliest memories: sitting in the workshop of his father, Eugenio, and playing with heaps of two poisonous chemicals, hyposulfate and potassium cyanide. He was especially fond of assembling the white and ruby-red powders into parallel, alternating lines, which is precisely what happens





ITALIAN *fotobusta collage.*

under the opening titles of *Il rosso segno della follia*.

Bava's feelings of devotion to his father—only two years dead at the time—are palpable throughout the film, wherein the main character (and narrator) lives and works as an adult in the house where he spent his childhood, a place populated with fashion mannequins whose clothing celebrates virginity, a sanctified state not unlike that of the Saints which Eugenio sculpted. A sense of nostalgia is maintained throughout the film by clever visual rhymes, which reveal the previous scene to have been a reverie. The opening murder on the train cuts to a toy train riding its tracks under John's abstracted gaze, and his incineration of Alice cuts to Mildred shattering his daydream by yelling, "Don't you smell something burning?" and alerting him to the bread burning in the toaster on their breakfast table.

It is telling that the House of Harrington (which John inherited from his *mother*) is described in the dialogue as a once-failing business, which only became a success when our hero relinquished operative control to his wife Mildred. This recalls another of Bava's public comments, in which he confessed that he became a cameraman because he was a young man caught between two women telling him what to do with his life; his mother wanted him to continue working as his father's effects assistant at the Istituto LUCE, while his wife insisted that he cut his family ties and campaign to become an assistant to Massimo Terzano instead. (Of course, Mario's wife had her way, but he found ways of appeasing his mother and maintaining the professional connection with his father.) Bava's family and intimates attest that his marriage was rockiest during the late 1960s (which would have been mid-life crisis time for a man born in 1914), and John's testy exchanges with Mildred are not too far afield, one imagines, from the rapport he had at home with his wife. It was hardly a coincidence that Bava was showing a new willingness, during this period, to work away from home.

Throughout the movie, Bava employs a number of sly visual gags to indicate John as his alter ego, much as he had done with the camera-oriented crimes of Diabolik. At the breakfast table with Mildred, he taunts her by observing her towering aggression through a negative binocular lens—momentarily rendering her small and insignificant—until she snatches the lens away, regaining her command. Though he wants to strike her, he marshals his anger, storms into his office, and slaps a *photograph* of Mildred across the room.

As embodied by Stephen Forsyth, John Harrington is also very much the male equivalent of the mannequins he hoards in his private sanctum; he is handsome, cultivated, and fashionable, a character whose facade offers a visual *divertissement* from his sickly interior existence. Freud once wrote that the presence of statues in dreams may be indicative that one feels unloved; while we can discount such an analysis from the dreams of a man whose boyhood was attended by statues on a daily basis, it may have some relevance to the fictional madness of the fictional John Harrington. Though Bava rewrote the bulk of Santiago Moncada's script, he filmed (and included in the final assembly) scenes of John visiting a private menagerie of nude mannequins and kissing and fondling them behind locked doors, scenes which have nothing to do with the derangement his actions express elsewhere in the picture. Moments before Alice is introduced to his hatchet, a POV shot shows her mimicking the stiff pose of a mannequin. It is obvious from the following shot that this moment is meant to convey the way John sees her, not something she has actually done for his amusement. From these scenes, we can surmise that Moncada's original script may have been the simpler story of a deranged man who feels unloved, trapped in a self-fulfilling phobia of expressing himself emotionally to women made of flesh and blood.

This would also explain the unexplored nature of his impotence, which has turned Mildred into the morbid,

5 Luigi Cozzi, *Il cinema dei mostri* (Rome, Italy: Fanucci Editore, 1987), 249–60.

frustrated harridan she is. Such an interpretation makes fresh sense of the sequence in which Mildred surprises us by responding ecstatically to John's sexual overtures, which he interrupts by leaving the room and returning in a bridal veil with hatchet gleaming on a silver dining tray. As it plays in the film, John appears to have cruelly led Mildred on, to punish her permanently for returning unexpectedly early from her faked trip to visit her sister. If we accept the mannequin fetish as the original source of his dementia, John's wedding drag becomes a sincere accessory in his preparation for lovemaking. Furthermore, Mildred's reminiscence of their wedding night suggests that John feigned impotence in order to avoid having to reveal this fatal side of himself to the woman who saved the house his mother built.

Instead of being the story of a man compelled to destroy the women who "betray" him by marrying themselves off to other men, a chain of betrayals that began with his mother's marriage to her second husband, Bava's rewrite reconceives John's murder spree into the search for an image, an elusive image capable of telling him something about himself. "Men need different women for different reasons," John says at one point, and most of the women in *Il rosso segno della follia* are two-dimensional presentations—not because Bava is incapable of depicting women three-dimensionally, but because he resolutely pursues his protagonist's point of view. Even Laura Betti's portrayal of Mildred, while primarily an exception to this rule, succumbs to it in death. When Mildred's ghost materializes, it too occupies the screen in arch poses, her skin bathed in the otherness of blue light, her face framed in a black and glittering hooded shroud—*haute couture* from the Other Side. It took several viewings of the film before I understood why the image of Mildred's ghost is so jarring in its sudden appearances: her stiff body language, always posed, is the film's only confirmation of John's self-professed paranoia. She looks not as other people see her (as the film proposes on the surface), but *as John fears that other people see her.*

As John Harrington, Stephen Forsyth projects a similar two-dimensionalism, being the kind of "male model" actor so commonly employed in low-budget Eurohorror. In this case, he is well-cast because of his handsome facade **a**nd the introspective blankness of his performance, which is given depth by Bava's careful attention to psychological visual metaphors and philosophical narration. John's opening soliloquy—spoken as he freshens up for a work day, after murdering Rosy Miller and her new husband on a train:

> *My name is John Harrington. I am 30 years old. I am a paranoiac. "Paranoiac"—an enchanting word! And so full of possibilities! The fact is, I am completely mad; the realization of which annoyed me at first, but now is amusing to me. Quite amusing. Nobody suspects that I am a dangerous murderer—not Mildred my wife, or the employees of my fashion house, nor of course my customers. [John uses a napkin to rescue a fly from drowning in a glass of water, carries it around . . .] Poor little fly! Why are you so daring? You are so fragile, and yet you're born, you reproduce yourself, and then you die—like men. The difference is that you don't think, and you don't need to remember. You don't fear death because you ignore it. Your insignificant life is a mere biological accident, but death exists, I assure you. And that is what makes life a ridiculous and brief drama. [. . . and then he feeds the fly to his pet parrot!]*

There is some awkwardness in the English translation of this soliloquy, and in lines heard elsewhere in the film as well, but the balance of tongue-in-cheek humor, sincere empathy, and cruel irony embodied by this passage is remarkable in the context of an exploitative, drive-in level horror film. The use of an insect as an illustration



ITALIAN *fotobusta collage.*

of life's bittersweet irony further reveals Bava's personal investment in the screenplay, echoing the words of the sage entomologists he had recently created for *Nude . . . si muore*, and would create again in *Ecologia del delitto/Twitch of the Death Nerve*, or the scientist of human behavior who hosts *Four Times That Night*. What is most interesting about the film's eavesdroppings on John's inner voice is that they portray him as the film's sanest, most intelligent, and most rational character. Compare his soul-searching remarks to the clumsy probings of the inept Inspector Russell, or the brainless blather of Helen Wood, our supposed heroine:

> *"I'm an ordinary girl; I adore luxury, I'm terribly lazy, and I like to amuse myself doing crazy things."*
>
> *"Like?"*
>
> *"Well, I just turned 23 and I've had several lovers!"*

While the rest of the cast whirls around, pretending to be fascinating, or mopes over scraped toast, so embittered that their only joy is making life a hell for others, John embarks on a path to self-discovery, to make sense of his mad world and to recover his peace of mind. As he tells Inspector Russell, "A madman can also have good reasons."

Bava cleverly externalizes the proposal that murder can be beneficial (at least for John) by having him dispose of the bodies in the incinerator of an adjacent hothouse, where he uses the ashes to fertilize a bevy of gorgeous hybrid flowers. It is the very essence of Bava to transmute images of death into images of beauty, but the source of inspiration here is Charles Chaplin's *Monsieur Verdoux* (1947), Bava's favorite film by his favorite director. Bava slyly acknowledges his source after Alice's incineration by quoting the eerie shot of Verdoux' hothouse smokestack puffing a mistress' remains high into the sky. Actually, Bava takes the hothouse metaphor farther than Chaplin did, pursuing the metaphoric relevance in the hybrid flora John is raising in his overheated little outback. Inspector Russell, playing Petrikov to John's Raskolnikov, taunts Harrington about his blood-red blooms, claiming to be "attracted to everything that is an alteration of Nature—like the brain of a mental patient. Even that," he continues, "must be something like your hothouse—an oppressive atmosphere, with flowers that are strange, and the birds of crime fluttering about." If nothing else, Inspector Russell understands Bava's uses of *mise-en-scène!*

Despite the poetic, sensuous, and philosophical appeal of its dialogue, and the appalling germs of matricide and Oedipal longing which are eventually uncovered by the scenario, *Il rosso segno della follia* (as can be discerned by its original and export titles) finds Bava intent on introducing elements of humor to his work. With few exceptions like *La ragazza che sapeva troppo*, humor did not become a common element of Bava's work (even in comedies like *Le spie vengono dal semifreddo*) until the deaths of his parents seemed to teach him something about the essential, random absurdity of life. He seemed to summarize his warm feelings about his parents in the somber, reflective *I coltelli del vendicatore*, but his subsequent work—*Diabolik*, the script for *Nude . . . si muore*, *Four Times That Night*, *Il rosso segno della follia*, and nearly all of the films yet to come—contains passages or concepts that push in the direction of black comedy and bitter irony. It is in this movie that Bava's senses of humor and irony are most sharply honed, perhaps because the situations were so close to home, so close to him.

In the film's most talked-about scene, John returns home after an innocent evening with Helen and turns on the television, where he finds in progress a black-and-white presentation of *"I wurdalak"* episode of Bava's *I tre volti della paura.* He turns the TV off after noticing an upstairs light, which signals him that Mildred has



MILDRED*'s ghost predominates in this Italian fotobusta collage. Veronica Llimera as Betsy is seen at right.*



A COLLAGE *of editing room trimmings created especially for this book by Stephen Forsyth.*

returned home early, and goes upstairs—launching a sequence of events culminating in her murder. When Inspector Russell shows up, pounding on the front door as the dying Mildred screams for help, John lets him in and explains the screams by turning on the television—which is showing the scene of Rika Dialina, screaming and backing away as Boris Karloff hobbles menacingly toward her. It's a wonderful in-joke, this scene, but it has serious implications, as well. The fact that Bava would make such a reference to his own work indicates that his recent encounters with fans like Luigi Cozzi and Armando Valcauda had made him aware that a small but attentive and devoted audience existed for his films; the scene is a wink at the *cognoscenti*. On the other hand, by using a clip from one of his own films, Bava encourages the viewer to interpret John's murderous voyage toward self-discovery as a metaphor—for Bava's own creative odyssey, which keeps returning again and again to dark and violent subject matter, to work out something about himself. With this film, Bava not only acknowledges that his work has rated a devoted following, but admits that he really is using this unlikely medium to express and better understand himself.

Mildred's age is never given in the film, but she is clearly older than her husband's 30 years, being a former widow with considerable experience in business and life. All that we are told about the Harringtons' relationship is that it was never consummated, but the seance sequence—in which Dr. Kalleway (the author of Mildred's favorite book, *Mediums and Spiritism*) helps her to achieve *oltretomba* contact with her late husband (also named John)—hints at its true substance. As a roomful of rigid, mannequin-like spectators look on, Mildred talks sweetly to her dead mate, who responds friskily to her sustained interest. "Be a good boy," she reprimands him, and then, as his spirit threatens to disappear beyond the veil once again, she appeals to him, "John—*my baby!*" At this point, her living husband, greatly agitated, interrupts the seance. The scene's meaning is intriguingly faceted, because John might simply be embarrassed by this public display of his wife's affections for a dead man, but there is also a deeper meaning to his agitation—Mildred is speaking to her late husband in exact phrases that his own late mother surely once spoke to him, so he is at once responding to a fear that Mildred might be channeling the voice of his dead mother, and not wanting to admit that Mildred in many ways represents a maternal figure for him.

As these points illustrate, Bava's improvisations were able to invest Moncada's script with a flattering, additional complexity. Nevertheless, the film can also be confusing at times in its failure to completely eliminate the hobgoblins of *Juan's* obsessions from *John's*; the mannequin fetish of the original script, still touched upon in the film's first third, is dropped completely as we surge into the second act, just as Moncada's undercover heroine is neglected in the wake of Bava's decision to assert the formidable Mildred and her even more formidable ghost. Another element that doesn't seem to jibe with the final construction is John's botched attempt to murder Betsy, one of the spoiled rich habitués of his salon. For one thing, Betsy is no newlywed, but a kindred spirit who tells John, "If only the girls who deserved these dresses wore them"—meaning, if only *virgins* had white weddings—"you'd go bankrupt!"

Visually, the scene also looks unfinished, composed of shots of John's peering eyes spotlighted within a darkened recess, Betsy's poodle barking at his sensed intrusion, and Russell's men suddenly bursting in through the French doors, having anticipated an attack for no given reason.

Aside from any film's text, there is also a texture—and this aspect of *Il rosso segno della follia* is not nearly so accomplished. The budget did not permit Bava the luxury of bringing his usual camera team to Barcelona with him. In fact, so meager was the film's budget that Bava had to act as his own cameraman and operator for the first time since his postwar short films, using the most basic camera equipment; only during the film's Roman shooting did Antonio Rinaldi step in to operate for him. Bava shot a good deal of the film hand-held or with a simple, light tripod. When the schedule did not allow time to seting up individual close-ups and long-shots, Bava forged ahead by recklessly "editing" various scenes in the camera with the help of an overactive zoom lens. This necessitated more generalized lighting, which sometimes went against the grain of his known visual style. The film contains some pretty location photography, as well as a few classic Bavian images (e.g., John kissing the doll-like corpse of Alice as it lay on the bier of his incinerator, the sudden stiffening of Mildred's hands during the seance, the hallucinatory matricidal montages), but in general, the cinematography has an artless quality lacking the magic ingredient that characterizes Bava's cinematography at its best. It was the first film since the stylish *La ragazza che sapeva troppo* to carry Bava's name as Director of Photography, and he must have been aware—on some level—that its limitations could only detract from his former reputation as one of Italy's greatest cameramen.

Il rosso segno della follia is not generally regarded as one of Bava's outstanding films, but the autobiographical details necessary for its full appreciation have not been available till now. Once we become aware that Bava had grown up among statues (symbols of a family business, much like the gowned figures haunting John's salon), that his own personal empire (i.e., his marriage, his career) was in danger of crumbling at the time of production, that Laura Betti's support and encouragement were helping to re-enforce his self-image, and that even so innocuous a passage as the main title sequence is charged with a deeply personal meaning, *Il rosso segno della follia* acquires a confessional aura rarely encountered in the horror cinema. While hardly a masterpiece, it has all the personal relevance and revelation one seeks in a masterpiece.



ITALIAN *locandina, art by Ercole Brini.*

Distribution

Il rosso segno della follia waited nearly a year to be completed, but two years passed before Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer finally gave it a negligible release. No Italian critic of the period seems to have reviewed it, and to this day, it remains one of Bava's least-seen works in his native country. Italian press materials list an original running time of 93 minutes, which is possible considering that Luciano Pigozzi's supporting role as Vences is all but nonexistent in the 89-minute version that abounds, consisting of only one line spoken while he stands in long-shot. Then again, it is possible that Pigozzi's screen time suffered as Dagmar Lassander's did, after Laura Betti's participation pushed the story in different directions. Pigozzi himself remembers nothing particular about the filming.

Of curiosity value is the fact that early Italian publicity materials ascribed different names to the film's characters. Mildred Harrington was "Deborah Windsor" (allowing the salon to become "The House of Windsor"!), Helen was "Susan," and strangest of all, John Harrington was "Oliver Barrington"—also the name of the protagonist in Erich Segal's best-selling novella *Love Story*, which was filmed in 1970 with Ryan O'Neal in the role.

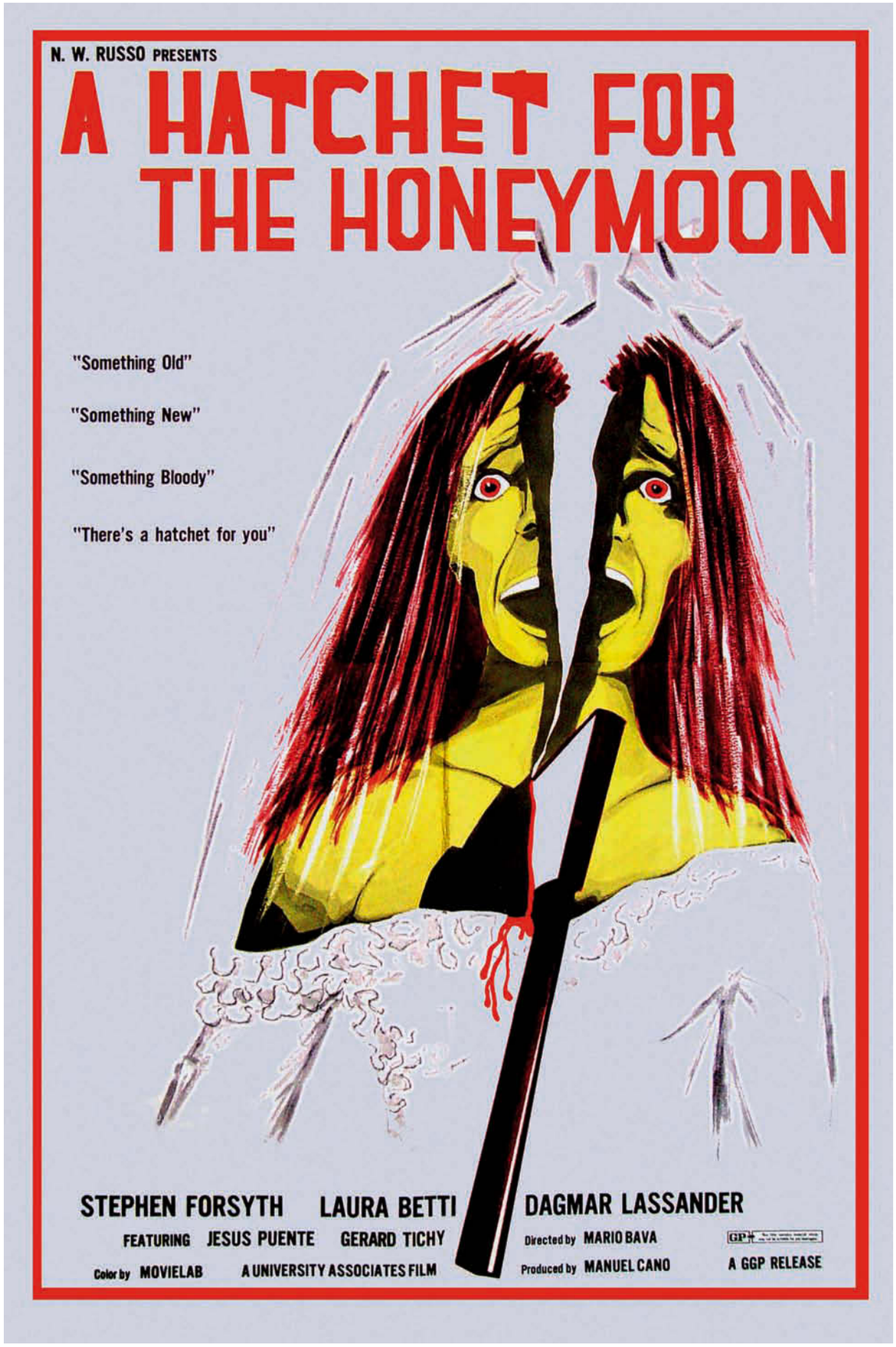
Il rosso segno della follia suffered from poor distribution in most international zones, though Manuel Caño's influence seems to have resulted in good distribution and advertising in Spain (where MGM's fine posters heralded Jesús Puente's name in bold letters). Though its story had been shoehorned into a *faux* Parisian setting, the film was never released in France, despite the fact that Bava's films had been consistently popular there since the release of *Le Masque du Démon* in 1960.

English-speaking countries were also slow in acquiring the film, as they would be with Bava's subsequent feature, *Four Times That Night*. Four years after *Il rosso segno della follia* was made, it was finally acquired for British distribution by Tigon, whose president Tony Tenser had co-produced Roman Polanski's *Repulsion* in 1965. (Perhaps Tenser was attracted

to Bava's fleeting homage to Polanski, in which a classroom photo is briefly glimpsed in John's private menagerie, showing his young face already shaded with dark abstraction.) It was distributed in Britain under the title *Blood Brides*, on the bottom half of a double-bill with *The Creeping Flesh*, starring Peter Cushing and Christopher Lee. It was reviewed for *Monthly Film Bulletin* by a condescending Robin Wood, who observed: "Mario Bava's claim to attention arises principally from the fact that, since he usually photographs as well as directs his films, they are very consciously conceived in terms of the potentialities of the camera and as a result are, in a somewhat crude sense, 'cinematic.' . . . The creation of elaborate effects through camera movement, stylized color, focus distortion and the use of varied lenses is, however, no guarantee of quality, and the effects in *Blood Brides* appear merely self-conscious and self-indulgent."[6] The UK release of the film was reported as having a length of 93 minutes, 5 minutes longer than the US release; it is not known if this count was inaccurate, or what the additional footage contains, if it indeed exists.

The following year, the film was picked up by a fledgling American distributor, GG Productions, whose one-sheet poster was an amateurish, crayon-scratched portrait of a green-faced bride with a V-shape cleaved out of her cranium. A second, superior, but unemptingly basic design of a clutching bloody hand replaced it, also without attracting many viewers. GGP sold its interests in the film one year later to Avco-Embassy Pictures, who immediately consigned it to a package of 16 mm films bound for television . . . where it seldom showed up.

Shortly after Avco-Embassy went bankrupt in 1982, *Hatchet for the Honeymoon* became unresistingly absorbed in the US public domain, where it became unauthorized fodder for numerous home video labels. Of the many releases, Media Home Entertainment's cassette was the best-looking, and the superb cover art delivered the campaign the film could have



US *one-sheet poster, unsigned—and deservedly so. Is it any wonder that audiences stayed away?*

sorely used when new. Released in the early 1980s, the box also carried a large, atypical boast: "Directed by Mario Bava."

Influence

Il rosso segno della follia stands out as one of Mario Bava's most unsettling yet compelling films. When its English version, *Hatchet for the Honeymoon*, was shown at the first Mario Bava retrospective in the United States, at San Francisco's Roxy Theater in 1992, it was the only film of the dozen shown that weekend which was not followed by a round of applause. This is a significant detail which, I believe, proves the film's achievement of its goals beyond doubt.

Unlike most of Bava's films, which candy-coat their horrors in harlequin colors or fairy tale fantasy, *Il rosso segno* is a tall, cold glass of bitters, best-suited for solitary sipping—just the way it depicts John Harrington settling down on his sofa to watch *I tre volti della paura* on television. One of Bava's darkest and most interior studies of human nature, it brings to light uneasy feelings and emotions which cannot be comfortably absorbed in the presence of other people. A longtime admirer of the film, I was surprised to find my enjoyment of the picture strangely inhibited in an auditorium full of strangers. (This may be the reason why the film was ultimately shown in so few theaters around the world.) To applaud such a film would seem as inappropriate as laughing along with it, though when viewed in a relaxed frame of mind, *Il rosso segno della follia* reveals itself as a monumentally comic deck of ironies. There is something suspect about an audience that *doesn't* see the humor of Mildred testily scraping the carbon from her hubby's burnt toast, or John calmly explaining to Inspector Russell—quite truthfully, as it turns out—that the screams he heard were coming from a Mario Bava movie.

While the best of Bava's earlier films were all readily influential to some degree, *Il rosso segno della follia* waited over thirty years for a film bearing its obvious influence to step forward. That film was *American Psycho* (2000), Mary Harron's inspired adaptation of Bret Easton Ellis' controversial novel. Ellis' book—which charts the deteriorating inner life of ruthless Wall Street yuppie Patrick Bateman, whose loathing for the world is expressed through random acts of murder that may (or may not) be imaginary—was rejected by its original publisher under the pressure of stockholders, editors, and the press, all of whom failed to see beyond its graphic descriptions of Bateman's serial killings to the layer of satire beneath.



SPANISH *handbill, which spoils the film's denouement in its depiction of young John (Guido Barlocchi) murdering his mother.*

American Psycho's resemblance to *Il rosso segno della follia* is immediately apparent in an introductory scene that shows Bateman engaged in his morning rituals, looking outwardly like an ideal of a handsome and successful young businessman, but who is revealed in voiceover to be a psychopath. Like John Harrington before him, Bateman introduces himself to the viewer while addressing his reflection in the bathroom mirror. There is even a reasonable resemblance between Christian Bale, who plays Bateman, and Stephen Forsyth.

The similarities do not end there. There is no shrewish wife, but Bateman is oppressed by the interminable wedding plans proposed by his fiancee (Reese Witherspoon), and like Harrington, he takes refuge in dating an employee (Chloe Sevigny) whom he ultimately turns away, for fear that he might hurt her if she remains with him. There is no ghost angle in *American Psycho*, but *Hatchet*'s playful approach to Harrington's haunting—is it real, or delusional?—is certainly reflected in Harron's handling of the film's murders, which may be factual or perhaps merely the poisonous daydreams of a stewing sociopath. Both films, too, eschew graphic violence (unlike Ellis' novel), which prevents the audience from becoming too appalled at the hero's actions and turning against him. The similarity between the two films becomes complete in *American Psycho*'s final scene, in which Bateman admits that he is unable to learn more about himself through his acts of murder because he is an empty shell; there's nothing inside to discover. Nowhere else in the film does Bateman mention an agenda of self-discovery behind his murders, so this concluding voiceover has the impact of a dialogue addressed from Harron's film to Bava's film, in which homicide is explicitly depicted as a journey toward illumination.

But the most lasting and pervasive influence of *Il rosso segno della follia* on cinema in general lies in the visual conceit of having John's actions observed, from the sidelines, by the reproachful image of the child he once was. Bava's film was the first to stage such a scene, and in the intervening years, it has been restaged countless times. To take one example: in a 2002 second season episode of the HBO series *Six Feet Under*, the sexually addicted character of Brenda Chenowith (Rachel Griffiths) is shown staring across the room while mechanically engaging in three-way sex with two young men, and seeing her actions watched and judged by her childhood self. Psychologically resonant scenes like this prove that *Il rosso segno della follia* has succeeded well above its intended station, in time introducing an entirely new and profound phraseology of emotional dislocation into the language of cinema.

6 Robin Wood, *"Un Hacha para la Luna de Miel (Blood Brides)"* review, *Monthly Film Bulletin*, 1973, 29.





PROMOTIONAL *color collage featuring Brett Halsey and Daniela Giordano in FOUR TIMES THAT NIGHT.*

Four Times That Night

MADE DURING the interruption in the shooting of *Il rosso segno della follia* was *Four Times That Night,* Bava's only foray into that salacious staple of Italian cinema—the sex comedy. The English title is proper, since the film was scripted in English and funded by North American producers.

Primary among these was Dick Randall, a rotund, cigar-smoking, Canadian expatriate who had been co-producing nudie films in France and Italy for America's burgeoning "Adults Only" audience since the early 1960s. Among his first films were *Shangri-La* (1961), *Paris Ooh-La-La* (1963), and *Primitive Love* (1964), which had starred Jayne Mansfield and Bava's *Goldfoot* cohorts Franco and Ciccio. Born in Ontario on August 14, 1925, Randall sometimes wrote and played cameo roles in his films, and he also occasionally worked under the aliases Robert Randall and Claudio Rainis, the latter (presumably a reference to the star of *The Invisible Man)* used for his production credits on Italian films.

After *Four Times That Night,* Randall briefly experimented with producing hardcore sex films like *Gola profonda nera/Black Deep Throat* (1976), starring the black transsexual actress Ajita Wilson, but returned to standard drive-in exploitation fare like Juan Piquer Simon's *Mil Gritos Tiene la Noche/Pieces* (1981) and *Los Nuevos Extraterrestres* (1983), which he had the nerve to film under the title *The Return of E.T.* He died in London on May 14, 1996, the victim of a stroke, at age 70.

The star of *Four Times That Night,* American actor Brett Halsey, offers a hesitant but candid appraisal of Randall: "He was a strange kind of guy. It's hard to talk about Dick because he . . . You wouldn't invite him home to a dinner with your mother! [He was] kind of crude. He plays the character of the *portiere* in the film, and he was playing himself, really. You couldn't have pegged Dick any better than he did himself. He was one of those *likeable* perverts. A rascal—that's a good word for him. He played pretty fast and loose, but he pulled the picture together somehow."

Randall had a New York-based partner, David B. Putnam (not to be confused with David Puttnam, the Oscar-winning producer of *Chariots of Fire*), who was financing Randall in exchange for the film's US and Canadian rights. Putnam was the son of George Putnam, the publishing giant who had married Amelia Earhart. According to Halsey, Putnam "raised the money to make the picture—I don't know what the figure was—but he then hired a supervising producer in Rome." This was Zelyko Kunkera, a Yugoslav who had previously co-produced Sid Pink's *The Tall Women* (1966, with Anne Baxter) and Giuliano Montaldo's heist picture *Ad ogni costo* (1968, with Janet Leigh and Klaus Kinski). Halsey continues: "What happened was, Kunkera had made a couple of films earlier that hadn't done so well, so he took the money he got from Putnam to pay the bills on his own films. So when the time came to start shooting *Four Times That Night*, there was no money. Randall had to go out and find other money, a bare minimum just to get it going." [1]

To ensure a more vigilant protection of his financial interests, Putnam assigned a business partner to assist the production in Rome—a man who would become the most significant player in the remaining years of Bava's story. Alfredo Leone was born on November 30, 1926, in Brooklyn, New York. After amassing his initial fortune in real estate, Leone entered show business in 1956, producing a short-lived New York television show called *Address the Nation.* Filmed in 16 mm, the show was put together by a group of inexperienced tyros whom Leone had hired in good faith. "I began to see the error of my ways when I saw the editor cutting his filmstrips with his bare hands!" Leone chuckles. "'Is that the way you do it?' I asked. 'Yeah,' the guy told me. We did the first two shows like that and they were disastrous. The film jittered and jumped all over the place. So I fired those guys and hired some professionals to come in and do the job right. I did three



MEETING *cute, Bava-style: John (Brett Halsey) falls at the feet of Tina (Daniela Giordano), injuring his back.*

Four Times That Night

Working title: *Una notte fatta di bugie,* "A Night Made of Lies"
Filmed at Dinocittà and on location in Rome
October 14 – December 14, 1968
First released: December 3, 1971 (Montreal, Canada)
Eastmancolor, 1.85:1, 81 minutes

Production: Delfio Film (Rome) and Hape Film Gmbh & Co. (Munich). Producers: Zelyko Kunkera and Claudio Rainis [Dick Randall]. Executive producer: Alfred Leone [Alfredo Leone]. Director: Mario Bava. Assistant directors: Lamberto Bava, Claudio Rainis [Dick Randall]. Screenplay: Mario Moroni, Carl Ross. Additional dialogue: Guido Leoni. Continuity: Rosalba Scavia. Director of photography: Antonio Rinaldi. Camera operator: Salvatore Caruso. Camera assistant: Carlo Tofani, Enrico Lucidi. Art direction: Andrea Crisanti. Set decoration: Romeo Constantini. Wardrobe: Annamode, Blanda. Makeup: Massimo De Rossi. Hairdresser: Lidia Puglia. Production manager: Virgilio Muzio. Editor: Otello Colangeli. Music: Lallo Gori. Distributor: Alexia Cinematografica. Distributor: Alexia Cinematografica.

Additional US credits: Producer: Dick Randall. Associate producer: David B. Putnam. Screenplay: Mario Bava and Gene Luotto, story by Charles Ross. Assistant director: Michael Leone.

Daniela Giordano (Tina Bryant), Brett Halsey (Gianni Prada/John Price), Pascale Petit (Esmeralda), Dick Randall (porter), Brigitte Skay (model), Michael Hinz [Robert Oliver] (Giorgio/George), Rainer Basedow (Lorenzo), Valeria Sabel (Tina's mother), Huguette Verton, Sante Lucerlini, Marina Cavorgna, Calisto Calisti.

Canada: *Four Times That Night*
France: *Une Nuit Mouvementée,* "An Eventful Night," TV only
Germany: *Vier Mal heute Nacht,* "Four Times Tonight"
Italy: *Quante volte . . . quella notte,* "How Often . . . That Night," 7/15/72
US: *Four Times That Night,* Cinevision Films Ltd., 7/15/72, 83m

shows this way and they went over brilliantly. I had *TV Guide* and all the other magazines praising me and the show, recommending that I enter the picture business, so I did."

Leone formed Paradise Productions in 1959, after acquiring the screen rights to a novel called *Women's Barracks* by Teresa Torres. His longtime friend Eddie Bracken agreed to star in the film, which was to be produced in Rome, and Leone hired novelist Harold Robbins to write the script. ("Worst thing you ever read," Leone laughs.) Robbins was paid a kill fee of $2,500, which he used to support the writing of his breakthrough best-seller *The Carpetbaggers* (1961). The second draft was undertaken by the blacklisted Hollywood screenwriter Waldo Salt, but the film was never made. Nevertheless, Leone had made the necessary transition from television to film. Over the next several years, Leone and various partners formed a number of different production companies—B&L and EuroAmerican, among them—through which he co-produced an estimated thirty films.

"David Putnam was my partner; we were involved in other ventures together," Leone explains. "One day, he got a telegram from Randall over in Rome requesting more funds, at which point Putnam requested that I go over and bail them out. I didn't especially want to get involved, but he pressed me. So I went to Rome and looked at some dailies, amounting to maybe eight minutes of film, if that much. I called Putnam and suggested that he walk away and take the loss, but he refused to do that. Instead, he coaxed me into taking over the production."

After screening those eight minutes of footage, Leone met Mario Bava for the first time. He remembers that Bava seemed to him "very kind, very gentle, quiet, unpretentious." Being unfamiliar at this time with Bava's past achievements, he had no idea of his longevity in the Italian film industry, or the professional sacrifices he was making to retain complete creative control of his work. Bava's recent track record was hardly prestigious: *I coltelli del vendicatore* had been tantamount to cleaning up another director's mess, he had not been paid for directing *Operazione paura*, the *Dr. Goldfoot and the Girl Bombs* debacle had soured his once prosperous relationship with American International Pictures, *Diabolik* had been a disagreeable experience, and now even a cheap Spanish side-job like *Il rosso segno della follia* seemed impossible to finish. With *Four Times That Night*, the *Maestro del colore* found himself, not too comfortably, at the helm of what he called "a blue movie."

"I agreed to do it because, at that time in Italy, if you turned down the offer to direct an erotic film, people assumed you were a homosexual," Bava later joked. [2]

In 1967, the "Adults Only" genre was even less reputable than horror; it no longer had the voyeuristic novelty of skin flicks in the late '50s and early '60s, and it had not yet been accepted into the framework of mainstream filmmaking, *Midnight Cowboy* and *The Killing of Sister George* being still a couple of years away. But a metamorphosis was definitely taking place. The kinds of pictures that Dick Randall had made in the past—feature-length peep shows given a wonky touch of "class" by being set in Paris or Rome—were being replaced with a more sophisticated form of adult entertainment, spearheaded by an American triple-threat man named Radley Metzger. Having successfully distributed some titillating French features (e.g., *The Dirty Girls, Daniella By Night*) in America through his company Audubon Films, Metzger had responded to a dearth of suitable product by producing and directing his own features in Europe. Bearing such provocative titles as *The Alley Cats* and *Carmen Baby*, Metzger's productions differed from their competition in taking the subject of human sexuality seriously, and conveying eroticism with at least a modicum of style—unlike the Dick Randall pictures, which were basically about getting an eyeful.

Randall's old-fashioned, "dirty old man" approach was no longer cutting it at the boxoffice in 1967, so *Four Times That Night* may have been conceived as a deliberate attempt to move in a more timely, mature, pseudo-arty direction. The picture was rationalized, to some extent, by invited comparisons to an acknowledged masterpiece of cinema, Akira Kurosawa's *Rashomon* (1950), which presented the story of a rape/murder in medieval Japan from four different perspectives—that of the rapist, the raped woman, an observer, and the woman's

JOHN *takes Tina back to his apartment building, where producer Dick Randall minds the gate.*



1 Surprisingly, this matter did nothing to queer the business relationship between Randall and Kunkera, who together subsequently financed Jean Brismée's French/Belgian/Italian co-production *La notte piu lunga del diavolo/The Devil's Nightmare* (1971).

2 Ornella Volta, "Conversation avec Mario Bava," *Positif* 138, May 1972, 44–48.

dead husband as reached through a medium. As Bava reasoned, "It was based on the principle of *Rashomon*—one night spent by two couples, as viewed from the perspective of each of the partners. For once, the abundance of sex had a logical justification."[3]

Bava now found himself working with proto-pornographers like Dick Randall, but if he had fallen on hard times, so had the Dinocittà studio where he had filmed *Diabolik* not long before. The studio launched as a proud offensive against the tradition of Cinecittà was now mostly abandoned, a shell of its former self. The "blue movie" Bava was making there in early winter could have turned blue from the freezing cold: he and his cast shot the entire picture in an abandoned, cavernous hangar without heat, electricity, or running water.



TOASTING *their first date, John and Tina are doomed to see things differently.*

Synopsis

While cruising through the park in his sportscar, male model John Price's roving eye is captivated by the sight of Tina Bryant bending over. He makes a pass, which she ignores, continuing to walk her black poodle—who has the unlikely name of "Coolie" (or in the English version, "Cool Rump"). John's wolfish persistence alarms her, and she takes refuge behind a shrub, where he finds her—seconds before tripping over her dog. This breaks the ice, and the couple set a date for that evening.

John goes to Tina's apartment to pick her up and meets her mother, a somber, strictly Catholic, middle-aged woman in widow's weeds, who explains that Tina may seem outgoing, but is actually a young woman of strong moral principles. John assures her that he has similar convictions; he respects her daughter, and he promises to get her back home by a reasonable time. Tina emerges from her room wearing an expensive blue mini-dress. They go to a discotheque and dance, but John's single-minded concentration on her body makes Tina uncomfortable and she soon asks to be taken home. Leaving the club, they pass three of John's male friends, who speculate, "Where does he meet these broads? And where does he take them?"

When Tina returns home, it is 3:30 in the morning, and her dress is torn at the front. She blurts out to her mother that John tried to rape her, and offers the following story, seen in flashback:

On the way home from the club, John invited Tina back to his apartment, explaining that he was expecting an important business call. She resisted, preferring to wait in the courtyard, but a brief encounter with two gay neighbors—George (called Georgette) and Esmerelda (called Jean-Pierre)—frightened the timid virgin, who preferred to take her chances inside. John's apartment turned out to be the ultimate swinger's pad, with a literal swing hanging from the middle of the living room ceiling. After finishing his call, John went into his bedroom ostensibly to get a sweater, but he emerged wearing only his briefs—and attacked Tina. ("We're at the boiling point! Let's crystallize!") She scratched his forehead in self-defense, freed herself from his embrace and barricaded herself in his bedroom, eventually locking him inside instead, and escaping with her maidenhead intact.

Meanwhile, John has returned to the club, where his friends' curiosity about the scratch on his forehead prompts his own narrative interpretation of the evening's events. According to John, Tina was all over him, a real man-eater, and all too willing to go back to his apartment. She seduced him on the living room couch, again in the shower, and again in his bedroom. (He: "What an insatiable, oversexed piece of libidinous tail!" She: "What a big, beautiful, timid blob of masculine protoplasm!") John is exhausted and not up to a fourth tryst, and his forehead is scratched as he tries to get away from her amorous stroking of his hair. He is saved from her by the unexpected arrival of George and Esmerelda.

A third version of the evening's events is offered in conversation between a milkman and the sex-crazed doorman of John's apartment building (whose private sanctum is a shrine to old Playboy clippings, with October 1966 Playmate Dianne Chandler centrally displayed). According to the doorman—a voyeur who watched the evening unfold from a rooftop vantage, through the living room window—John is actually gay, and he invited Tina to his apartment with the intention of providing company for Esmerelda while he and George were otherwise occupied in his bedroom. (Within the context of this story, Esmerelda tells Tina the story of how she met John, years earlier, at a discotheque called the Club Kama Sutra . . . which turns out to be the story of how she tricked a German girl into posing for nude pictures.) Tina does not believe her story about John's homosexuality, so Esmerelda invites her to peek at him and "Georgette" in the bedroom. ("One man is ugly," she remarks, "but two are absolutely repulsive.") As the disillusioned Tina weeps inconsolably, Esmerelda drugs her drink and takes advantage of her unconscious body. When she wakes,



THIS *passionate clinch must be a promotional still, as it doesn't reflect any of the four versions of John and Tina's date depicted in FOUR TIMES THAT NIGHT.*

naked and seduced, she screams and races for her discarded dress, which John tries to withhold from her, tearing it. She scratches him as he tries to hold her down on the floor, vulnerable to Esmerelda's next advances.

At this point, a nameless, professorial narrator appears, showing a split-screen display of the three different accounts and asking the viewer "Who is the liar?"

With this question in mind, another version of Tina and John's date is unreeled . . .

After making friendly contact in the park, they had a very nice, very ordinary date. John took Tina to his apartment, but the door was kept open at all times. Unfortunately, the gate in the courtyard of John's apartment building has a stuck lock, and the doorman does not respond to their buzzes for assistance. John suggested that Tina try climbing over the fence, with him following. She tried but fell, tearing her dress on the ironwork and scratching his forehead as he gallantly attempted to catch her. They decided to wait on a bench in the garden until someone showed up to let them out. When George and Esmerelda arrived, ringing for admittance, this time the doorman responded, and John and Tina drove away.

At this point, the narrator reaches gigantically into frame and lifts the tiny sportscar into his hands.

"Do you believe it?" he asks. "Do you believe that things went exactly that way?" He returns the car to the road, and it speeds off toward the rising sun. "And despite the tainted figment of our imaginations," he adds conclusively, "they watched the sun rise on a very bright day."

The script of *Four Times That Night* is credited to Mario Moroni and Charles Ross. Of the two, Ross is the more probable instigator, since both lead actors remember working from a script in English. Ross had been a writer on earlier Dick Randall productions, including *The Sexperts* (1965) and *The Wild, Wild World of Jayne Mansfield* (1968).

Mario Moroni was more likely brought in during post-production to write the Italian version's dialogue, which is extremely witty and elevates the picture to a superior level of entertainment. Moroni's first screen credit was as co-author (with Alberto Albani Barbieri) on *Anna perdonami* ("Forgive Me, Anna," 1953), starring Aldo Fiorelli and Tamara Lees. Moroni seems to have written scripts only for the director of that film, Tanio Boccia, emerging again in 1964 to script two Kirk Morris *pepla, La valle dell'eco tonante/Hercules of the Desert* (actually a Maciste film) and *Il dominatore del deserto*, which Boccia directed under the pseudonym Amerigo Anton. After *Four Times That Night*, in 1971, Moroni would direct one of his own scripts, *Il mio nome è Mallory . . . M come Morte* ("My Name is Mallory . . . M as in Morte [Death]").

The preceding synopsis follows the American version of the film, which seems most appropriate, as *Four Times That Night* was produced with American funds and acted entirely in English. Unfortunately, the American version is not very good; Tina's sultry allure is completely sabotaged by a ridiculous, inappropriate Southern American accent, and the dialogue conveys a leering, sophomoric attitude toward sex and a paranoid, provincial view of homosexuality. In contrast, the Italian version—which is now, happily, the standard, thanks to a DVD release from Image Entertainment—comes off as a sly, quick-witted, philosophic comedy of manners.

The Italian version is also slightly longer than the English re-edit. The additional footage consists of a longer animated title sequence; a longer edit of the sequence of Tina's first wait in the darkened courtyard, that focuses more on her increasing sense of insecurity; and an extended finale. There is also more footage of the professorial narrator, who precedes the final scene with a mini-lecture on the slippery, subjective nature of human perception and the mercurial nature of "the truth." He illustrates his point with cartoon portraits of three veterans of the Biblical deluge: Noah's wife, the bird with the olive branch, and a giraffe—each of whom (in voiceover) remember this singular event in markedly different ways. He then proceeds to show photographs of John, Tina and the doorman, recounting their various points of disagreement. When he replaces the sportscar on the road, it rolls in reverse, and we are treated to a bizarre "comic" replay of various shots in reverse, high speed, and still frame. The point being, no matter how much we analyze what someone has said, or from how many angles we study an event, we can never know the whole truth about anything, because—although we are the same species—we are all coming from, going

3 Ibid.


Amber for ever

to, and living in, different places, which result in different subjective moods, perceptions, and perspectives. As we see the concluding shot of John's car driving toward the horizon one last time, the professor asks if we really believe that John took Tina straight home—and then he reveals that, on the contrary, he took her to the sea where they watched the sun rise together, while everyone else had an ordinary day.

The significance of this lecture—which, alas, the professor himself fails to express—is that love not only bends the way we perceive our world and ourselves, but it is the only factor capable of bringing our hopelessly divided and disagreeable species to a perfect oneness of mind and heart.

Cast

Cast as the story's male lead was American actor Brett Halsey, born Charles Oliver Hand in Santa Ana, California, on June 20, 1933. After a stint in the US Navy, he worked briefly as a disc jockey before turning to acting, and he spent his earliest acting days as a latter-day contract player at Universal. He took the name Halsey, legally, from his great uncle Admiral Halsey, one of the leading Naval officers of WWII. And "Brett seemed to go well with it," he explains.[4] His Universal days were spent in thankless bit parts in B-pictures, the only one of real historical interest being Jack Arnold's *Revenge of the Creature* (1955), in which he plays a teenager killed by the Gill Man. When his Universal contract expired, Halsey spent five years as a freelance actor, and then was placed under contract at 20th Century-Fox for three years. One of his first starring roles was in *Return of the Fly* (1959), opposite Vincent Price—with whom he worked again in 1963's *Twice Told Tales*. In the early 1960s, Halsey made his first professional trips to Italy to star in two historical swashbucklers for Riccardo Freda, *Le sette spade del vendicatore* (1962, on the set of which he met Bava, who was directing the lighting of some scenes) and *Il magnifico avventuriero/The Magnificent Adventurer* (1963).

"While I was making *Twice Told Tales*, I got an offer to go back to Italy and do four films," Halsey recalls. "I went over, after the four films it became five and six, and the next thing, it had been *years* and I'd become an Italian actor! I lived in a condominium sort of thing, the top two floors of this condominium in the Pina Clara section. They used to call it 'the American ghetto' because there were so many Americans living there."[5]

The former husband of Italian actress Luciana Paluzzi, Halsey was married at the time to German actress Heidi Bruhl. He worked in a number of different Italian film genres during the 1960s, notably spy pictures (*Operazione Polifemo/Spy in Your Eye*) and Spaghetti Westerns (*Uccidete Johnny Ringo/Kill Johnny Ringo*), and actually launched a second career earlier in 1968 when he consented to star in Tonino Cervi's Western *Oggi a me, domani a te/Today We Kill . . . Tomorrow We Die!*, scripted by Dario Argento—a picture Halsey did "only for the money"—under the pseudonym "Montgomery Ford." *Four Times That Night* was Halsey's first erotically themed picture, and he explains his reasons for accepting it: "I liked the script. I've always liked comedies. It was obvious that it was a sex comedy, but a mild sex comedy. It had an erotic premise, I'll grant you, but there really wasn't anything to it that would even qualify as softcore."

When the picture went into preproduction as *Una notte fatta di bugie*, different trade ads announced that the female lead would be played by either Jacqueline Sassard (*Accident*) or Brett Halsey's ex-wife Luciana Paluzzi (*Thunderball*). The woman finally cast opposite Halsey was Daniela Giordano, born in Palermo in November 1947, who became a celebrity after winning the Miss Italy competition of 1966. She was only the second Miss Italy to launch a successful acting career; Lucia Bosé had been the winner of the 1947 contest—with Gina Lollobrigida and Gianna Maria Canale among her runner-ups. (Though she was a contestant in the 1950 competition, Sophia Loren—then Sofia Scicolone—won only the honorary title of "Miss Elegance.")

"The qualities needed to win the contest aren't necessarily relevant to the ones you need to pursue a movie career," Giordano observes. "Due to the fact that I had bad quarrels with the director and owner of the contest, in the official history of the contest, it says and I quote, 'she did only very few things in the movie business.' Every year, on the occasion of the contest, I read the same thing in the newspapers! This has been a way which the director of the contest—who is still alive, and now almost 80 years old—took revenge for my disgraceful behavior. From his point of view, he gave me the chance to become rich and famous. Thus, everything he suggested should have been accepted with extreme gratitude, but I was not that kind of girl. I wasn't interested in spending time with the 'right' people—who I found old and boring; I preferred to escape from these 'duties' by hanging out with some not very important young men of my own age. The point was, I was not prepared in my soul to be obligated. For me, the contest was only a new happening. I came from a good family and never had problems with money (my father worked in the Bank of Italy), so I couldn't understand why I should do things I didn't like or have to accept reproaches from anyone." Because Giordano spoke English, she also became the first Miss Italy to be invited to meet the President of the United States. Making a Columbus Day trip to the United States, she met President Lyndon Baines Johnson, as well as New York State Governor Nelson Rockefeller and New York City Mayor John Lindsey. Her indomitable spirit inspired her nickname, "The Wild Girl From Palermo," an epithet she enjoyed.

"When I did this movie," Giordano confesses, "I was 23 or 24 years old. In my mind, I lived on an other planet—I mean, I lived outside the movie business, so I had never heard the name of Mario Bava before. When my agent talked to me about him the first time, he said, with a little grimace, that Mario Bava was a director who often worked on horror subjects. My agent's face was not particularly happy, as it usually was when he had a good offer. I was at a strange point in my career. I still had a certain popularity from the beauty contest; the public knew that I was an actress, because my photos were often in newspapers and magazines; but, for some reason or other, my films had not been so popular. So my agent was worried, because it would have been dangerous for my name to be attached to a big flop. But he added that Bava was a very good cameraman, and so, in any case, to do a film with him could not damage me.

"When I met Mario Bava and Dick Randall for the first time," she continues, "they were excited about this new film. They told me it was something very new—the famous Japanese film *Rashomon*, retold in modern terms. (I didn't tell them I had never heard of this film before in my life; I just said, 'Ah, fantastic!') They gave me the script. I read it and I was still doubtful. But I was 24 years old, at the beginning of my career, and my agent told me that Mario Bava was a well-known director. Also, I had the main part, and above all, the movie was going to be shot at the De Laurentiis Studios, which at that time was almost a guarantee of success. Many, many years later, I finally saw *Rashomon*, an old film in black-and-white. Though I didn't like it very much—it's kind of boring—I could understand why it was considered a masterpiece of international cinema. Of course, it has nothing to do with *Four Times That Night*, except for the schematic of the narrative."

Valeria Sabel, who gives the film's outstanding performance as various versions of Tina's mother, was the wife of Virgilio Sabel—the documentary filmmaker who had collaborated with Bava on the animated short *Una lezione di geometria* in 1948. Valeria had previously appeared in Sergio

◀ **"ONLY** *you for ever"*
The only inscribed photograph of Mario Bava known to exist, from the collection of actor Brett Halsey.

4 Brett Halsey, as quoted in Mike Ferguson and Steve Fentone's interview conducted October 9, 1993, in "Roy Colt Shoots His Mouth Off," *European Trash Cinema* 12, July 1995, 12–20.

5 Ibid.

Corbucci's Western *Navajo Joe* (1966) with Burt Reynolds. She would work again with Bava on the Alfredo Leone-produced *Baron Blood* in 1972, playing the wife of Massimo Girotti. Still active in films and television, her most visible role was as Sister Vincenza in Francis Ford Coppola's *The Godfather, Part III* (1990).

French actress Pascal Petit (b. 1938), who plays Esmeralda, made her feature debut in Raymond Rouleau's film *Les Sorcières du Salem*, a prestigious 1957 adaptation of Arthur Miller's play *The Crucible* scripted by Jean-Paul Sartre, in which she played opposite Simone Signoret and Yves Montand, as well as future Bava alumni Michel Piccoli and Mylène Demongeot. After making French films for such directors as Marcel Carné, Henri Verneuil, and Michel Boisrond, she moved into French-Italian co-productions and Italian features circa 1961, and German films circa 1966, including two of the "Sexy Susan" series featuring Terry Torday. After *Four Times That Night,* most of Petit's work was in television.

Cast as the naïve young German girl whom Petit persuades to pose nude for her camera at the Club Kama Sutra was Brigitte Skay (pronounced "Bri-ghee-ta Sky"). She was born Brigitte Johanna Riedle in Mannheim, Germany on July 18, 1944, and became an actress in 1967 with the successful *Unruhige Töchter/ Sexy Baby*, directed by Hansjörg Amon. *Four Times That Night* was her third film, made when she was under contract to 3 Star Films, a company owned by Brad Harris, Ralph Zucker, and Walter Bigari. Skay has conflicted memories about the filming, but very fond memories of Mario Bava.

"He was a beautiful man, a gentleman director," Skay enthuses. "He was always very polite and very nice to me. There was some difficulty in communicating, because I could speak only German and a little English. Mario did not like to see me naked. When we were shooting *Four Times That Night,* it was Dick Randall who told me to take my clothes off for the camera. Dick was a very strange man. He was always making strange deals, and asking me to make calls to people for him. He also told people that I was his fiancee." Skay would work once again for Bava, playing the important secondary role of the skinny-dipping girl who runs afoul of one of the many murderers in *Ecologia del delitto/ Twitch of the Death Nerve*.

The role of the homosexual character George/Georgette—or, in Italian, Giorgio/Giorgia—is credited as being played by German actor Michael Hinz, who has a screen career reaching back to the late 1950s. But, according to Brett Halsey, the role was in fact played by Robert H. Oliver, an associate of Dick Randall who later directed the horror film *Il castello della paura/Dr. Frankenstein's Castle of Freaks* (1973, a Randall production) and is sometimes listed in genre reference books as "Roberto Olivieri."

"He wouldn't allow his name to be used on the picture, but I knew him as Bob Oliver," Halsey clarifies. "I think his grandfather's name may have been Olivieri, because he was of Italian origin, but Bob was an American and his father was American. I knew them both very, very well. Before *Four Times That Night,* we had worked on a couple of other pictures together. He later became a master of dubbing and had a dubbing company in Germany that became very successful. But that's how I heard about all the behind-the-scenes trouble that was going on—because Bob told me. If you were to look at Bava on the set, you never would have known there was a problem. *Four Times That Night* was a doomed project; if it hadn't been for Bava, it never would have got made."

"Bava *would* get stressed, I suppose," Halsey told Tom Weaver in a separate interview, "but he was very good at handling it. He was the type of director who was 'captain of his ship.' If the ship was going down, he was there at the wheel and trying to keep everything going. You wouldn't know if Bava was stressed or not . . . To Randall's credit, he did scrounge up enough money to make the picture, but we didn't have the money that we really *needed.* There were short cuts taken, and we were doing this picture not knowing that we were ever going to be able to finish it. There was a constant cloud of, 'Well, are we gonna come to work tomorrow or not?' Well, we did make the picture, and I saw it recently; it looks all right. You wouldn't know that we had the problems that we did."[6]



ARTFUL *compositions were required to convey the illusion of nudity in Bava's remarkably coy "blue movie."*

Production

Four Times That Night was produced on a very low budget—certainly under $150,000. It was so cheap, in fact, that some of the sets resorted

to inflatable furniture and even more illusory furnishings, and the actors were obliged to wear their own clothing in the picture. Brett Halsey commends Bava for his ability to divert the cast's attention from the precarious state of production.

"If I hadn't known about it 'from the inside,'" he says, "I never would have known. [Bava] was always in a good mood, regardless of what was going on. He had a very good rapport with his actors. He let me do a lot of what I wanted to do myself, but his talent as a director may have been in subtly inspiring me to do what he wanted me to do in the first place—and simply! He wasn't an intellectual director; he was just a nice man. Being directed by Bava was kind of like having your father talk to you, or something. He kept everything very light on the set, there was always a good mood, a lot of joking. But things kept getting cheaper and cheaper as we went along. Working at Dinocittà was horrible. There was no heat, and we shot in the winter. It was cold as hell."

For this reason, Halsey remembers the shower scene as being extremely uncomfortable to film: "It was a real problem. They had no hot water in that studio. Actually, there was no power—on every stage, they had to bring in a generator from outside. The water was a problem, too, because for the shower scene, they had to have hot and cold water, because it was really cold in that great big, cavernous, concrete warehouse building with no heat. The problem with the shower was that the controls for the hot and cold water were about, oh, thirty feet away from the shower! So before you could get the proper temperature adjustment, the water had to travel through this long pipe. It took a lot of time, and it was a bit uncomfortable in there! First, the water would be cold and we'd be standing in there freezing, and then they would keep adding the hot water long after it was sufficient, so by the end of the scene it might be scalding hot!"

Daniela Giordano has her own recollections of the meager amenities at the dying studio: "My dressing room facilities consisted of a normal room, but because it was so far from the set—it took a lot of time to go there and to came back—I moved to the first room with a door I could find. The place where the actors got together and talked was the makeup room, and because of this, the makeup men were always angry. As for meals, I don't think we ever went to the studio commissary. We were given a '*cestino*' (box lunch) with a dish of spaghetti, a second dish of meat and potatoes, along with some salad and fruit. Usually, we would be given a *cestino* only when we were filming exteriors, but on this occasion, I think we had them in the studio as well. I remember the De Laurentiis Studios being strangely deserted during this period."

Indeed they were. The Italian production boom which had commenced in the mid-1950s had drawn to a close by the late 1960s. In the early 1970s, Dino De Laurentiis would sell his massive studio albatross to the Italian government that built it, and relocate his production headquarters to New York City.

Having learned to be irritated when working under the eye of an American line producer, Bava was quick to test Alfredo Leone's knowledge of the basics of filmmaking. "My first day on the set, Bava finished setting up a shot and invited me to take a look through the viewfinder," Leone recalls. "I did and I couldn't see a thing, because he had deliberately thrown the camera out of focus! He asked me how it looked, and I told Bava I guessed it looked okay. Bava went over to his assistant and said under his breath, *'Stronzo americano'* [shitty American] or whatever. He was testing me. I learned my lesson, and from that point on, I always gave it to him straight. He appreciated that, and we went on to become the best of friends."

As with every Bava film, *Four Times That Night* was thoroughly pre-planned and storyboarded by the director himself. Though the project was not destined to be among his most visually innovative works, Bava was extremely concerned with using his camera creatively to protect the privacy of his lead actress.

"When we met for the first time," recalls Daniela Giordano, "I told Bava that I would not consent to appear nude onscreen. He told me: 'Don't worry. You will *appear* to be naked, but you will not be naked.' And he explained me how he planned to use the camera to obtain this effect. Something in his glance and in his tone of his voice convinced me that he was sincere, so I accepted the film. He kept his word, and I must say, he did a very good job from this point of view. I think the film's erotic scenes hold up very well, according to the period in which they were shot."



DANIELA GIORDANO *remains well-covered throughout 99.9% of the film.*

6 Tom Weaver, *Eye on Science Fiction*, (Jefferson NC: McFarland & Co., 2003), 128–29.

Brett Halsey confirms that the issue of nudity was "never a problem, because if the actress makes it clear in the beginning that she won't do nudity, the producer and director have two options: they can either hire someone else, or respect her wishes. Well, they didn't want to hire someone else, so it was never really a problem. No one criticized [Daniela] because of it. To be perfectly honest, I don't ever remember her being nude at all. Maybe she was topless in in the shower . . . I don't remember, but I would not have been surprised. Even when I worked with Freda, when I first came to Italy, I can remember him filming bare breasts . . . 'for the South American version.' But who knows? Maybe they were just for his private collection!"

As it happens, for the shots in which Giordano was filmed seminude, her body was always well covered either by her hands, arms, or deliberate obstacles placed between her and the camera; these shots are also very isolated in composition. However, there is one brief topless shot as she is dressing for her date, which one imagines was either obtained clandestinely at Dick Randall's insistence or was intended to be soft-matted in projection to bar Giordano's nudity from public view.

Because there was very little money available to create sets, Bava was also called upon to innovate believable environments out of thin air. Alfredo Leone: "I once saw him hang a bunch of ornaments right in front of the camera lens. There wasn't anything else there, but if you looked through the camera, it looked like there was a whole set! You'd never know that it wasn't." A close look at the Club Kama Sutra sets reveal that there was very little on-set besides a single cage frame, some flashing lights, and a few boxes for extras to sit on; the rest was conjured by arranging pieces of plastic near the camera lens, and by hanging a large makeshift chandelier of paper and beads in the middle field of the shot.

"I don't remember anything in particular about Bava's inventive duties on the set," Giordano offers, "but this doesn't mean anything, because I was not interested in the technical details of filmmaking. Besides, it was almost forbidden for an actor to look through the camera during the shooting of the film, and it was forbidden for us to attend the dailies."

Asked about how Bava seemed to get along with Dick Randall, Giordano adds, "I have nothing to say, really, about the relationship between Bava and Dick Randall. It seemed everything was okay: big smiles, big hugs . . . you know, the usual movie behavior. After each working day, I went home, so I don't know if anyone quarreled after work. On the set, everything was okay. Nobody was particularly excited because we were making a sexy kind of film. Bava was a nice director; we understood each other. He knew how to explain what he wanted. I knew what he wanted. It was enough for him to explain each scene to me only once."

Bava was hiding more from the cast and crew than the precarious nature of the production. The experience of making *Four Times That Night* was made personally stressful for Bava as he was reaching the end of his close personal alliance with Rosalba Scavia, who had been his production secretary, script girl, personal assistant and intimate since *Terrore nello spazio* in 1965. It was during the making of this film that Scavia made known that she had decided to withdraw from the film business to pursue a different line of work.

"I wish we had worked together more," Scavia says wistfully, looking back. "But production teams here in Italy—it's a big family thing. And working in the cinema was not how I wanted to spend the rest of my days. Do you know, the films I made with Mario . . . I never saw them, other than the dailies. If I saw them now, I would probably feel great emotion . . ."

The difficult working circumstances were ameliorated, for Daniela Giordano particularly, by the crew of talented artisans Bava had assembled. "The makeup was by Massimo De Rossi, who was the best available at that time," Giordano points out. "The De Rossi family is still providing the best makeup we have in Italy today. Also, the directors of photography and lighting were excellent. The crew was a good one, but you need more than a good crew to make a good film. I'm sorry to say, I didn't like *Four Times That Night*. It was a good idea, and it could have been a good film—but it didn't work at all."

The production otherwise unfolded without incident, depending on who is telling the story. Daniela Giordano recalls: "I had a scene where I had to kiss Brett Halsey, and the kiss had to be full of passion. I am myopic, so I had to measure the distance between him and me. I got the right position, I got the right place—his mouth, but I did not get the right distance, and so I gave his teeth a good hit with my teeth. He lost three caps in front!" [7]

Halsey, for his part, is perplexed by the anecdote. "I've never worn caps," he insists. "I don't know where that comes from, because I've never worn them. Maybe she's remembering another picture, another actor—but it wasn't me."

The evidence seems to support Halsey's statement, as there is no shot in the final cut that shows the two actors walking into a passionate kiss. It's possible that Ms. Giordano is remembering an incident from another picture. But it seems appropriate that the making of *Four Times That Night* would result in at least one *Rashomon* of its own.

Commentary

One of the predominant themes of Mario Bava's career is the nature of illusion: whether or not we can, or should, trust what we see with our own two eyes. As a special effects artist and trick photographer, this subject was of prime importance to Bava, who made a lifelong study of exactly how much the eye needed to see before the mind would believe. His filmography is not only rife with illusions, but with stories that ponder this question on a narrative level. Barbara Steele embodies a walking deception in *La maschera del demonio*, as do the possessed dead bodies of the astronauts in *Terrore nello spazio*. As Hercules ventures into the Underworld in *Ercole al centro della terra*, he is cautioned, "Do not believe in what you think you see," and the whodunit plots of *La frusta e il corpo* and *Sei donne per l'assassino* are studies in red herring, casting a wide net of suspicion about suspects who are later proven innocent.

Given its foregrounding of this recurring theme, one may approach *Four Times That Night* with the hope, if not the expectation, that it might be Bava's ultimate dissertation on reality and illusion. Unfortunately, it falls quite short of this mark, and given the material he had to work with, one doubts in retrospect that Bava ever had such conscious ambitions for the picture. One's ability to appraise the film is further complicated by a vast gulf in quality between the Italian version (a remarkably decent comedy with added shadings of irony and lots of snappy, sophisticated dialogue) and the English-dubbed version (which is simply excruciating). The complication is that the latter version is much more representative of the film as it was shot, because the actors played their roles in English, whereas the whole personality of the Italian version—particularly its delightful dialogue—was concocted largely in postproduction. Though Bava took no screenplay credit, the sense of humor displayed in the Italian dialogue is palpably his own—full of deliberately (and amusingly) melodramatic references to nuns, chastity, morality, horror (John likens himself to Count Dracula several times), and the entertainment business. (A favorite bit comes at the end of George and Esmerelda's first scene, as the decadent, dissipated couple ponder what they will ever do if men start showing an interest in dating women again. "Go on being television producers, I guess," sighs George.)

One of the movie's greatest faults is precisely the same aspect that makes it most attractive to new viewers today: its blatantly artificial look, which could be described as "bargain basement *Diabolik*." Andrea Crisanti's art direction shows what a little taste can do with even less money at its disposal; John's apartment is predominantly white, with low, squarish furniture and pillows of primary colors and geometrical shapes thrown here and there for accent, and a turntable situated atop a decorative box that flashes meager pulses of psychedelic light; the other



COLLAGE *of scenes from the film, with Pascal Petit as the central photographer, taken from the original Italian promotional booklet.*

rooms seen in the film—the bathroom, the discotheque—are provided mostly by suggestion. At the time of the film's original release, Crisanti's art direction looked hopelessly anachronistic; it was a time when nothing was as abhorrent as phoniness to the young, who were coming out the other end of the psychedelic era with a reawakened interest in the authenticity of nature and natural things. Viewed today, however, it is easier to accept these Pop Art trappings as a kind of retro-*chic* city of the imagination, though it is doubtful that this was anyone's intention. (The movie's budget did not extend to redecorating John's apartment "subjectively"—everyone remembers it the same way.) *Four Times That Night* is most interesting when it is most delirious, as during the Club Kama Sutra sequence, but its caged showgirls and mechanically choreographed guitar trio are not nearly as captivating as a similar sequence in *Diabolik*. In an effort to sustain interest, the viewer begins to dissect individual shots into their component trick elements, like the clever hanging maquette of beads and paper that conceals the catwalks of the studio ceiling at Dinocittà.

As always, it's delightful to see Bava meet the challenge of breathing life into so little, but isn't the point of telling any lie to make it believable? With each of the characters' versions of the story coming across as equally artificial, the film ponders its heady subjects and the appetites of the body from a stance that is virtually sterile. Though about (and thus seemingly addressed to) young people, *Four Times That Night* belongs more to the generation of Dick Randall's leering doorman than that of John or Tina; it is a kindergarten lesson in perception to a generation that had already moved beyond Aldous Huxley and Timothy Leary. Perhaps the movie was (as Alfredo Leone says) aiming for a level of unprecedented frankness about sex, but it doesn't do much more with its sparing nudity and openness about sexual diversity than gawk at it and pant after it. Instead, it seems a half-hearted attempt to bring the *telefoni bianchi* romances of the 1930s up-to-date with post-Pill promiscuity. Other films made in Italy around the same time achieved a more successful fusion of scenic artifice and sexual liberation, notably Piero Schivazappa's *Femina Ridens/The Laughing Woman* and Pasquale Festa Campanile's *La matriarca/The Libertine* (both 1969) and, most particularly, Radley Metzger's *Esotica, erotika, psicotika/The Lickerish Quartet* (1970).

The film's failings have less to do with an absence of Bavian technique, than with the occasionally inappropriate presence of it. "Bava had a tendency to add his sense of mystique to a film," Leone admits. "In *Four Times That Night*, there's a scene of Daniela waiting in a garden at night, and he made it look mysterious, like a scene from a murder mystery, which it never was." Indeed, Tina's solitary moments in the night-shadowed courtyard outside John's apartment would have had no importance whatsoever, had another director been at the helm, but Bava cannot resist milking them for all the anxiety they're worth. Even slapstick scenes, such as the manic shots of the doorman rushing up and down stairs to spy on the young lovers, are inappropriately bathed in ominous shadows more appropriate to a mugging or a murder. Bava also inserts a number of playful point-of-view shots—such as the one of Tina reclining on John's couch and raising and lowering a red glass in front of her eyes, each peek resulting in John's perceived loss of another layer of clothing—which would seem appropriate to the film's themes of subjectivity, but in this setting seem more expressive of a director trying desperately to engage himself in work that holds no interest. Bava's films were sometimes unfairly criticized for their use of zoom shots, but this is one of the few occasions where such criticism seems warranted. Bava used zoom shots for many reasons—to inject comic strip dynamism into *Terrore nello spazio* and *Diabolik*, to beat the clock on hasty projects—but here they are indulged to such an excessive degree that one is tempted to compare them to something more appropriately conducted under the cover of a raincoat.

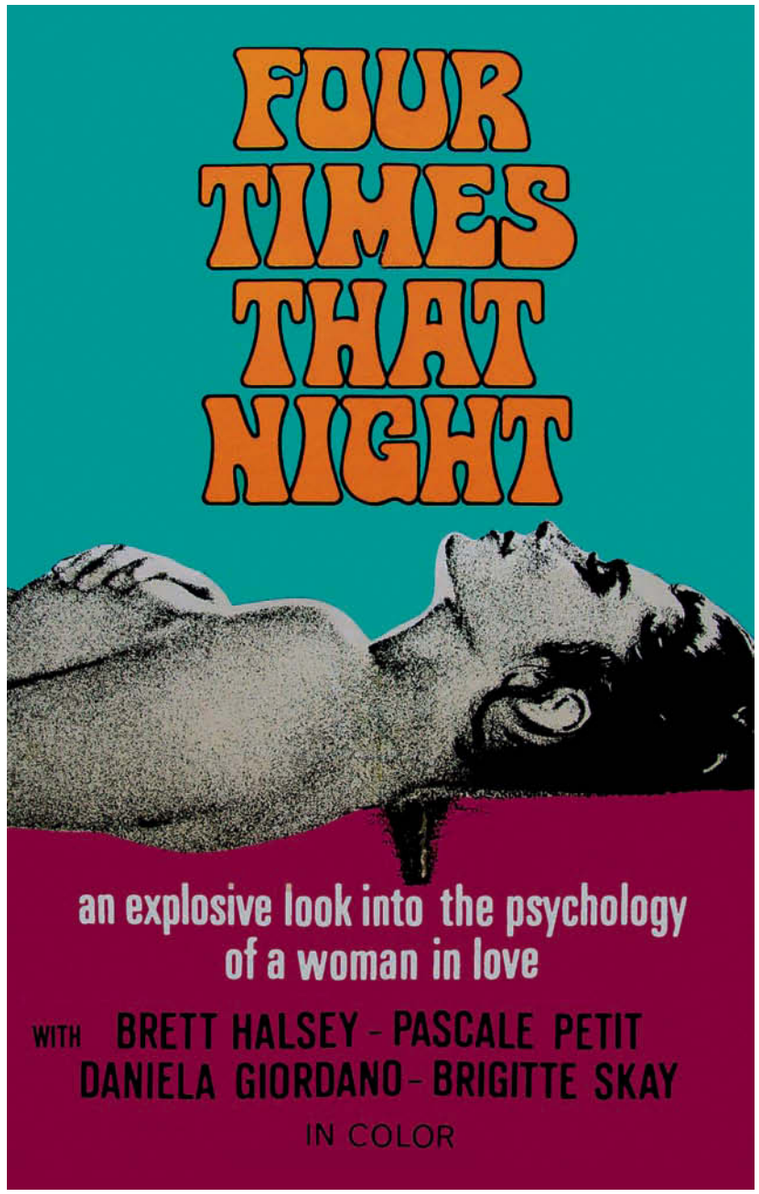
The film's worst fault is its screenplay, which, for all its *Rashomon* pretensions, is totally inept at the game it chooses to play. Why do the early

7 Miroslaw Lipinski, *The Daniela Giordano Interview,* Sinister Tales website at http://members.aol.com/eurosin/sin.htm (February 4, 2006).

scenes of Tina and John's date, which take place before Tina tells her version of the truth, find John behaving like the craven sex maniac described in Tina's account? (Tina, dancing: "Don't look at me—concentrate on the groove!" John, staring at her crotch: "I am!") How are we to believe John's account of the evening at all, when his vivacious description of Tina's mother is completely at odds with the more soberly attired woman we saw before anyone started telling their stories? How can the doorman's story, from its binocular vantage, logically accommodate Esmerelda's flashback story of how she met John—and why does that story end up neglecting this story entirely, as she recounts her persuasion of a German girl to pose for nude photographs? Lastly, if their date went so well, as the "true" version suggests, why would Tina return home and tell her mother that John tried to rape her?

One imagines that the film was originally scripted to begin with Tina's 3:30 a.m. homecoming, or perhaps with the meeting in the park cutting directly to her homecoming; this would help to explain John's characterization as a cartoonish sexual predator in the early scenes. But by depicting him this way in the early scenes, which are meant to be objective, it becomes impossible to regard his interpretation of events with any credence, and the account of the oversexed doorman has even less cause to be taken seriously. The strength of *Rashomon*—aside from the expert filmmaking of Kurosawa—is that each character's interpretation of the story is equally valid, and each performance is uniquely persuasive; thus, the film directly appeals to the viewer's intelligence in sorting out the details and establishing the truth. In *Four Times That Night*, the characters are so two-dimensional, and everyone's story is so exaggeratedly false, that one loses interest in what really happened, if the viewer is charitable enough to foster any interest at all.

Adding to the film's inconsistency is the character of the unidentified narrator, a kind of Mephistophelean lecturer first glimpsed during the solarized main titles and not again until very late in the picture. It is doubtful that *Four Times That Night* would have been any more successful had his place in the proceedings been more consistent, but as it is, his half-hearted presence makes the confection seem worse than half-baked.



CANADIAN *one-sheet poster, with a surprisingly inexact description of the film's purpose.*

Four Times That Night is the least visually imaginative of Bava's fantasy films, and certain handmade elements such as the hanging baubles that provide the discotheque's ceiling offer the only evidence that he was actually behind the camera. The sole remaining in-camera effects shot is the doorman's point of view, as he spies on the goings-on in John's living room from an opposing rooftop. This was achieved by filming the living room set, at a distance, through an unpainted rectangle on a glass matte painting of a modern apartment building exterior—not a particularly magical shot.

More intriguing is the presence of two talismans that meaningfully recur throughout the Bava canon: the swing and the cigarette. In Bava's films, from *Operazione paura* to *Schock/Beyond the Door II*, the swing is always depicted as a throne of mischief. When Tina finds one hanging in the middle of John's living room, she immediately tags the *double entendre* ("Does this mean you're a . . . swinger?"), which is later reinforced when Esmerelda plots her seduction while rocking back and forth on it, and again when Tina's discarded dress is shown draped over its seat. Likewise, beginning with Nora's marijuana misadventure in *La ragazza che sapeva troppo*, Bava's films almost always use cigarettes as a signpost to guilt or complicity. In *Four Times That Night*, as in *Sei donne per l'assassino* and *5 bambole per la luna d'agosto*, lovers are shown celebrating their post-coital afterglow by sharing a cigarette.

The presence of these totems may be indicative of Bava's discomfort with the film's subject matter. "He didn't like sexy movies and disliked having to film erotic scenes," Lamberto Bava confirms. Daniela Giordano agrees: "Mario Bava was not the kind of director who liked to linger over sexual or erotic situations. As he told me, he preferred to shoot the atmosphere, rather than the crude, erotic situation. That's the reason I accepted the film."

Distribution

Four Times That Night was Bava's first completed directorial effort since the international success of *Diabolik*, but it would not be the next of his films to be released. Although, in retrospect, the film was as tame and suggestive as an erotic film can be, its release in Italy was blocked by the national censor board, whose members evidently objected to its depiction of homosexual characters and relationships. Ironically, the primary obstacle to the film's acceptance was the board chairman, who happened to be Bava's former mentor, Riccardo Freda.

"I was responsible for approving *5 bambole per la luna d'agosto* and for banning another Bava film, *Quante volte . . . quella notte* [*Four Times That Night*], which had an erotic lesbian premise," Freda told interviewer Luigi Cozzi. "*Quante volte . . . quella notte*

was a terrible film, so bad that Mario didn't claim it as his own, but he did direct it. By preventing the film from being shown in Italy, I felt I was doing him a tremendous favor."[8]

Freda was mistaken about a couple of things. First of all, the film had a lesbian character, not "an erotic lesbian premise." (Only a year or two later, when Dario Argento began to direct, homosexual characters were a common component of his *dramatis personae* and experienced no upsets with the censor board.) Secondly, Bava never denied his paternity in regard to the film; in fact, when interviewed in 1971, Bava said of the still-unreleased film, "It didn't turn out half bad."[9]

What is most interesting about Freda's assertion is that he claimed to recognize an element of self-contempt creeping into Bava's work. By his own admission, Freda was hoping to save Bava from himself by barring his latest film from public exhibition.

"In Italy, we never cleared the censor board," complains Alfredo Leone, still resentful of the interference. "They held us back for about three years, and that hurt us worldwide." In the midst of this ordeal, *Variety* reported that Bava was planning to undertake a modest schedule of pickup shooting, in the hopes of making the film acceptable by replacing its erotic content with horrific scenes of a Black Mass, hallucination and other traditional Bavian traits. Presumably, these inserts would have been used to deflect the true nature of John and George's disappearance behind closed doors, which is revealed in terms of the horrified expression on Tina's face. Instead of witnessing the two men making love, she would have seen them praying to Satan, sacrificing an animal, or something of the sort. But Bava's proposal was never taken seriously enough for him to have discussed it with anyone but the censor board. "I don't remember ever discussing such a move with him at all," reports Leone.

According to Brett Halsey, there were plans afoot in the early 1970s to beef-up the film's erotic content, as Alfredo Leone approached him on the matter. "Leone was a pretty straight shooter," Halsey says. "I was working in New York on a soap opera [*Love Is a Many Splendored Thing*] and he came to me and said, 'Look, we want to spice up the picture. If we give you $10,000, would you sign a release saying it's okay?' He wasn't asking me to act in the reshoots, he was just asking for my permission. And I said, 'No,' because I always thought of the picture as a comedy, not as a sex picture at all. But I admired Alfredo for that, because most producers wouldn't have asked; they would have gone ahead and done it. Apparently, they didn't do anything anyway. But at least he had the courtesy to ask."



US *ad mat from the original Cinevision pressbook.*

Though decidedly lower tier Bava, *Four Times That Night* is very much as Leone describes it: "A film far ahead of its time." Literally. Four years passed before it saw the light of public projection, and by the time it came out, the market for adult films had radically changed. It had entered production before the MPAA Ratings Board was introduced in America, but was not acquired for distribution in America until early 1972, by which time the world had moved well beyond it, into the once-unthinkable realms of *Deep Throat* and *Behind the Green Door*.

Alfredo Leone tried to sell the film's US distribution rights for many years without success. It was first acquired in Canada by John Dunning and André Link's Cinépix Film Properties, Inc., who gave the film its world premiere in December 1971 at the Seville Theatre in Montreal, Canada, where it had a two-week run with an "18 Years" restriction. Around this same time, the US distribution rights were secured by Cinevision Films Ltd., a small New York-based company formed by Sam Lang and J. Arthur Elliott, who later became the executive producers of *Baron Blood* by providing Leone with $125,000 at a time of need. Pressbook ads claimed that Lang and Elliott "presented" *Four Times That Night*, but it is doubtful that the film was ever "presented" in more than a few theaters, nationwide. Cinevision was out of business within two years. The Internet Movie Database lists a domestic release date of April 1975 for the picture, without any further information about who distributed it.

The film was eventually given a scant release in Italy—as *Quante volte . . . quella notte*—in the summer of 1972, at the height of vacation season. Not even Bava's friendliest Italian critics remember seeing it, and the film subsequently dropped out of sight until the Italian version was released on DVD as part of Image Entertainment's "Mario Bava Collection" in November 2000. An English-language version of the film exists, but Alfredo Leone deliberately withheld the track from the disc.

"It's terrible," Leone admits of the track. "It was done very badly, giving Daniela Giordano's character a Southern accent and whatnot. It's a very special picture, *Four Times That Night*. It needs special handling. And I didn't want to include anything that might hurt its chances of finding an audience that would appreciate it."

8 Luigi Cozzi, *Il cinema dei mostri*, (Rome, Italy: Fanucci Editore, 1987), 249–50.

9 Volta.





MARIE *(Edwige Fenech) is found crucified in a mockery of her earlier "virgin sacrifice" in* 5 BAMBOLE PER LA LUNA D'AGOSTO.

5 BAMBOLE PER LA LUNA D'AGOSTO

5 Dolls for an August Moon

ALFREDO LEONE REMEMBERS that Mario Bava approached him with a copy of the *Hatchet for the Honeymoon* script as the filming of *Four Times That Night* was coming to a close. This indicates that the picture was still uncompleted at this time, in limbo since the budget bottomed out in Paris; it still needed additional footage to wrap it up. Leone had rescued *Four Times* at the eleventh hour, so it makes sense that Bava would see if he and his New York partners might be interested in salvaging another. Leone read the Moncada script (which bore only fleeting resemblance to what Bava had actually shot) and "was not impressed," feeling that the material was "ordinary and unworthy of Bava." He declined to get involved, but made it clear that he would be more than happy to work with Bava again—when the right project came along.

At some point between the conclusion of *Four Times That Night* in December 1968 and the start of Bava's next production, some nine months later, Manuel Caño located the necessary funds for Bava to complete *Il rosso segno della follia*. What remained to be shot isn't known, but it did not require the participation of Stephen Forsyth.

Inevitably, the summer of 1969 began to edge into autumn, but the events characterizing the season were anything but autumnal. Apollo 11 became Earth's first chariot to the moon, nearly half a million young people flocked to a pasture in New York's Sullivan County for the Woodstock Music and Arts Fair, and in Italy, filmmakers continued to seek footholds in this ongoing era of crisis. By now, the Italian cinema (so healthy throughout the late '50s and early-to-mid-'60s) was in decline; most of the visiting producers from America—Deke Heyward, Larry Woolner, and now Alfredo Leone—had decamped for home, leaving the Italians to their own devices. It was not a happy season for Italian directors in general, and Bava was worse off than most. Though his recent professional choices had been the right ones for him at the time, it did not look well on his resumé that Bava had followed his work for Dino De Laurentiis with a cheap Spanish horror picture, a kinky sex comedy for Dick Randall, and a couple of low-profile moonlighting assignments.

Fortunately, a much-needed native shock wave was about to reactivate the Italian film industry and its need for directors like Bava. Much as Woodstock had given the world a seismic illustration of the sheer volume of the youth market, the Italian cinema was shaken in early 1970 by the release of *L'uccello dalle piume di cristallo/The Bird With the Crystal Plumage*, the feature film debut of a 29-year-old writer–director, Dario Argento. Born in 1940, Argento was the son of motion picture producer Salvatore Argento and the Brazilian photographer Elda Luxardo. He entered the movie business as a film critic for the leftist daily newspaper *Paese Sera*—in which capacity he had been among the first to write respectfully about Bava's films.



DARIO ARGENTO, *the new hope of the Italian giallo, in conversation with Luigi Cozzi and father/producer Salvatore on the set of his third thriller, 4 MOSCHE DI VELLUTO GRIGIO (1971).*

"I particularly liked *La maschera del demonio* and *Sei donne per l'assassino*," Argento remembers. "I don't remember reviewing them, but I wrote in some magazines about them. I think some of the irony of Bava influenced me. As in *Sei donne per l'assassino*, there was something interesting-looking about the sets, the violence, the beautiful girls."

Argento's astute journalism and enthusiasm for B-movies led to a number of minor screenwriting assignments—Westerns and action pictures, mostly—culminating in a shared story credit (with Bernardo Bertolucci) on Sergio Leone's masterpiece *C'era una volta il West/Once Upon a Time in the West* (1968). *L'uccello dalle piume di cristallo*—which borrowed liberally from Frederic Brown's novel *Screaming Mimi*—was co-produced by Salvatore Argento and Artur Brauner's CCC, who sold it to West German audiences as a *faux* Bryan Edgar Wallace adaptation. It was a bold stylistic amalgam of Antonioni's *Blow Up* and Bava's *gialli*—flashy, stylish, violent, but also infused with McLuhanesque cool. Something in the film's combination of its semi-futuristic settings, its Hitchcockian flair, its European existential approach, and cruelly accentuated misogyny galvanized audiences worldwide, reinvigorating the Italian cinema. One of the film's most remarkable narrative devices was borrowed, consciously or unconsciously, from Bava's *La ragazza che sapeva troppo*—namely, the subconscious witnessing of an important clue to a murderer's identity, which does not surface into consciousness until the final reel. Though Argento denies that this particular film in any way influenced him, this single narrative device made such an impression that it factors, to a greater or lesser degree, in every one of his films.

Though Bava and Argento worked in the same genre, their approaches

5 bambole per la luna d'agosto

"5 Dolls for an August Moon"
Filmed at Dear Studios (Rome) and on location in
Tor Caldara and Lavinio
October 1969
First released: February 14, 1970
Eastmancolor, 1.85:1, 79 minutes

Production: PAC (Produzioni Atlas Consorziate, Milan). Producers: Pietro and Mario Bregni. Director: Mario Bava. Assistant director: Mario Bianchi. Story and screenplay: Mario De Nardo. Continuity: Marisa Agostini. Director of photography: Antonio Rinaldi. Camera assistant: Emilio Varriano. Second camera assistant: Gianlorenzo Battaglia. Art direction: Giuseppe Aldebran. Sets and costumes: Giuliani Maffai. Wardrobe: Roberto Ranucci. Production manager: Luigi Alessi. Assistant production managers: Rodolfo Martello, Alfonso Cucci. Production secretary: Franco Tupini. Editor: Mario Bava. Assistant editor: Liliana Serra. Songs: "Five Dolls" by P. Umiliani, sung by Alessandro Alessandroni's I Cantori Moderni (Cinevox Records), "Neve calda" by Jarusso/Simonelli [credited, but not actually heard in film] and "Ti risveglierai con me" by Jarusso/Simonelli/Umiliana, performed by Il Balletto di Bronzo (RCA Records). Sound: Leopoldo Rosi. Music: Piero Umiliani. Stills: Armando Pietrangeli. Distributor: PAC

Ira von Fürstenberg (Trudy Farrell), Edwige Fenech (Marie Chaney), William Berger (Fritz Engel/Gerry Farrell),[1] Teodoro Corrà (George Stark), Maurice Poli (Nick Chaney), Howard Ross [Renato Rossini] (Jack Davidson), Helena Ronée (Peggy), Justine Gall [Ely Galleani] (Isabelle), Edith Meloni (Jill Stark), and Mauro Bosco (Jacques/Charles).

Belgium: *5 Meisjes Tijdens een Warme Zommernacht*, "5 Girls on a Warm Summer Night," Cinema International Corporation
France: *5 Filles dans une Nuit Chaude d'Ete*, "5 Girls on a Hot Summer Night," Lyre Cinématographique, 11/22/72. Video: *L'Ile de l'Épouvante*
Spain: *5 Muñecas para la luna de Agosto*, Filmax S.A.
Turkey: *Yilan Ruhlu Kadinin Ýntïjkami*, "Revenge of the Woman With the Spirit of a Snake"
UK: *Five Dolls for the August Moon*, Border Films, 12/1971, 81m 36s, Certificate "X," passed with no cuts
US: *5 Dolls for an August Moon*, International Media, 6/2/2002, American Cinematheque Mario Bava retrospective

to their material were decidedly different. In the course of his own career, Lamberto Bava has worked as an assistant to both directors. When asked how they differed, he answers simply: "Well, one was Mario Bava and the other is Dario Argento! Argento is more visible to the public and he makes movies that his audience will like. My father, on the other hand, made movies to express himself, so they are more interior, more strange and less commercial. And he made them long before they became fashionable."

Lamberto's son Roy, who has worked more recently with Argento, has his own views on the subject: "Mario started the *giallo* picture with *Sei donne per l'assassino*, but it was evolved further by Dario, who loved my grandfather's work but had a different way of looking at the same subject matter. He adapted the form in his own personal way. When Dario did *L'uccello dalle piume di cristallo*, it was a massive sea change in the *giallo* format because he was younger, a child of the counter-culture revolution. Dario's vision was more modern than Mario's, who stuck to the supernatural and took things much less seriously than Dario, because he liked irony in his pictures. That is completely the opposite of what Dario likes. Mario was a joker, and although Dario can be funny, I would never describe him as that . . . He's more of a serious person. He's had his fair share of nasty things said about him in the Italian press and he is guarded and on the look-out for that. Mario never cared about that. From Mario's very first movie, they were always speaking badly about him, so it got to the point where he took it with a grain of salt. Dario's press background means that he's more focused on what other people think about him. That was never Mario's concern. He saw it all as a game. The reveal at the end of *I tre volti della paura* says more about Mario's personality and sense of humor than you could possibly imagine. He used to say that, if you can't laugh at yourself, then you must be a really sad person. In life, you have to laugh about tragedies, because that's what life is all about."[2]



ARGENTO's *gialli showed the influence of Bava's* SEI DONNE PER L'ASSASSINO *by contrasting violent murder with beautiful victims—as in this scene from his debut,* L'UCCELLO DALLE PIUME DI CRISTALLO *(1970).*

Another important distinction between the two men is that Bava always denied being an artist, while Argento never resisted such identification (nor should he); in fact, if anything, his choice of protagonists alone would seem to confirm this definition. Argento's heroes are always confident and successful in their craft, while his murderers are often revealed as people with failed creative impulses. *L'uccello dalle piume di cristallo* offers a journalist pitted against an art museum curator (as opposed to the exhibited artist); the hero and murderer of *Profondo rosso/Deep Red* (1975) are both pianists but work, respectively, in a concert hall and at a street corner bistro; the villainy in *Suspiria* is wielded by aging dance instructors—i.e., failed dancers—against their promising young students; and *Tenebrae* (1982) is a clash between a best-selling mystery novelist and a group of obsessed readers compelled to emulate the brutal razor slayings described in his latest book. One cannot help but notice his murderers' common inclination to photograph their gory handiwork, to put a feeble frame around it, to interpret their crimes as art—destruction perverted into constructive creation.

At the start of the new decade, it seemed that everyone in Italy was making *gialli*—except the man most responsible for innovating the form. With three unsuccessful films behind him, his best recent work uncredited, his name associated with a sex film banned by the censor, and now twice the age of Italy's new generation of directors, Bava's rudderless approach to career had painted him into an unhappy corner.

Bava's friend and former interviewer, Luigi Cozzi, befriended Argento during this period and soon became his assistant director. As someone with a serious knowledge of, and affection for, Italian thrillers, it became Cozzi's goal to bring the two *Maestri* together. "In the '70s, I tried to arrange a meeting between Mario and Dario," he chuckles. "I tried hard to do that, because I considered Mario to be the father figure to Dario, but Mario was not willing to meet Dario because he considered *L'uccello dalle piume di cristallo* to be a copy of his film *La ragazza che sapeva troppo*. He had not seen the picture himself, but you see, a lot of people had come to him and said, 'You know, that's your picture!' He was irritated by this, because his picture didn't make any money, and Dario's picture was making a lot of money. So Mario was upset and didn't want to meet Dario at that time. I kept insisting and finally Mario said, 'Okay, okay, I'll meet him'—but he was still not so willing, you know? I don't know when they finally met because, around this time, I went away to work and didn't see Mario or Dario for a couple of years. By the time I came back, they had already met."

According to Argento himself, this meeting did not occur until 1974, during the production of his film *Profondo rosso*. "I met [Bava] occasionally in the bar," Argento says. "He thanked me, and told me I should be proud, because now it was possible for everybody to work in the *giallo*; it was no longer a problem. I think it became easier for him to have a film financed, because the distributors began thinking that these were good films."

The meeting was cordial, if a bit unequal, and didn't result in continued contact. Argento may have heard from Cozzi of Bava's trepidation about an encounter. Subsequent to their meeting, Bava actively discouraged himself from feeling any sense of rivalry toward Argento, persuading himself that they made very different kinds of films. He preferred to focus on their differences rather than on the similarities that friends and colleagues kept bringing to his attention. "In Italy," Bava later wrote, "horror films have never made any money, but my movies always made money in America. For some reason, Dario Argento was successful—but he didn't make horror films. He made thrillers."[3]

With the tremendous success of *L'uccello dalle piume di cristallo*, Italian thrillers were now defined as Before or After Argento. The post-Argento *gialli* employed enticing, surrealist

1 The main character goes by many names in the various international versions. In Spain, Fritz Engel becomes Frick Hengel, and he has been named as Frank Angel in other references, though I have not been able to determine which versions name him so. I have chosen to stick with the name given him in the Italian release.

2 Roy Bava interviewed by Alan Jones, April 2003.

3 Alberto Abruzzese, et al., *La città del cinema—produzione e lavoro nel cinema italiano 1930–70* (Rome, Italy: Napoleone, 1979), 83–89.

titles as exuberantly as Bava's had used garish, impressionistic lighting. Such was the eagerness of the market that screenwriter Mario De Nardo was able to sell *5 bambole per la luna d'agosto*—an uninspired, shameless rehash of Agatha Christie's novel *Ten Little Niggers/Ten Little Indians*[4]—to Produzioni Atlas Cinematografica on the strength of little more than its poetic title, which reflected this current vogue.

The production was planned as a vehicle for the voluptuous French-Algerian actress Edwige Fenech, but it lost its original director only days before the shooting was to begin. Bava remembered the hectic circumstances of his hiring: "The producers [Pietro and Mario Bregni] sent me the script, and I told them it was identical to *Ten Little Indians*, which I didn't like to begin with. They pleaded with me, so I agreed, in principle, to do it—but I refused to discuss it any further unless I was paid up front. I forgot all about it, because I had other things on my mind. And then, one beautiful Saturday morning, these producers called me into their offices again, handed over a check and a contract to sign, and announced that we had to begin shooting on Monday—*the day after tomorrow!* I put the check in my pocket, signed on the dotted line, while saying that the script was a joke, that they owed me at least ten days to rework it, to put it right, to prepare myself . . . but nothing doing!"[5]

By reading between the lines of Fenech's filmography, we can surmise the identity of the director whom Bava was hired to replace. Fenech was considered the "discovery" of producer–director Giuseppe Zaccariello, who—as "Josef Zachar"—featured her in several 1967–68 Italian/German coproductions—*The Blonde and the Black Pussycat, Sex is a Pleasure,* and *The Brazen Women of Balzac,* to give their English titles. All of Fenech's previous eight films had been directed by either "Zachar" or Guido Malatesta (b. 1919)—best remembered for such *pepla* as *Maciste contro i mostri/Fire Monsters Against the Son of Hercules* (1962) and *La rivolta dei barbari/Revolt of the Barbarians* (1965)—depending on the national origins of the production funds. Therefore, with P.A.C.'s Italian money financing *5 bambole per la luna d'agosto*, the film's direction was probably first entrusted to Malatesta. Lending further support to the theory is the fact that Malatesta died the following year, 1970, at the comparatively young age of 50, so ill health could have been responsible for his leavetaking.

As mentioned earlier, Zaccariello had worked as a silent production partner on *Il rosso segno della follia* and his alliance with Fenech implies that he was also unofficially involved with the Bregnis on this project. Therefore, it was most likely he who suggested Bava as an eleventh hour replacement. Bava was hired and put to work so quickly that, for the first time since 1965, his son Lamberto was not available to assist him. (Acknowledging that his father was no longer working steadily enough for him to support his family, Lamberto had accepted a job as assistant director on another film—whose title he doesn't, or claims not to, remember.) The production's cast and technical crew had already been assembled, but Bava insisted on working with his usual camera crew, headed by Antonio Rinaldi.

Bava felt some rivalry with Dario Argento, but he felt no trepidation about being perceived as jumping on Argento's bandwagon. In an interview conducted around this time, he observed: "I like to think of myself as someone who manages to keep working. I don't care about having a big success; I just want to stay active. My father used to say the same thing, and he worked in the cinema since 1906. The movie business has been in crisis, of late; I've seen a lot of people end up badly because they felt they were above catering to the latest trends, or were just too stupid to capitalize on their success."[6]

In the course of this same interview, Bava was asked for his feelings about traditional horror movies—the kind featuring monsters. "Monsters aren't psychologically suitable for [the Italian] public," he opined. "There's always someone ready to talk back to the screen, and they're right to do so. I saw *King Kong*



EDWIGE FENECH, *the sex siren of 1970s Italian cult cinema.*

vs. Godzilla: a big cardboard gorilla waging war against a plastic dinosaur . . .[7] At a certain point, a Jeep carrying soldiers was shown heading in the direction of the monsters—I don't know why, maybe to increase the suspense! Someone in the audience called out, 'They'll nip this in the bud!' Once they said that, it was all over! You must never give the public that kind of opportunity [to get the upper hand] . . . The monster in horror movies doesn't exist any more. *We* are the monsters now."

The idea that "we are the monsters now" is actually present in most of Bava's work, going all the way back to *La maschera del demonio*. His characters are always running afoul of family—wives, parents, relatives—as well as lovers, co-workers (as in the case of *Caltiki* and *Terrore nello spazio*), and of course, the demons of their own minds. But in these films, there was usually a supernatural element involved—a vampire, a ghost; this is true even of his most realistic stories—as in the way that Isabella's diary in *Sei donne per l'assassino* functions as an incriminating voice from the grave. By the late 1960s, however, Bava had largely expunged all consideration of the supernatural from his work. It might be that, since the deaths of his parents, his thoughts of the Beyond became gentler, less fearful, more philosophical and inevitable.

From this point on, Bava's films would depict our waking world, the world of other people, the world of ourselves, as the one most worthy of our fear.

Having already been involved with films with the numbers 6 (*Sei donne per l'assassino*) and 7 (*Sette vergine per il diavolo*, the working title of his *Cry Nightmare* project) in the title, Bava now followed his number 4 (*Four Times That Night*) with 5: *5* (pronounced "*cin-que*") *bambole per la luna d'agosto.*

It bears so little resemblance to the *giallo* as it was then known that it could almost be described as an "anti-thriller"; there is no emphasis whatsoever on acts of graphic bloodshed and the story's thriller status is conveyed basically through dialogue as it remains resolutely in the heads of its characters, who are almost never allowed to break the film's compositional decorum in outbursts of physical, animal violence. It is (as Bava suggested with his reference to Agatha Christie) a more traditional mousetrap thriller that resembles *Sei donne per l'assassino* in the sense that it, too, is a tragedy put into motion by greed and romantic betrayal, executed with a flamboyant sense of color and style. It suggests what Bava's *Cry Nightmare* might have been—namely, a teasing thriller that exists to confuse or deny the viewer's basic expectations. Though a conservative thriller in many ways, *5 bambole per la luna d'agosto* anticipates Bava's next picture, *Ecologia del delitto/Twitch of the Death Nerve,* on so many levels that it can almost be viewed as a blueprint or rough draft that takes an alternative approach to very similar material.

5 bambole per la luna d'agosto is one of the most controversial titles in the Bava canon, due mostly to the fact that Bava himself once singled it out in an interview as "probably my worst film." He was likely speaking in reference to the script he had to work with, or the facts of the production itself, rather than the final product. It is actually quite far from his worst film, and one suspects that—had Bava been inclined to give it a second thought—he would have reconsidered his low opinion. Now in its fourth decade of life, *5 bambole . . .* has a remarkable freshness and air of invention about it. Based on the flimsiest of scripts, without any characterization to speak of, the project granted Bava an uncommonly wide berth in which to experiment with technique, to reach for new and untested *frissons* and visual approaches, and he seized the opportunity with a refreshing lack of inhibition. Though it was made by a grandfather aged 55, *5 bambole . . .* rivals *Diabolik* as the most youthful in spirit of all his works; though it doesn't aspire to their same level of accomplishment, its attractive buoyancy makes even his greatest films seem heavy and lethargic. The light plot actually becomes sublimated in secondary viewings, allowing the traditional role of text to be replaced in function by Piero Umiliani's score, which was given a revolutionary prominence in the sound mix; in this way, the film becomes as endlessly viewable as a good album demands to be listened to again and again, over a lifetime. We



ISABELLE *(Ely Galleani) spies on the wild party at the Starks' beach house.*

4 Americans are often shocked to discover this, the original title of Christie's first and most famous mystery novel, which was retitled *And Then There Were None* (and later, *Ten Little Indians)* for its US publication in 1939. But the title of this classic thriller—which takes place in a house on "Nigger Island"—has remained *Ten Little Niggers* in the United Kingdom and Australia to this day.

5 Luigi Cozzi, *Il cinema dei mostri* (Rome, Italy: Fanucci Editore, 1987), 249–60.

6 Alfredo Castelli and Tito Monego, interview in *Horror* 1. 1969.

7 In Troy Howarth, *The Haunted World of Mario Bava* (London, UK: FAB Press, 2002), 307, this interview is presented in a translation by Roberto Curti, which correctly points out that the film released in Italy as *King Kong vs. Godzilla* was not the Toho production directed by Ishiro Honda, but rather the Daiei production *Gamera vs. Guiron,* directed by Noriaka Yuasa. While this is true, Bava's mention of a "gorilla" and a "dinosaur" indicate that was in fact talking about the Toho film. Therefore, either he, Cozzi, or the editors of *Horror* knew what was being discussed and substituted the film's actual name.



MARIE *makes a spectacle of herself, dancing around the room to the pop stylings of Piero Umiliani.*

can enjoy the procession of images and their musical accompaniment without being bound to the gravity of a tedious and overfamiliar story.

However, at the same time, something new can be seen creeping into Bava's technique, the gremlin of self-sabotage that Riccardo Freda also noticed, that finds him cheating his film (and consequently, his audience) of nearly all of the genre's ritualistic highlights of sex and violence. In taking this approach, Bava may have been unconsciously exorcising his resentment over having to take work on short notice, of being deprived of any preproduction input, by deliberately flaunting his disrespect for the material.

Despite its often in-your-face manifestations of Bava's frustration, and in some ways because of them, *5 bambole . . .* is a very special work in his filmography. It is indispensable as a demonstration of what Bava was capable of achieving on very short notice, and it captures this most careful of technicians in a rare, almost wholly improvisational light.

Synopsis

Wealthy industrialist George Stark invites a group of colleagues, along with their wives and girlfriends, to his fabulous island beach house for a holiday of decadent pleasures. Isabelle, the watchful teenage daughter of the island's game warden, has the run of the island while her parents are away. She follows the sound of music to the beach house and spies on a wild, orgiastic party. The Starks' houseboy, Jacques, carries a serving tray around the room, offering each of the guests their choice of a blade. Then, on cue, the lights go out—and when they come back on, the formerly frantically dancing Marie—the voluptuous wife of Nick Chaney—lies still on the ground, a knife planted in her breast. Everyone panics, but Nick sees through the trick and sprays the "blood" off her chest with a jet of seltzer water. Marie laughs and removes the knife from her brassiere—the "virgin sacrifice" has been a joke, because everyone knows that Marie is no virgin.

Stark's guest of honor is Prof. Fritz Engel, whose formula for a new industrial resin is so coveted by George, Nick, and their partner Jack Davidson that they have invited Fritz—and his wife Trudy—to the island to seduce him with whatever temptations they have at their disposal. They make him a collective offer of $3,000,000—a million from each of them—but Fritz is not interested in money; he is more interested in the humanitarian applications of his discovery, especially since his closest friend and associate died as a result of their research. He toys with the idea of giving the formula away at an upcoming scientific congress, but George is firm in his determination to obtain exclusive ownership and voices this in a manner that leaves Fritz feeling threatened. When Nick makes Fritz a covert offer of $1,000,000 "and if you decide to deal with just me, there'll be five more"—the scientist cements his resolve by burning the formula manuscript.

That night, Trudy and Jill (George's wife)—who are secretly lesbian lovers—are meeting on the beach when they see Marie clandestinely climbing aboard the Starks' private yacht for a secret tryst with Jacques, and finds him dead with a knife in his chest. This time, the murder is real. In panic, Marie runs away from the boat—observed by Isabelle—but says nothing to anyone of her horrible discovery. The next morning, Nick asks Marie to do what she can, physically, to persuade Fritz to accept his offer, and she agrees—but their conversation is disrupted by screams from the beach. While going to the beach to do some painting, Jill has discovered Jacques' corpse—moved by someone from the yacht to the shoreline, where it is being nibbled by tiny sand crabs. Knowing now that a murderer is among them, the guests want to leave, but there is no escape from the island. George has supposedly sent his yacht away to avoid a coming storm; the launch has also disappeared, and the phone is out of order. The men wrap Jacques' body in a polythene shroud and hang it in the house's meat locker. Aware of her indiscretions with the houseboy, Nick suspects Marie of the murder, to which she responds, "You forgot—I like men, but I like them to be alive!"

A highstrung artist, Jill is made hysterical by Jacques' death, and George slaps her, fed up with her crying and screaming. As Trudy tries to comfort Jill, Isabelle sneaks into the house and steals a silver lamé shawl. When Nick sees her hiding the garment on the beach, he tries to use the situation to his advantage, grabbing Isabelle—but Fritz happens along in time to stop him. Fritz and Isabelle discuss money, with the scientist insisting that it isn't important and the girl remarking that money is only unimportant to people who have never had to worry about it. But even she allows that not even a million dollars is enough to last for a lifetime.

Returning to the beach house, Nick is angry at Fritz for disrupting his



GEORGE STARK *(Teodoro Corrà) induces Marie to be the "virgin sacrifice" centerpiece of a practical joke.*

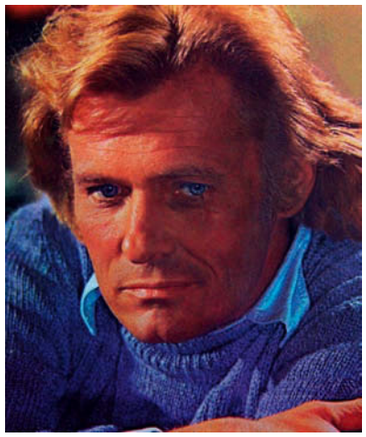
encounter with Isabelle and also for snubbing his $1,000,000 check, which Fritz returned to Nick's bedroom and tucked between the cups of Marie's discarded red brassiere. Nick didn't find the check, so Fritz goes in search of it—and finds Marie waiting for him, inviting him to search the red brassiere, which she is now wearing. Fritz leaves the room in disgust. During the night, Fritz wakes from a bad dream in a solitary bed and traces his wife Trudy to the beach, where she is taking a romantic moonlight walk with Jill. Pausing for a cigarette, Fritz is shot with a telescopic rifle—aimed by Isabelle! The two women hear the shot, find Fritz' body and run for help. Isabelle drags Farrell's body away, seemingly into the sea.

With Fritz now out of the picture, the men converge on Trudy for the rights to his formula. When Nick demands the formula and accuses Trudy of stealing his still-missing check, she flips him with a jiu-jitsu move. Jack and his girlfriend Peggy, aloof from the earlier action, make love in their room. When morning comes, Peggy wanders out onto the patio to daydream, and Jack wakes to find her with a bullet hole in her forehead. Peggy is bagged and hung in the meat locker next to Jacques. Distraught, Jack flees the beach house and is sought by the remaining survivors. After many hours of searching, they return home to find Jack passed out in a chaise longue, but Marie has not returned. Her corpse is soon found, ritually slain in a manner similar to her earlier feigned sacrifice—suspended by her wrists from a tree trunk, stripped to her red bra and panties, stabbed in the heart. She joins Charles and Peggy in the deep freeze.

George later discovers Nick rummaging through his bedroom for his stolen check; outraged, the host attacks his guest. Their fistfight upsets a decorative display of glass balls, which spill down the stairs and into a sunken bathtub, where Jill—despondent over the murders—has committed suicide. After Jill joins the other bodies in what now resembles a carousel of death in the meat locker, Nick refuses to stay there like a sitting duck and leaves the house in anger. Jack, George, and Trudy decide to protect themselves by keeping watch over one another. They drink to pass the time. Trudy toys with George's tape recorder, which she drunkenly leaves in record mode before passing out with her two comrades on the floor. Soon after, George's yacht returns to the island and its crew find the entire beach house spotless and empty, with no one lying passed out on the floor. Later, when the three revive, George finds the tape recorder played out and rewinds it to hear the Captain and crewmen searching the house. They cannot understand how the rescue team failed to see them on the floor, and blame Nick—but they find that his dead body has somehow joined the others in the freezer during their black-out.

George offers Trudy $1,000,000 for Farrell's formula, which she reveals still exists on microfilm (the whereabouts of which only she knows), and she accepts the offer. George uncovers the launch he has hidden with palm fronds and, upon returning to the house for Trudy, finds Jack aiming a rifle at him. Jack confesses that he was responsible for all the murders, except Farrell's—a confession which Isabelle overhears. Jack shoots George dead. Terrified, Trudy bargains with Jack, offering the formula in exchange for his $1,000,000 check (she has already pocketed George's). As the microfilm and check are exchanged in the deep freeze locker, Trudy shoots Jack in the face with a pistol secreted in her handbag—and Jack returns fire, killing her. Isabelle enters the freezer to take the check from Trudy, and the microfilm from Jack—but he is not entirely dead yet, and briefly lashes out in a final spasm of greed. Isabella manages to escape with the money and the formula, locking the freezer door behind her.

In a short coda scene, Isabelle—transformed from an attractive teenager into a beautiful young millionairess—visits Fritz (yes, Fritz!) in a prison, where he has been sentenced to death by hanging for murdering his partner, the rightful discoverer of his industrial resin. A brief conversation between them reveals that Isabelle fell in love with Fritz at first sight and, inspired by George's false slaying of Marie, decided to save him from his murderous colleagues by shooting him with a sodium pentothal pellet, which her game warden father uses to tranquilize animals on the island. Unfortunately, because animals do not speak, Isabelle was unaware of sodium pentothal's properties as a truth serum, and when Fritz was given over to protective custody, he confessed to his crimes in his stupor. Isabelle explains to Fritz that she is broke. He is astounded that she has already spent three million dollars, but she explains that only two million has been spent; she needs the number of Nick's private Swiss bank account in order to collect the remaining









THE CAST *(left to right): William Berger as Fritz, Ira von Fürstenberg as Trudy, Teodoro Corrà as George, Helena Ronée as Peggy, Maurice Poli as Nick, Edith Meloni as Jill, Ely Galleani as Isabelle and Howard Ross (a.k.a. Renato Rossini) as Jack.*

unspent million. Reasoning that she saved his life, after all, and that he will have no use for the money where he is going, Fritz whispers the account number into her ear. Isabelle skips merrily away, returns to her parked Rolls-Royce, and instructs her driver to take her to Lausanne.

Cast

Signed to direct this film after it had been cast, Bava found himself working with actors whose names and abilities he did not know. He adapted to his circumstances with a characteristic sense of absurdity: "I often asked the actors who didn't arrive on set at the same time as myself to repeat their names for me, out of simple Christian charity!"[8]

Though Bava had no input into the film's casting, it is hard to imagine him picking a more appropriate or suitable group of actors. Some of the performances may be wooden, and most of them may be two-dimensional, but each of the actors is visually correct and their lack of warmth and personality actually helps to sell them as the soulless business people they are supposed to be, just as their lack of depth brings everything one needs to know about them on a purely visual plane.

German actress and wealthy socialite Ira von Fürstenberg—born Virginia Caroline Theresa Pankrazia Goldina von Fürstenberg on April 17, 1940, in Rome—received top billing as Trudy, and—according to Maurice Poli—was also one of the film's principal investors. Svelte and a full six feet tall, Fürstenberg was born and formerly wed to nobility, being the ex-wife of Prince Alphonso von Hohenlohe-Langenburg, with whom she had two sons. She was always better known for her family's fortune than as an actress, though, at the time of production, she had more than a half-dozen films to her credit, including Alberto Lattuada's *Matchless* (1966) and Robert Hossein's *J'ai tué Rasputin/I Killed Rasputin* (1967).

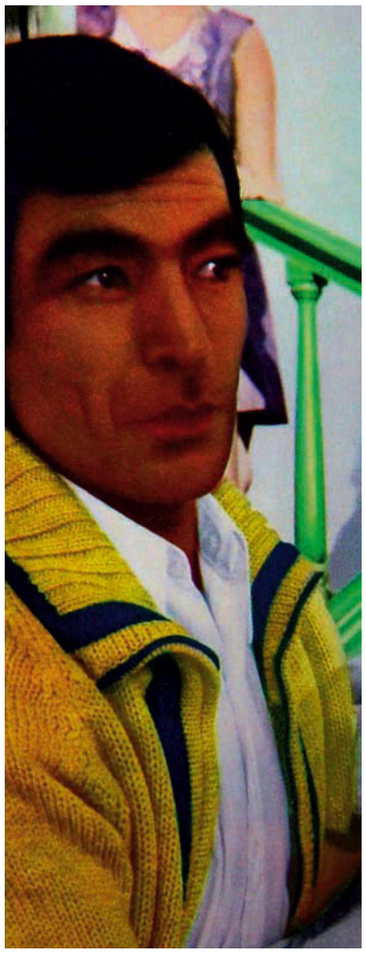
As one of the film's investors, Fürstenberg was positioned front and center in the original spate of Italian advertising materials for the picture, but in re-release, she was replaced by buxom Edwige Fenech, who is certainly the center of attention in the film itself. Born December 24, 1948, in Bône (now Annaba), Algeria, Fenech ascended to stardom after breaking off from Giuseppe Zaccariello, shortly after this film, and allying herself with producer Luciano Martino. Martino's brother Sergio subsequently directed Fenech in a series of *gialli* which—along with Dario Argento's psycho-thrillers—redefined the genre for the 1970s. Fenech's films for Martino include *Lo strano vizio della signora Wardh/Next!* (1971), *Tutti i colori del buio/They're Coming to Get You!* (1972), and *Il tuo vizio è una stanza chiusa e solo io ne ho la chiave/Gently Before She* Dies (1973). During this interval, in 1972, she married Luciano Martino—who had since divorced *I vampiri* star Wandisa Guida—and they remained married for ten years, and remain friendly to this day. Italy's reigning sex star of the 1970s, Fenech worked with Sergio Martino as recently as the 1995 TV miniseries *Delitti privati*. Still in demand as an actress, primarily on Italian television, she currently heads her own production company, Immagine e Cinema.

Seen here with his blonde hair in Einsteinian disarray, William Berger was born in Austria on January 20, 1928, and educated at New York's Columbia University, where he excelled as a track and field athlete. After spending several years in America as a television actor—billed as "Bill Berger"—on soap operas like *The Edge of Night* and guest series appearances (including *Route 66*'s episode "Lizard's Leg and Owlet's Wing," in which he worked opposite Boris Karloff, Peter Lorre and Lon Chaney Jr.), Berger relocated to Rome. He began his long career in Italian films with Mario Maffei's *La grande notte di Ringo* (1965) and starred in at least twenty Italian Westerns, including most of the Sartana series. In his private life, Berger was a well-known proponent of communal living and psychedelic experimentation. "Bill was heavily into drugs and it could interfere with

8 Ornella Volta, "Conversation avec Mario Bava," *Positif* 138, May 1972, 44–48.

shooting, sometimes," admits actor Brett Halsey, who worked with Berger on several occasions. "I can remember we were filming a Western together and we were on horseback, like in a posse. I was talking to him and, as I talked to him, Bill started slowly . . . sliding off his horse. Leaning over until he fell off. Another time, I found him, off in the woods, sitting in a tree and reading a book—but the book was *upside down!* But he was a nice man and had a sense of humor about himself."

In 1966, while Berger was playing the lead role in Elio Scardamaglia's *La lama nel corpo/The Murder Clinic* (1966), his wife Carol was arrested for possession of drugs and, shockingly, died while in custody. "She was put in jail," Halsey explains, "but she was a diabetic, which they didn't know, and died from lack of insulin." Her death had a shattering effect on Berger, who nevertheless continued with his acting career, which he pursued with a lack of ambition, always being more interested in his life and children than in his work, a stance he shared in common with his *5 bambole . . .* character. Among his later European co-productions were Tonino Valerii's *Mio caro assassino* (1971), Jess Franco's *Los Ojos Siniestros del Dr. Orloff* (1973, in which he played Dr. Orloff) and *Liebesbriefe einer Portugiesischen Nonne/Love Letters of a Portuguese Nun* (1977), Lamberto Bava's *Oceano rosso/Devilfish* a.k.a. *Monster Shark* (1984), Ruggero Deodato's *Dial Help* (1989), and several other films for Jess Franco—until his death from a heart attack on October 2, 1993. His daughter, actress Katya Berger (b. 1964), appeared in some prominent French films of the 1980s, including Marco Ferreri's *Storie di ordinaria follie/Tales of Ordinary Madness* (1981) and Jean-Jacques Beineix' *La Lune dans le Caniveau/The Moon in the Gutter* (1983).



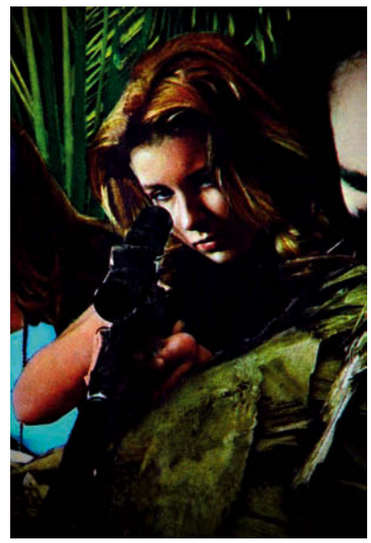
Maurice Poli (not Maurizio, as sometimes claimed) was born in Sfax, Tunisia, in 1933 to Tunisian and Italian parents. He began acting in Paris, where he appeared with his brother Axel in Jean Herman's short film *La Quille* (1961), which was followed by small parts in Mauro Bolognini's *La viaccia/The Lovemakers, The Longest Day* and the Steve Reeves *peplum La leggenda de Enea/The Avenger* (all 1962). This led to a more prominent supporting role in another Reeves adventure, *Sandokan la tigre di Mompracem/Sandokan the Great* (1963). In 1965, after a successful supporting role in the French television series *Belle et Sébastien,* Poli took the lead role in a spy series that lasted only one season: *Frédéric la gardian.* He also played the recurring role of Alfred in Marco Vicario's two "Seven Golden Men" features *Sette uomini d'oro/Seven Golden Men* (1965) *and Il grande colpo dei setti uomini d'oro/Seven Golden Men Strike Back* (1966). After his role in *5 bambole . . .* Poli would reunite with Bava twice more, most importantly as the leader of the criminal gang in the ensemble crime drama *Cani arrabbiati/Rabid Dogs* a.k.a. *Kidnapped.* Poli's later work in films consisted mostly of low-budget Italian erotica, such as *Malombra* (directed by Bruno Gaburro, the ex-husband of Erika Blanc). Today he is retired and makes his home in the Flaminio district of Rome, where he devotes himself to his lifelong hobbies of geology and archaeology.

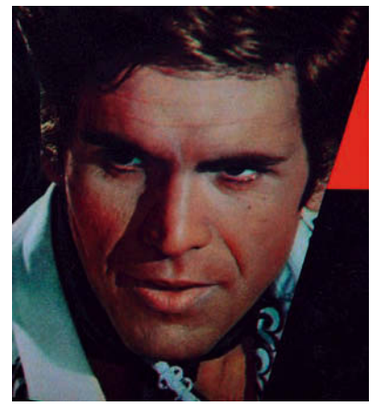


Prior to *5 bambole . . .* Maurice Poli and Howard Ross had both acted in Italian Westerns under pokey pseudonyms; Poli as "Monty Greenwood," and Ross [real name: Renato Rossini] as "Red Ross" in Bava's *Ringo del Nebraska.* Born in Rome in 1938, Ross had also co-starred in Guido Malatesta's penultimate film *Le calde notte di Poppea* (1969), which Malatesta directed under his alias of "James Reed." Ross was the only male cast member of *5 bambole . . .* who went on to become a fixture of *giallo* productions. His later Italian thrillers include Alfonso Brescia's *Una ragazza tutta nuda assassinata nel parco* ("Nude Girl Found Murdered in the Park," 1972), Giuseppe Bennati's *L'assassino ha riservato nove poltrone/The Killer Reserved Nine Seats* (1974), and the curiously named *Cinque donne per l'assassino/Five Women for the Killer* (1972).

Teodoro Corrà (sometimes credited as "Doro Corrà") was also a veteran of Italian Westerns, including Sergio Garrone's *Django il bastardo/Django the Bastard* and Piero Pierotti's *Testa o croce/Heads or Tails* (both 1969). Corrà appears to have based his performance as George Stark on Bava himself, employing the director's sly sense of humor and animated body language into his characterization. Bava liked the actor well enough to cast him as the villain of his next picture, *Roy Colt & Winchester Jack.*

Helena Ronée, an attractive blonde French actress, entered films with Mario Monicelli's black comedy *Toh, é morto la nonne* (1968) and briefly specialized in lightweight romantic fare. Her most notable screen appearance,









BAVA *discouraged Edwige Fenech from playing some scenes nude, but she nearly caught cold nevertheless running half-naked on a beach in October.*

aside from her role as Peggy, was as one of Blofeld's "Angels of Death" in the James Bond picture, *On Her Majesty's Secret Service* (1969).

Newcomer Ely Galleani, who plays Isabelle, was—like Ira von Fürstenberg—of noble blood. The daughter of Count de Galleani and a Polish noblewoman, she was born Federica Eleonora De Galleani on April 24, 1953, in Alassio, a district of Savona only a few kilometers distant from Mario Bava's own birthplace of Sanremo. *5 bambole . . .* is often cited as her first film, but she had prior experience at working onscreen. "It was, in a manner of speaking, my very first picture," she supposes. "Before that, I did only a couple of films as an extra, and one other little role in cinema. I was very young at the time and Mario really coddled me."

Galleani's billing in the picture is bewildering, to say the least. On the film's first Italian poster design, she is credited as "Federica De Galleani," while onscreen, and also on the locandina and lobby cards, she is identified as "Justine Gall." A program booklet from the first release was printed bearing the name of Federica De Galleani, but was overlaid with a strip of tape bearing the "Justine Gall" name! A variety of screen names is attached to her screen career—including "Elly De Galeani," "Edy Galleani," and "Ely Gall"—which included such films as Lucio Fulci's acid-drenched *giallo, Una lucertola con la pelle di donna/Lizard in a Woman's Skin* (1971, in which she played Florinda Bolkan's daughter), Corràdo Farina's *Baba Yaga/Kiss Me Kill Me* (1973), Denis Héroux' *Ne pour l'Enfer/Naked Massacre* (1976), and two of Joe D'Amato's "Black Emanuelle" films, *Emanuelle nera orient reportage/Emanuelle in Bangkok* (1976) and *La via della prostituzione/Emanuelle and the White Slave Trade* (1977). Some sources credit Galleani with playing the witch Elizabeth Holle in Bava's *Baron Blood*, but this is not true. In 1972, she married Carlo Vanzina, the son of Stefano "Steno" Vanzina, who was destined to become a successful director in his own right. (The best known of his forty-plus films, to American viewers, might be the 1983 *giallo, Sotto il vestito niente/Nothing Underneath*, starring Donald Pleasence.) They separated only one year later, and this, coupled with some admitted drug problems and the decline in Italian film production, left Galleani with few options to continue her acting career. She retired from the screen in 1978. Today, her old problems now overcome, she makes her living as an accountant in her hometown of Alassio.

Even more bewildering than Galleani's screen credit is the listing of Mario Bianchi as assistant director. Bianchi says he never worked for Mario Bava in this capacity and doesn't know he was credited as such in *5 bambole per la luna d'agosto*.

Production

Despite the haste of the proceedings, filming commenced with a sense of occasion and the attractive cast was trotted out for a press conference, which was filmed as a newsreel item. In this black-and-white footage, the cast look quite elegant as they stand and pose and whisper amongst themselves under the bombardment of *paparazzi* flashbulbs—with their camera-shy director nowhere in sight.

Ely Galleani recalls that the film's budget was so low that most of the cast members were obliged to wear their own clothing, as there was no money for wardrobe. "She was me," Galleani says of her character, Isabelle. "I used my own clothes. I was just like Isabelle, too, in that particular moment of my life, so they asked me to wear my real things for the movie. That dress was an awesome gift from a lovely friend of mine, who was French. He had a fabulous striped dog . . . So I went around Paris with this striped dress and the striped dog . . . and yes, I was *verrrry* sexy!" Given the film's emphasis of the color blue, Galleani's orange-and-yellow striped dress provides a dazzling contrast yet fits in perfectly with its modernistic *mise-en-scène*.

"My first encounter with Mario Bava was a strange one," remembers Maurice Poli, in reference to Bava's sudden presence on the set as director. "However, he was extremely pleasant and professional—and intelligent. There was an air of serenity when we made this film."

Bava himself remembered the circumstances quite differently. "We worked under horrendous conditions," he shuddered. "It was October, terribly cold, and almost all the scenes were set on the beach as if it were summer."[9] Bava shot the beach scenes on the Torre Astura coastline near Anzio, where he had filmed similar scenes for *La frusta e il corpo* in 1963. For the night scene in which Marie discovers the murdered body of her lover aboard ship and must run back to the house, Edwige Fenech had to race up the beach and through a palm-lined area wearing nothing but panties and a thin scarf clutched to her breasts, when the sun was not at its warmest—nearly catching her death of cold.

It was on this same beach that Bava created a glass matte to supply the

establishing shots of the Starks' fabulous beach house, which occupies the same promontory as Castle Menliff in *La frusta e il corpo.* The interiors were photographed inside a real, similar-looking beach house that was located not far from the beach. This highly decorous setting for the ugly murders yet to come show that Bava was perhaps better attuned to Agatha Christie's intentions with *Ten Little Indians* than any of the filmmakers who made authorized adaptations for the screen, as it is the only adaptation or imitation of the novel ever filmed to be staged in the sort of fantastic modern house Christie described. (Old, dark mansions have sufficed for everyone else.)

Interviewed near the end of his life, actor William Berger remembered little about the actual filming of *5 bambole,* but he retained vivid memories of Bava's camera trickery. "One of the few things I recall," he told interviewer Christian Kessler, "is that Bava loved to play with special effects. He was the first director I worked with who used the matte shot technique, and he painted the glass plates himself. I never saw this with any other director, before or afterwards. He painted a house on the hill, then surrounded it with real foliage, placed it in front of the camera and you really can't see the trick onscreen."

Ely Galleani was impressed by the same spectacle: "Bava was a unique talent and an incredible magician. He personally painted the villa on a sheet of glass—including even the smallest details—and then he fixed the camera and lights, in such a way that the structure appeared to be positioned on the cliff in background. He looked something like the ultimate old-fashioned daydreamer . . . Even if he had to complete a movie with two chips, he was a complete perfectionist; his craftsmanship and visual style of filmmaking were truly terrific and invaluable. The set was quite an exacting place to work, not only because we actors had to be good, but there was also a technical side that had to work to perfection. Those were exhausting days on *5 bambole* . . . days that seemed never-ending, but they were unforgettable at the same time."

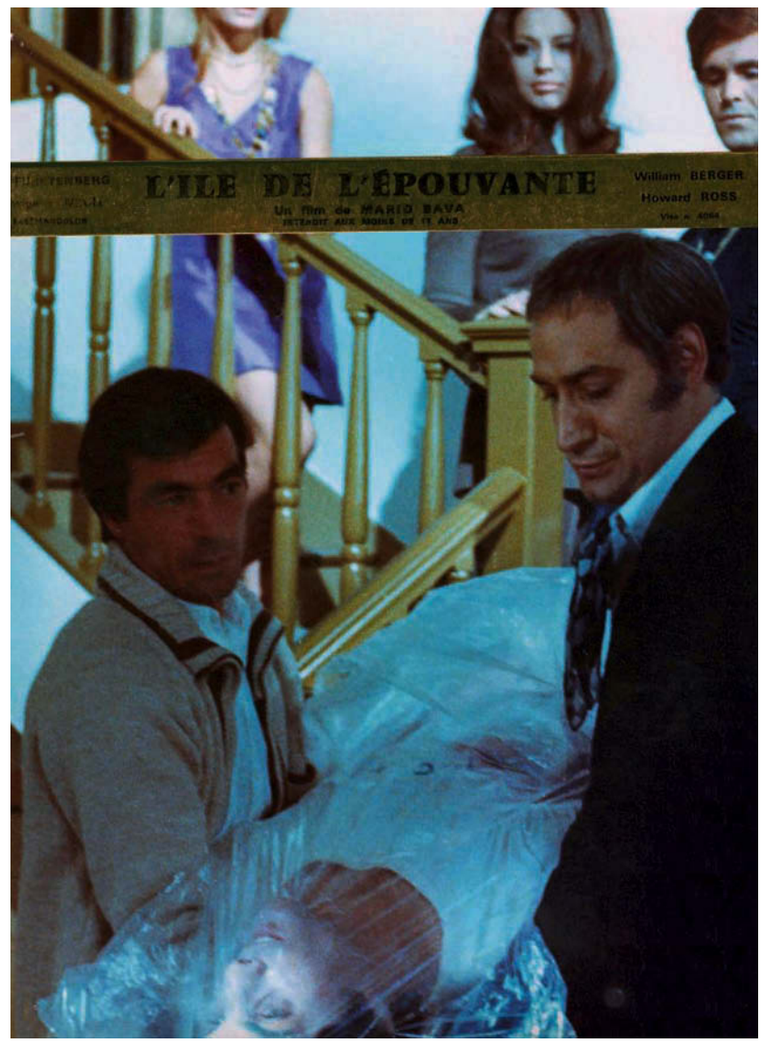
In the earliest night views of the matte, it accommodates not only a house but black crepe paper silhouettes of the yacht, launch, and pier to the left of the frame. The perfect view of the matte and its positioning can be obtained on the Image Entertainment DVD at 21:30. The glass matte covers the entire field of vision in this shot. William Berger and Teodoro Corrà are on the other side of the glass, seeming to run toward the beach house, which is painted on the glass. Once they gain a certain distance, Ely Galleani steps into the foreground of the shot, on the same side of the matte as the camera, allowing her to block it from view and effectively "sell" it as a piece of actual scenery. But if one steps through the shot, Galleani can be seen reflected on the glass in two or three frames prior to her arrival, as she stands off-camera awaiting her cue.

While on the subject of the film's cinematography, it should be noted that, shortly before the filming of *5 bambole per la luna d'agosto*, a camera operator named Emilio Varriano joined the Bava squad. Varriano's previous work had included stints as camera operator for directors Alberto Cardone (*Mille dollari sul nero/Blood at Sundown*, 1966) and Gianfranco Parolini (two "Kommissar X" films).

"I was already familiar with Bava as a cinematographer," Varriano says, "and I would have done anything when they told me there was a chance I might work with him. Before hiring me, though, Bava tested me. With a completely closed zoom, he told me to follow the movements of his hand for a couple of minutes. From that, he deduced that I was up to the task, and I became a part of his crew . . . He had a regular crew, including his chief electrician Antonio Rinaldi, whom he valued a great deal. But it was me, as a cameraman, who kept my 'eye on the hole,' as we used to say. Bava wasn't the typical director who doesn't know anything about cinematography, of course, and you couldn't give him any advice. It was *he* who told *me* what *I* had to do, but I was very happy to work with him because there was a real satisfaction when he sat on the dolly and invented things. He was a bit stern, perhaps, but he was very open with all of us; he was nice. We didn't stop working for a single day."

Varriano's tantalizing comment about the Bava squad's activity during this period is indicative of the fact that Bava was now supplementing his time between feature films with TV commercial and industrial film work, none of which was credited or has been properly catalogued.

Maurice Poli's favorite memories of the picture concern his female costars, particularly Edwige Fenech, who played his wife. "Working with Edwige was great. Here was this beautiful young girl—just out of her teens, having only made a few films, and thrilled to be working with me! She remembered watching me on television in Tunisia when she was a teenager. She said she was so happy to be married to 'a real star' [*laughs*], even if it was just in a film. So she was quite wide-eyed around me, because she knew me as this French TV star. So we became friends, and stayed friends for years and years. Edwige was very proud of her body—and why not? [Luciano] Martino was a lucky man. However, Mario Bava didn't want any of that. Everything had to be suggested. I remember Edwige coming out of the shower naked and Mario was very embarrassed. 'What are the producers wanting me to shoot now?' I think I remember him saying. But as for me, *I* didn't mind!"



NICK, *Trudy, Jack, and George carry the latest casualty to the meat locker carousel.*

9 Cozzi.

Poli also admits to misbehaving on the set, while shooting Nick's attempts to thaw "the beautiful icicle, Trudy" (Fürstenberg). "A very beautiful woman," he remembers. "She had a great figure on her. The problem was, when she walked, she had these unusual swollen ankles that just didn't seem to go with the rest of her body. She wasn't an actress; she was a princess, a real diva. Anyway, I had this scene with Fürstenberg on the beach, where I had to lightly stroke her neck, her chest. I remember Mario saying, when we were going to do this scene, 'Touch her—touch her intimately.' It was a cool day. Mario said, 'Action' and told me to start unbuttoning her blouse. With fast and nimble fingers, I undid her blouse, scooped her breast out and started squeezing! Ahhh! I never felt a finer, more aristocratic breast! Ira was taken aback and squealed over her shoulder, 'Agggh! Mario! Mario! Stop this scene! This wasn't in the script! Cut!' Bava was standing there, next to the camera, and I swear that I saw him smile in a naughty way—maybe even snicker, but I can't be sure."

Working in the cinematic equivalent of a dying man's shoes, Bava managed to assert his vision on two important aspects of the screenplay. He took credit for the idea of having the corpses bagged in polythene shrouds in the walk-in freezer, which is believable considering the similarly shrouded dead of *Terrore nello spazio*: "In the screenplay, they were buried underground with lots of cross-shaped headstones—like in the Westerns!" [10] He also made the important decision "to change the murderer's identity to that of the hero, thereby sentencing him to a lifetime of hard labor. I had to avenge myself somehow!" he reasoned. [11]

Both William Berger and Ely Galleani, the participants in the new coda, preferred Bava's twist on the ending and were pleased by the measure of substance it brought to an otherwise shallow picture. "I think what is important to understand is that bad things never serve a purpose in life, because they always lead to nothing," Galleani says. "In my opinion, this is a message that Mario—who was a very smart, clever, wise, and tender-hearted person—actually wanted to convey in all of his movies: that the negative energy that people project will ultimately return to them, in the end, to bring them down. It's as simple as that."



MARIE *tries to seduce the resin formula out of Fritz, but he's not taking the bait.*

Unfortunately, though Bava took an interest in improvising a better ending for the picture, he also left in the final assembly a scene that flagrantly contradicts the movie's most important revelation. Viewers attuned to the narrative logic of the picture will balk at Jack's admission that he was responsible for all of the murders (except Fritz') since he was clearly still in bed when Peg was shot in the head while sitting outside on the patio, and also shown reacting with surprise to his discovery of her dead body. Bava may have thought he was changing the murderer's identity by putting (the presumably dead) Fritz in prison, but the dialogue reveals him to be just a murderer, not the murderer responsible for the entire body count. So, in fact, Bava did not change the murderer's identity; what he did was to add a dimensional layer to the otherwise thin narrative with one of his signature directorial traits: a backstory that reveals the hero to be just as vicious as everyone else in this microcosm of humankind.

One of the most interesting characteristics of the cinematography is its frequent emphasis on a single color, which inspired Pascal Martinet to describe the film as "a veritable symphony of blue." The atmosphere of death, the cold bodies in the freezer, may have led Bava to think of cyan—as in cyanide—and several of the beachside scenes were filmed with blue gel filters, either to emphasize the blue that was already there, or to assert blue where there was none. When Ely Galleani had to change from her orange striped dress to other items of personal apparel, she accommodated her director's color scheme by wearing a blue blouse and blue jeans.

For the first and only time in his career, Bava was required by the film's minimal budget to edit *5 bambole per la luna d'agosto* entirely by himself. Evidently, this turned out to be a positive experience, as would Bava later remark that "Editing is the most beautiful thing in the world." [12] Different edits of the picture exist, the longest on record being an Italian version alleged to run 85 minutes. It is doubtful that a print of such length exists. The French and British versions are virtually identical, running about 81 minutes, and appear to be complete. These versions fade to black over the extended end titles with the Il Balletto di Bronzo music, but the version released on DVD in America by Image Entertainment postpones the fade-out, including more footage inside the car as Isabelle is driven away down a winding road. The Image version,

being a PAL conversion, runs 25 frames per second and is thus also time-compressed; its 78:10 running time is equal to 81:20 at the correct projection speed of 24 frames per second.

Music

As with most other facets of this production, Bava had no say in the selection of a composer for *5 bambole.* The job went to the Florentine jazz composer/musician Piero Umiliani, with whom Bava had previously worked on his first Western, *La strada per Fort Alamo,* in 1964. While that earlier effort was unlikely to have aroused any enthusiasm on Bava's part, Umiliani was now entering into what many listeners regard as the most inspired phase of his career, and he brought to Bava's film an infectious, inventive score with few parallels in its buoyancy and instrumental color.

With the exception of a quirky carousel theme (*"Fantoccio grottesco"*) that complements perfectly the addition of each new polythene-bagged corpse to the house's walk-in freezer, there is every indication that most of the score—an impish and colorful assortment of cues that work and rework two central themes—was written from the composer's own inspiration, not in response to filmed footage.

The main theme, "*5 bambole"*—especially as it is heard in full on the soundtrack album—reveals close organic ties to the score which Umiliani had recently penned for Luigi Scattini's *mondo* movie *Svezia, inferno e paradiso/Sweden Heaven and Hell,* released in September 1968. Opening with a one-two, one-two-three-four-five beat tapped out on a snare rim with escalating staccato brass accompaniment, the piece initially evokes an atmosphere of espionage. This is dissipated, however, with the introduction of the vocals—heard only on the soundtrack album, not in the film—which are sung over a samba-themed accompaniment. After two increasingly ornamented run-throughs of the "One-two, one-two-three-four-five dolls" vocal, and a middle-eight played by conversing harpsichord and electric piano, a familiar voice enters. It reprises the "Mah-Nà Mah-Nà" vocal (by Alessandro Alessandroni) that would become world-famous as a novelty recording in 1970, following the US release of *Sweden Heaven and Hell,* when Jim Henson selected it as a pantomime performance piece for his Muppets. Bright instrumentation, particularly from the electric keyboard, keeps the track buoyant, and with the vocals in place, it becomes a classic bit of tongue-in-cheek, a kind of retroactive love letter to the film itself. The theme is reprised throughout the film at different tempi, with different instruments at the fore (tenor saxophone, Hammond organ, sitar, sultry flute) and aft (brass, gently plucked harp strings, stuns of electric guitar, brushes on snare), and its restatements and perpetual reinvention make it an absolute joy.

The other main theme theme, *"Luna d'agosto"* is first heard under the main titles, and is a lilting piece with harpsichordized electric keyboard playing the main melody over a backwash of gently strummed acoustic guitar. It is also reprised throughout the film in various redressings. One (designated as "M5"), which accompanies the discovery of Marie's corpse, and is a thumping, 4/4 rock variation played by Hammond organ, electric bass, and drum kit. Another is the sublime *"Notte di luna,"* which punctuates the main theme's bass lines with exotic flourishes of harp and celeste, before phasing into a sweetly lazy restatement of the theme, first on solo trumpet over electric jazz guitar, then with the trumpet trading phrases with a flute. *"Luna di Piero Agosto"* is a lovely, though very brief reprise whistled over a repeated three-note pattern played on sparkling celeste.

"*Danza primitiva"* is the percussive piece that accompanies Fenech's dance at the beginning of the film, a frenzy of drum and vibraphone percussion that is overcome by a lush foliage of dulcimerized keyboard, quirky sitar, and eventually vocal melismi. *"Interludio azzuro"* is distinguished by a repeated seven-note riff, which moves from piano to a more rocking Hammond organ interpretation over rock percussion and fluttering guitar. *"Interludio Giallo"* has a delightfully introspective, eight-note pattern which recurs over an alternating time signature. The soundtrack album also contains a cue not heard in the English-language edition: "*Bambola omicida,"* which accompanies the penultimate scene of Isabelle's visit to Fritz in prison in the Italian version. It opens with a blast of brass, a polyrhythmic drum part modelled on James Brown's 1966 hit "Cold Sweat," and dissonant steel drum percussion before introducing a brassy, up-tempo fanfare reprise of the *"Luna d'agosto"* theme, which then eases down to a slower pace with smears of Hammond organ coloration.

On first viewing, the music's eccentric ebullience can be distracting, working against the parade of murders onscreen almost to the point of trivializing or making fun of them, and its prominence in the sound mix is initially disturbing in ways that are hard to explain. After my own first viewing, I came away feeling that it was the worst score ever forced on Bava. I have no idea whether or not Umiliani's music was "forced" on Bava, but I have since come to love this score. It is, first and foremost, great jazz, but its range of instrumentation is also quite audacious, especially in this milieu, and it seems to reinforce the specific value of *5 bambole per la luna d'agosto* as a confection, a bon bon of abominable acts. Musically, it may go against the film's grain, but in doing

PEGGY *is found shot through the forehead.*



10 Ibid.
11 Volta.
12 Abruzzese.



JILL, *in a striking psychedelic caftan, drops her painting easel and oils as she discovers Jacques' body washed ashore, covered in sand crabs.*

so, it lends a distinctive personality to the proceedings that would otherwise be lacking. In a sense, the music doesn't score the film, but rather our own enjoyment of it. Its prominence in the sound mix was a bizarre novelty at the time, but now seems almost visionary in its prediction of such music-driven *gialli* as Argento's *Suspiria* (1977) and *Tenebrae/Unsane* (1982).

When I heard of Piero Umiliani's death from a heart attack on February 23, 2001, my first thought was of this music; I hope he died aware of how many people love it. After being released in a limited Italian 12" vinyl edition in 1969 (now one of the most hotly sought-after Bava collectibles), the music became unavailable until the late 1990s, when an expanded CD release was licensed to Japan. A subsequent, remixed edition with additional bonus tracks was released the following year on the Cinevox label. At the time of Umiliani's death, his *5 bambole* score was experiencing this rebirth of interest, just as the film itself was on the verge of its first American release, as a DVD. The availability of the film has only multiplied the number of admirers of this music, which seemed to come into its own with the dawning of the retro-lounge music craze.

None of the soundtrack releases from this film have ever included *"Ti risveglierai con me,"* the song by the Italian progressive rock band Il Balletto di Bronzo which is heard over the end credits of *5 bambole*. It appeared on their 1970 RCA album *Sirio 2222*, as did their song *"Neve calda,"* which is also named in the end titles but which is not actually heard in the movie itself. Although he was not a member of the band at the time these songs were used, Il Balletto di Bronzo's subsequent leader Gianni Leone (who joined around the time of their second album, 1972's *Ys*) has claimed that the band's music was used in the film without their knowledge or permission.

Release

Released on St. Valentine's Day 1970, *5 bambole per la luna d'agosto* was, predictably, not a success at the Italian boxoffice. Its Italian theatrical release was so limited that Roman poster shops were inundated with unused *locandinas*, which can be easily found to this day. From there, it proceeded to make a painfully slow circuit of the globe. Two years passed before the film was picked up for distribution in France, Turkey, and the United Kingdom. In France, it was marketed under a more aggressively sexy title that translates as "Five Girls on a Hot Summer Night." It was issued in Turkey as one of a series of Edwige Fenech films that were given uniform titles in celebration of what their Turkish distributor perceived to be her unique screen persona. Thus, *5 bambole* was retitled *Yilan Rhulu Kadinin Yntykami* ("Revenge of the Woman With the Spirit of the Snake"), which followed the release of Sergio Martino's 1970 *giallo, Lo strano vizio della signora Wardh/Next!* as *Yilan Ruhlu Kadin: Seks ve Cyanyet* ("The Woman With the Spirit of a Snake: Sex and Murder").

An English-dubbed print was released in Great Britain by E. J. Fancey as *Five Dolls for an August Moon*, with the numeral spelled out. Reviewing it for *Monthly Film Bulletin* was Tom Milne, who commented that "despite its alluring title and ingenious ending, this is a rather formulary variation on the *Ten Little Niggers* theme, and by no means Bava at his best . . . the film is almost totally devoid of suspense . . . nevertheless, as always in a Bava film, each image is superbly designed—George's sudden appearance in a golden, scarlet-plumed demon mask during the wild party at the beginning; the houseboy's corpse wrapped in polythene and hanging on a meat-hook alongside the carcasses of beef in the freezer; a glittery, silvery stole being slowly dragged through a room by a mysterious, coveted hand; above all, the skillful use of crimson stains as a motif in both sets and costumes—making *Five Dolls* a pleasure to watch even when the plot flags and the zooms proliferate."[13]

Despite the availability of an English print, *5 bambole* became the first of Mario Bava's directorial outings to fail to secure distribution in the United States. Some sources report a US release under the title *Island of Terror* in 1970, but evidence in support of this—posters, stills, etc.—has not been forthcoming. There were no 35 mm prints of the film available to include the picture in the earliest major Bava retrospectives in San Francisco, Los Angeles, New York, and at the British Film Institute in London. This changed when Alfredo Leone acquired the rights to the picture in 2000 and had a beautiful 35 mm print struck as the film was being restored for its DVD release in early 2001. *5 Dolls for an August Moon* had its US theatrical debut at the American Cinematheque's Mario Bava retrospective in Los Angeles, in June 2002.

Commentary

Despite its maker's low opinion of it, *5 bambole per la luna d'agosto* is neither Mario Bava's worst film, nor as devoid of personal touches as he claimed. Regardless of the script he was given to work with, and his lack of involvement in the preproduction stages, the film is an invaluable chapter in Bava's filmography, as it alone shows what he was capable of achieving without his usual meticulous preparations, without the full support of his usual crew, and when left alone in an editing room.

When Bava's mentor Riccardo Freda saw the film in his role as chairman of the Italian censor board, he was aghast at what he perceived as Bava's flagrant contempt for the material, and his participation in it. "He made *5 bambole per la luna d'agosto* and justified his participation by saying that he did it only for the money," Freda observed. "Obviously, we make films to make money, but if we accept this responsibility, we should always strive for the best possible result, even though we work in adverse conditions." [14] Bava himself candidly told the press that *5 bambole* left his daughter Elena concerned for his sanity. "My daughter saw it when she was in Padua, and she asked me if I was insane when I made it," he said cheerfully. [15]

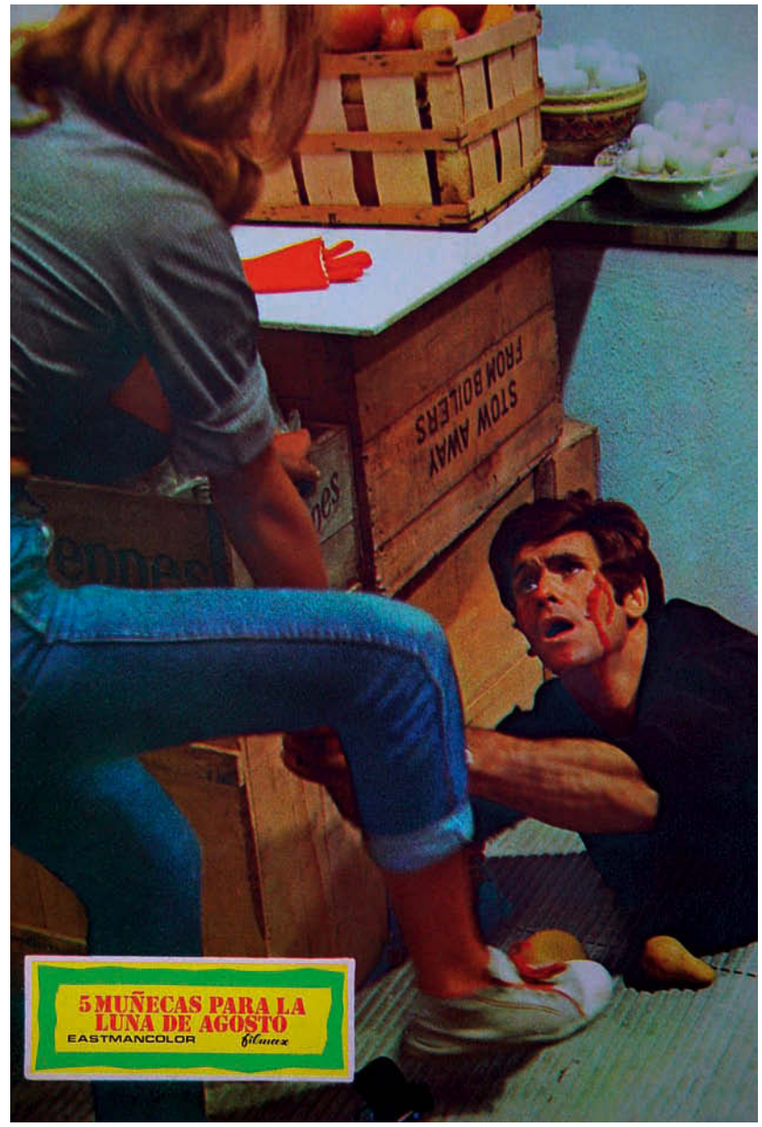
But if any of us were to be granted a glimpse of the future, we might well interpret it as a glimpse into madness. With each passing year, *5 bambole per la luna d'agosto* seems to stand out more and more as Bava's most contemporary work in both look and feel; it is not inconceivable that, twenty or even fifty years from now, it may be commonly regarded as his most enduring film. In a sense, our world is already catching up with it. George A. Romero's *Bruiser* (2000), while outwardly a horror film, is really an indictment of the dog-eat-dog business practices that are becoming increasingly common in American business and personal interaction; it dramatizes the necessity of an innocent to "get his hands dirty" in order to get ahead, or at least to earn a face worth presenting to the rest of the world. *5 bambole . . .* actually makes many of the same points, and with more restraint, but it originates from a more restrained period. While Romero's film doesn't offer any specific solutions to the problem it poses, other than to roar louder than the person roaring at you, one gets the sense from *5 bambole . . .* that art may be the last refuge of our civility.

With nothing to lose, Bava filmed *5 bambole . . .* with a greater than usual degree of creative abandon—sometimes reckless, sometimes familiar (when Jacques is found dead on the beach, his camera suspiciously eyes each of the survivors in a manner that recalls *Sei donne per l'assassino*), and always audacious. Working again with Antonio Rinaldi, who arguably produced his finest work ever in this film, he plays with wide-angle lenses, gels, reflections, distortions, and movement with childlike exuberance. Admittedly, in places, it is an angry, sloppy film, seething with apparent indignation or self-loathing, which is apparent from the way its potential for suspense—the *raison d'etre* of *any* thriller, after all—is repeatedly sabotaged by the director. Every corpse is presented as a *fait accompli* without the traditional foreplay of suspense. When Marie's dead body shows up impaled on the tree—signed, sealed, and delivered, at the end of an outrageous whip pan—and even moreso when Nick is added to the deep freeze while all three survivors are knocked out by drugged drinks, we can feel Bava's impatience with the scenario's mechanical acceleration of the obvious. [16] As Trudy aptly remarks, "Everyone seems to be waiting for something that's not happening." And yet, at the same time, the film manages to portray death in the way it is most commonly felt: as a sudden and inexplicable subtraction from the cast of characters surrounding our own ongoing lives. We watch this movie knowing that a series of deaths is inevitable, we expect to be shocked by them, and Bava keeps both promises while cheating us of the pleasure we expect to take in their commission. Pleasure he reserves for the film's depictions of beauty, color, art, the natural majesty of the seaside.

Although *5 bambole . . .* was lensed at a time when Bava could take full advantage of the screen's new freedoms, he chose instead to subvert that expectation, as well. The film's point of view is sometimes deliberately titillating, even prurient—witness the early thrusts of the zoom lens in and out of Fenech's bountiful bosom—but the nudity actually captured on film is so meager as to seem accidental.

As Tom Milne reported, when one looks back on the film, the mind fairly reels with a veritable parade of stunning images—not expensive images, but images concocted with color, taste, and imagination. The character of Jill Stark is a good case in point, as it is likely—given the nature of her dialogue and limited activities—that she was present in the script only to supply George and Trudy with a companion.

AFTER *witnessing the final showdown between Jack and Trudy, Isabelle tries to pry the million dollar check from Jack's dead hand-only to find it still warm.*



13 Tom Milne, "Cinque bambole per la luna d'agosto (Five Dolls for an August Moon)" review, *Monthly Film Bulletin*, 39:463, August 1972, 156-57.

14 Cozzi.

15 Ibid.

16 In Umberto Lenzi's *Sandokan, la tigre di Mompracem/Sandokan the Great* (1963), a hostage is tied to a tree by Sandokan's (Steve Reeves') men, only to be found the next morning with a dagger protruding from his chest. The framing of this scene is identical to Bava's handling of Fenech's death in *5 bambole per la luna d'agosto.* In both cases, Maurice Poli is among the actors discovering the corpse!



Bava decided to depict her as a troubled artist, sometimes using her Munchean paintings to venture backgrounded remarks on the foreground action. When she discovers the dead body of Jacques on the beach, she is wearing a caftan of swirling, psychedelic colors, which complements the shot of her fallen tubes of oil paint, squeezed out and merging with the sand and sea. After Marie is added to the deep freeze, the scene cuts to Jill pleading with George to help her get off the island—as a self-portrait of a wild-eyed woman, not unlike Barbara Steele, glowers derangedly from her easel.

The scene of Jill's suicide is perhaps the film's most inspired feat of design and storyboarding. Faced with the prospect of shooting a banal fistfight between George and Nick, Bava made the decision to view the fracas through a grating, thus splitting up our view of the action into dozens of tiny squares. During the fight, a tabletop *objet d'art* is knocked over, sending countless glass balls of all sizes spilling across a series of different colored floors, so that a screen full of squares literally explodes into a screen full of circles. The camera follows the balls as they roll and bounce down a spiral staircase flecked black, white and gray, roll across a red floor and then plop by the dozens among the soap bubbles in a sunken bath, where Jill is found with both wrists slashed—her blood cutting scarlet swathes across the blue screen. The grating outside the bedroom was a real part of the modernist house in which they were shooting, as was the spiral staircase, which Bava posits in the background as George, Nick, and Jack bully Fritz on the subject of money; in this shot, the staircase with its central pole forms such a literal dollar sign that I didn't grasp the visual pun until my umpteenth viewing.

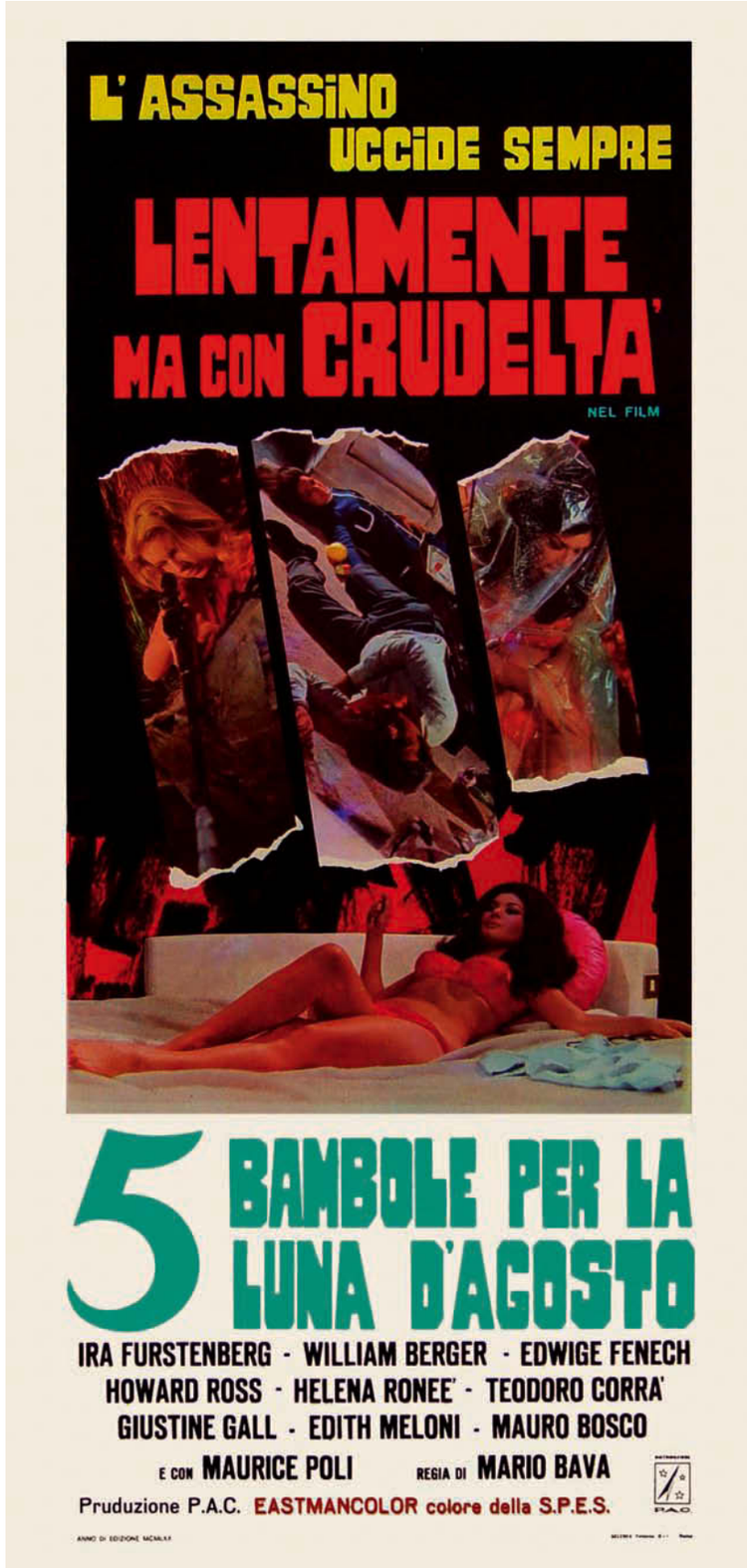
If there was any negative result of having to work quickly, it is that Bava occasionally falls back on obsessive images we have seen before, and others we will see again: the child on the swing as the zoom thrusts in and out

MARIE *joins Jacques and Peggy in the meat locker—an echo of the polyethylene shrouds in* TERRORE NELLO SPAZIO.

(*Operazione paura, Schock*), the bouncing ball that signals danger (*Operazione paura, Baron Blood*), the murders followed by close-ups of the survivors' paranoid/suspicious faces (*Sei donne per l'assassino*), the greedy couple dying from mutually inflicted wounds (*Sei donne per l'assassino*), the dead bodies encased in plastic shrouds (*Terrore nello spazio*), a shot of a curl of hair on a pillow moving sideways to frame the eyes of a sleepless woman (*La frusta e il corpo*), the beautifully dressed "widow" visiting her imprisoned lover (*Diabolik*), and so on.

The opening party sequence, the most common target of adverse criticism, admittedly seems almost hellbent in its determination to alienate any viewer with half an aesthetic sense. It bombards us with what might be termed verbose technique, with its funhouse camera angles, relentless Go Go music, and leering zoom-lens lunges in and out of Fenech's cleavage as she dances on her back, undulating her arms and fluttering her fingers in ways that recall Gaia Germani's oracle Medea in *Ercole al centro della terra.* It may well be a diversionary tactic for the master illusionist, a big, bearish booboo up front to make everything that follows look better, or it may be Bava's way of telling the audience that he's flying by the seat of his pants here, so we might as well admit the possibility of bad taste and learn to enjoy it. Yet the sequence becomes curiously pleasurable over successive viewings and accomplishes some remarkable things in spite of itself. It manages to introduce all of the characters as well as we ever really get to know them, without anyone uttering a single word of dialogue for a full 5 minutes—an experiment in "pure cinema" that Bava would extend to twice that length at the outset of his next picture, *Ecologia del delitto.*

By withholding dialogue from the film for so long, Bava establishes from the very first frame that the real lifeblood of this picture is its musical score. Indeed, it is in the revolutionary way that Bava presents—no, *emphasizes*—Piero Umiliani's score that *5 bambole per la luna d'agosto* would exert its greatest influence on the future course of the *giallo.*



ITALIAN *locandina sells the picture with the catch-phrase "The Murderer Kills Again—with Confidence and Cruelty."*

Throughout the picture, the defining line which separates score (i.e., composed accompaniment to action) from source music (i.e., incidental music actually contained within scenes) is frequently and playfully erased. The movie opens with Umiliani's music played at a moderate, traditional soundtrack volume as Isabelle approaches the beach house; as she spies on the wild party taking place inside, the camera cuts inside and, as our vantage cuts from outside to inside, the same music (which we have understood till now as "score") becomes the music being played at the party, suddenly played at fuller, you-are-there volume. In other scenes, music perceived as soundtrack cuts off abruptly as a needle is raised from a phonograph, or as the volume control of a portable radio is suddenly dialed down.

Dario Argento would play similar games with soundtrack in *Tenebrae* and he is often credited as the first director to wed a thundering rock soundtrack to horror cinema, with 1975's *Profondo rosso.* While this distinction is true to a degree, that degree has a lot to do with whether or not one perceives Umiliani's score as "rock." Certainly, when individual cues played with a drum kit kick in, it is, but most importantly, it is when Umiliani's music is given a strong rock backbeat and cranked up to concert volume (as it is with the discovery of Marie's body, and when Jack stalks Trudy just before the film's climax), or in its closing use of the Balleto di Bronzo track, that *5 bambole* really treads into new and brilliant waters. The music grants Bava the space in which to milk images and compositions to a degree that would have been unseemly if wedded to a track of live sound, in a manner not unlike what Ennio Morricone's operatic scores allowed Sergio Leone to do, what they allowed him to *become.* When conveyed in a rock context, the images become less about story and more about groove. The images cease to convey a sense of real people in a dangerous situation; instead, they purely become fodder for our enjoyment, functioning with the music on the same plane as the colorful and somewhat mad artwork framed on the walls of the beach house—a plane of sheer sensuality.





ITALIAN *fotobusta collage featuring Brett Halsey, Charles Southwood, and Marilù Tolo.*

Roy Colt & Winchester Jack

PRODUZIONE ATLAS Cinematografica's Mario Bregni rewarded Mario Bava for his last-minute rescue of *5 bambole per la luna d'agosto* by offering him another Mario De Nardo script. Bava hadn't thought very highly of De Nardo's script for *5 bambole* and the screenwriter's latest effort—a Western—was not much better: a saddle-sore saga of two partners-in-crime who find their bonhomie tested by a treasure map and a beautiful woman. Granted a free hand by Bregni, Bava accepted the job and proceeded to direct his final Western—perhaps the most peculiar entry in his filmography.

The resulting picture, *Roy Colt & Winchester Jack* (the ampersand is correct; only in pronunciation does the Italian version become "*Roy Colt e Winchester Jack*"), is sometimes incorrectly described as the first comic Italian Western. As any true *aficionado* of Italian Westerns knows, the genre was tongue-in-cheek, more or less, from the very beginning. Bava's own early Westerns *La strada per Fort Alamo* (1964) and *Ringo del Nebraska* (1966) both featured ludicrous, mocking scenes of an heroic gunslinger entering a saloon and sidling up to the bar to order a glass of milk. A certain poker-faced humor was likewise always part and parcel of Sergio Leone's Westerns, as when Clint Eastwood's Man with No Name (in *Per un pugno di dollari/A Fistful of Dollars*, 1964) pauses while en route to a showdown to place an order with the village coffin-maker for three coffins . . . and then, after dispatching all of his opponents, pauses again on the way back to call out, "My mistake—*four* coffins!"

Leone's Westerns became so popular that they spawned parodies, as well as imitations. In 1967, Franco and Ciccio responded to Leone's *Il buono, il brutto, il cattivo/The Good, the Bad and the Ugly* (1966) with two comedies: Lucio Fulci's *Il lungo, il corto, il gatto,* and *Il bello, il brutto, il cretino* ("The Beautiful, the Brutish and the Stupid"), directed by Giovanni Grimaldi. That same year, they also replied to the "Ringo" films with Marino Girolami's *Due Ringos del Texas* ("Two Ringos from Texas") and Giorgio Simonelli's *Due figli di Ringo* ("Two Sons of Ringo"). Franco and Ciccio continued to lampoon the more popular Italian Westerns for years, responding in particular to Giuseppe Colizzi's *Dio perdona . . . io no!/God Forgives . . . I Don't* (1967) with Marcello Ciorciolini's *Ciccio perdona . . . io no!* (1968),

During this period, and earlier, humor also began to infect the more straightforward Italian Westerns. Sergio Leone's Westerns perspired a bit more, but they were always made with great integrity and fidelity to the feel of American Westerns; but as his successful work began to be imitated by other Italian directors, those men brought their own feelings to the genre and, in time, Italian Westerns became increasingly baroque. The harbinger of this trend was Sergio Corbucci, whose *Django* (1966) featured a mysterious gunman (Franco Nero) toting an unexpected weapon (a machine-gun) in an unexpected holster (a coffin he drags around with him). After Leone trumped his imitators, and himself, with the magisterial *C'era una volta il West/Once Upon a Time in the West* (1968), Italian Westerns seemed to embark on an implicit contest to see who could come up with the most flagrantly bizarre characters and situations. The exploration of the physical prowess of gunslingers led to demonstrations of kung fu, and exploitative scenes of rape and gore were added for spice. Gothic themes began to proliferate to such an extent that certain entries, such as Giulio Questi's *Se sei vivo spara/Django, Kill!* (1967) and Antonio Margheriti's *. . . E Dio*



ROY COLT *(Brett Halsey) dissolves his partnership with fellow outlaw Winchester Jack (Charles Southwood) to search for an honest job in a more honest world.*

Roy Colt & Winchester Jack

Filmed at De Paolis Studios, Cinecittà and on location near Rome
November 1969
First released: August 13, 1970
Eastmancolor, 1.85:1, 89 minutes [1]

Production: PAC (Produzioni Atlas Consorziate, Milan), Tigielle 33 (Rome). Producer: Mario Bregni. Director: Mario Bava. Assistant director: Lamberto Bava. Story and screenplay: Mario De Nardo. Continuity: Marisa Agostini. Director of photography: Antonio Rinaldi. Camera assistant: Emilio Varriano. Assistant camera operator: Lorenzo Battaglia. Art direction: Giulia Mafai. Assistant art director: Oscar Capponi. Makeup: Sandro Melaranci. Hairdresser: Sergio Gennari. Firearms: Bruno Ukmar. Production supervisor: Luigi Alessi. Production managers: Arrigo Peri, Alfonso Cucci. Production secretary: Franco Tupini. Editor: Olga Pedrini. Assistant editor: Liliana Serra. Music: Piero Umiliani. Song: "Roy Colt" by Umiliani and Gizzarelli, published by Bixio Sam, performed by I Free Love (Vedette Records). Sound: Leopoldo Rosi. Sound engineer: Guido Felicioni. Sound recordist: Carlo Spagnardi. Post-sync: C.D.C. Stills: Armando Pietrangeli. Distributor: PAC.

Brett Halsey (Roy Colt), Charles Southwood (Winchester Jack), Marilù Tolo (Mahila), Teodoro Corrà (Reverend), Isa Miranda (Mammolla), Lee Burton [Guido Lollobrigida] (Sandro/Sandy, Jack's 1st henchman), Bruno Corazzari (Reverend's 1st henchman), Mauro Bosco (Bellatreccia/Bernstein, Jack's 2nd henchman), Rick Boyd [Federico Boido] (Boida/Blondie, Reverend's 2nd henchman), Piero Morgia (Jack's 3rd henchman), Franco Pesce (old man in scarf), Giorgio Gargiullo (Sam Lewis), Maurizio Laureri, Vincenzo Crocitti (deaf man), Leo De Nobili. Uncredited: Osiride Pevarello, Pietro Torrisi.

France: *Roy Colt et Winchester Jack,* TV only
Germany: *3 Halunken und ein Halleluja,* "Three Rascals and a Hallelujah," AB-Film, 10/13/72, 83m
Spain: *Roy Colt y Winchester Jack,* Cinedia S.A., 82m
US: *Roy Colt & Winchester Jack,* Libert Films International, 4/75 (unconfirmed)

disse a Caino/. . . And God Said to Cain (1970), had sequences indistinguishable from horror cinema. By 1970, Corbucci's idea of a villain had transformed into a pot-smoking, philosophizing Scot mercenary played by Jack Palance in *Compañeros,* while Gianfranco Parolini's *Indio Black/Adios Sabata* (1971) featured Yul Brynner as a hero who felled his opponents with heavy ball bearings flung, shotput-like, from a pocket built into the toe of his boot!

Another good case in point is *C'è Sartana . . . vendi la pistola e comprati la bara/A Fistful of Lead* (1970), directed by Giuliano Carmineo as "Antony Ascot." Though the film is serious in execution, it features a hero (George Hilton as "Sartana") who is always dressed for a funeral, who carries a bag stuffed with freshly baked loaves of bread (which sometimes disguise a well-aimed gun—a custom job that fires four small projectiles at once), and treats all women with respect. In this film, Sartana's chief adversary is an equally fast triggerman who dresses in white, passes the time by reading Shakespeare's sonnets and Alfred Lord Tennyson's *The Lady of Shalott,* and never goes anywhere without a frilly white parasol—the kind of fashion accessory which not even a 19th century *woman* would dare carry around other than on Easter Sunday. Played by Charles Southwood, this marvelous character—named Sabbath (or Sabata, in Italian)[2]—is not depicted as gay so much as an ultra-refined English dandy, which would have meant the same thing to the hard-drinking men of the Old West. As much as any mean, leering, itchy-fingered bully in black, when Sabbath rides into town, he seems to be begging for a fight—and he is more than up to the challenge. Carmineo's film is also of interest to Bava watchers for reteaming Erika Blanc and Piero Lulli for the first time since *Operazione paura* in 1966, and Federico Boido also has a good scene as one of two psychotic brothers who start leaning on the local bartender.

After agreeing to direct *Roy Colt & Winchester Jack,* Bava soon realized that, at this point in the evolution (or de-evolution, some would say) of the Italian Western, it would be absurd to film such a meager script seriously. Even before the cameras started rolling, he made the decision to approach the project as a broad spoof.

Synopsis

Roy Colt and Winchester Jack—a pair of self-admitted "losers" heading a gang of would-be outlaws—fight tooth and nail as their bored companions look on. Knocked to the ground, Roy admits defeat and quits the gang, leaving Jack in charge and vowing to find "an honest job."

Meanwhile, in Carton City, a gunman with Tourette's Syndrome (who makes involuntary bird noises) enters a saloon and demands his share of a fortune in gold from Sam Lewis, a man on crutches. When Sam has the crutches shot out from under him, inch by inch, Roy interferes. He shoots the gunman, who dies with a final, convulsive squawk. Sam treats his savior to a drink and asks his name. Roy mentions that he's in search of an honest job, and Sam tells him his search is over.

At his encampment, Jack reads a sentimental letter from Roy ("I miss our fistfights so much . . ."), but the epistolary mood is shattered when two men and a woman ride in. The woman, a Native American named Mahila, is being escorted to a sheriff for killing her husband. Jack is attracted to her and relieves the escorts of their responsibility; they start shooting, and he quickly bests them. As the other men dig graves, Jack and Mahila go off into the woods to make love—but she suggests a more comfortable place. Mahila takes him to a warm cottage, loaned to her by an old woman from her tribe. As her nose gets closer to Jack's bare skin, Mahila unholsters his pistol and orders him to take a bath. Even after he cleans up, Jack's luck doesn't improve: Mahila demands either a vow of marriage, or ten dollars for each sexual favor performed. She then demands an additional two dollars to remove her dress, another two dollars to take off her bra, and refuses to shed her panties unless she is paid "a few dollars more." Fed up, Jack takes her by force, but finds her quite willing. Afterwards, Mahila uses a knife to smooth the notches from her cuenta, a banana-shaped piece of bone which she uses to tally a man's debt to her for sexual favors. Meanwhile, outside, the Jewish member of Jack's gang, Belletreccia, is unhappy about having



ROY *en route to Carton City.*

1 The Image Entertainment DVD of this title is derived from a PAL source running at 25 frames per second, which abbreviates the running time to approximately 86 minutes.

2 Evidently not the same character played by Lee Van Cleef in Gianfranco Parolini's *Ehi amico . . . c'è Sabata, hai chiuso!* (1969).

to stand in the cold while Jack is warm inside a cottage, making love. He grumbles that things will be different when he's in charge.

The next day, Jack's gang gets into a shootout while trying to rob a coach transporting a payload to a bank. Amid the gunfire, Jack realizes that only one man has the ability to shoot as well as their opponent. Sure enough, it's Roy—and the former partners have a pally reunion. Roy demurs from Jack's suggestion that they split the payload, saying it's more important that he complete the mission to get a good look inside the bank. He tells Jack to ride ahead into town.

Reaching Carton City at the same time as Jack's gang is the outlaw gang led by the Reverend, a Russian socialist outlaw whose weapon of choice is dynamite. Jack finds the gang terrorizing Sam Lewis, who is holding them off with a shotgun aimed from the window of his hotel room. Meanwhile, the Reverend himself sits in the saloon, drinking bad whiskey, and shivering with the cold that has been deep in his bones ever since he fled Russia via the freezing Don River. Jack joins the effort against Sam, during which the entire facade of the hotel is ripped away from his room. Jack tells Sam that the Reverend has placed bombs around the hotel and the bank, and they will be detonated in ten minutes—unless he hands over the map leading to the gold. Sam admits defeat. The Reverend and Jack squabble over who should hold the map, eventually tearing it in two pieces to share. As the thieves ride away, Sam curses the cowardly townsfolk of Carton City who did not raise a finger to help him, and the sheriff and mayor who fled town at the sight of the Reverend. Where is a single man of courage? Just as he poses that question, Roy Colt rides into town with the bank money. Sam proposes that he be made sheriff.

At the saloon, Roy addresses an assembly of local men, explaining that he needs fifty volunteers to join his search for Winchester Jack. He cautions them that they may not return home from this dangerous mission, as Jack is an expert gunman who can shoot a man dead from 200 yards away. The bar nearly empties behind Roy's turned back. The only person who remains isn't brave—he's stone deaf!



MAHILA *(Marilù Tolo) sells kisses for a dollar and disrobes for a few dollars more, squeezing every last penny out of Winchester Jack.*

Sam recreates the stolen map for Roy. It says that the gold is buried at an old Indian cemetery in the desert near Vulture Canyon. "Do you swear to protect that gold as if it were your own?" asks Sam. "As if it were my very own," Roy promises.

Meanwhile, the Reverend shivers in bed with cold—Sam Lewis managed to shoot him in the buttock as he rode away with the map. Thinking he's dying, he asks Jack to write a letter of farewell to his wife, Conchita. He asks Jack to include something about how beautiful she looks naked, and he complies, praising the Reverend for having found an educated wife who can read. He laughs that his wife is as simple as he, but that she is residing in a convent where a nice nun will read the letter to her.[3] Outside, a fight breaks out between Jack's and the Reverend's men, which the latter stops with a stick of TNT. The two men with the two halves of the map agree to split up and meet at a designated point, Jack's gang leaving first and the Reverend's men following shortly after. While resting in a cave, the Reverend and his gang are approached by a surprise visitor—Roy Colt, who claims the Reverend's map is false. He proposes that they work together and get rid of Jack. "But he's your friend!" the Reverend exclaims. "Reverend, this is business," Roy reasons. He shows the Reverend his badge; he's now the sheriff of Carton City.

Riding toward the gold, Mahila is angry with Jack because he loves only money, not her. Accordingly, she swears her going price will now be doubled; it shouldn't matter to a man who's going to be rich. Belletreccia watches in annoyance as they make love in a sleeping bag, writhing like a snake in the mountains. When Mahila calculates Jack's overnight debt at $40, he throws her cuenta away. It lands in a puddle that reflects Roy's face—and he and Jack have another pleasant reunion. As Mahila snuggles deeper into the sleeping bag, Roy proposes that he and Jack ride ahead into the narrow mountain passage on the map, and ambush the Reverend's gang. Later, Roy makes a pass at Mahila. "I bet you don't want to pay," she says. "I've been paying all my life, but never for that," he replies. So Mahila loses interest.

Belletreccia turns Jack against Roy, predicting that when they reach their destination, he will take both the gold and the woman. While riding on, Roy tells Mahila he can't pay her because he respects her too much. "Then you'll marry me?" But before that question can be answered, the Reverend and his two remaining men ambush Roy



BRETT HALSEY *is visited on the set by wife Heidi Brühl (then expecting daughter Nicole) and son Clayton.*

and Jack's gang. After discouraging the attack, Jack confronts Roy and Mahila. Roy draws his pistol on Jack—but only to shoot a rattlesnake behind him.

The map cuts a path through Wimpy City, the home of one of Roy and Jack's favorite spots, Mammola's bordello. They are greeted as old friends by Mammola, who recommends two Irish girls new and popular at her establishment. They pay their money and are put at the end of a long line. When the current client keeps paying for more and more time, Roy and Jack muscle their way into a room and discover their whores in bed with . . . the Reverend! A knockdown, drag-out fight ensues, and after ejecting the Reverend and his men, they jump into bed with the girls.

Mahila storms into the bordello, finding Roy and Jack in compromising positions, and shames them for spending their money on whores instead of her. The room explodes from a small charge of dynamite left behind by their adversary.

That night, at camp, Mahila wakes and moves away from Jack to Roy. Belletreccio sees this, and listens. "Is it true that you love me?" she asks Roy. "More than my horse," he says earnestly. Bernstein draws his gun on them, but Jack shoots him before he can pull the trigger. Jack realizes Mahila's duplicity, and the three of them exchange stares . . . until dynamite explodes. The Reverend's gang attack until Roy and Jack get the upper hand, then ride on.

Jack can't deal with two enemies at once, so he orders Roy to surrender his gun and ride on. He tells Mahila to go with him, and Roy says she never will; Jack has the gun, so he's the strongest. Jack immediately dismounts and offers Jack his rifle. They fight. The other members of the gang accidentally shoot each other dead, and Roy eventually comes out on top. He asks Mahila who she's going with. "With the strongest, of course." The Reverend's gang hears the bullets and follow the sound. They find the dead men, Jack lying among them. He plays dead until they ride away. Then he whistles for his horse, which runs to him like a dog.

The Reverend's gang find Roy and Mahila drinking water and apprehend them. The Reverend demands the map, but Roy claims he has eaten and already defecated it. Mahila then betrays him, telling the Reverend that he can find the gold without a map. They are tied up and walked through desert. Jack, following at a distance, finds and adopts Roy's black hat. Mahila sweet-talks the Reverend. When he notices her cuenta, she explains it is a record of her prayers. "You are very devout, always praying," he marvels, while eyeing the notches.

Roy leads the Reverend to the Indian cemetery and explains how the burial site of the gold can be located by looking through the hollow eye socket of an ornamental skull on one of the graves. The Reverend's men dig at the designated spot, find the gold, and load a wagon with it . . . then the Reverend tricks them back into the hole and blows them up! He also vows to blow up Roy, but Jack shoots a hole in the last bag of gold, and the Reverend forgets the lighted wick of his explosive as he scrambles to collect the dust. He blows up. "In Hell, you will have all the heat you want," Jack says.

Winchester Jack tells Roy that they will split the gold 50-50, but he insists on keeping Roy's hat, which he found—and so they fight again, over the hat. While the two men are distracted, Mahila takes the reins of the wagonload of gold and shoots the hat off of Roy's head, down the road. She throws them her cuenta, "for company on those lonely nights," and rides away to a life of wealth and independence, as the two men resume their fight.

Cast

Roy Colt & Winchester Jack finds Bava working once again with a number of familiar faces from his recent work. In the lead role of Roy Colt—a rascally Man in Black who facetiously pines for a more honest world—Bava cast Brett Halsey, whose enthusiasm for comic roles had been established by their earlier collaboration *Four Times That Night*, filmed exactly one year before.

"As one of [Bava's] biggest fans, I was delighted to get to work with him a second time," Halsey enthuses. "*Roy Colt* became a comedy because the script wasn't very good; it kind of lent itself to having fun with it. I've always enjoyed comedy so much, and had so few opportunities to play it, that when Bava suggested comedy, I went for it immediately. He had the idea in mind pretty much from the time I came aboard."

3 This bit was surely an inside joke from Mario to his sister, Elena.



Bava welcomed Halsey's participation, but the actor was likely chosen by the film's producers, as he was under contract at the time to Produzione Atlas Cinematografica. *Roy Colt & Winchester Jack* would be the last of three films Halsey made for PAC, but it was the first in which he appeared under his own, well-established name. His previous two PAC films—Tonino Cervi's *Oggi a me . . . domani a te!/Today We Kill, Tomorrow We Die* and Alberto Cardone's *L'ira di Dio/The Wrath of God* (both 1968) billed Halsey (who had nearly fifty films, including some big Hollywood pictures, to his credit at that time) under the pseudonym "Montgomery Ford."

Halsey accepts full blame for this. "I wasn't sure I wanted to do the first picture [*Oggi a me . . .*]," he confesses, "so I just said, 'Let's put another name on it.' I figured it would be some piece of shit that no one would ever notice, but the money was good—put it that way. The picture turned out to be a big success; in fact, it was the second biggest grossing Italian film of that year! Because of the contract I had signed with PAC, they put the [Montgomery Ford] name on another picture too, and I started getting calls from Hollywood: 'What's this, you changed your name?' So when the time came to do *Roy Colt*, they expected me to use the other name, and I told them, 'No, no—not again! Montgomery Ford is dead!"

Halsey was accompanied on-set by his then-wife, German actress Heidi Brühl (pregnant at the time with their daughter, Nicole), and their young son, Clayton. Just as he had supplied his own wardrobe for *Four Times That Night,* Halsey arrived on location with several of his own Western accoutrements: "The opening sequence opened on my personal Colt .45 pistol and my fast-draw holster, which I had brought from the States. The black hat, boots, and spurs were also mine, and were used in some of my other Westerns. Although it was strictly forbidden by Italian law, I would often practice my fast draw, against a tree or some other inanimate object, with live ammunition. The pistol, holster, hat, boots, and spurs, are now in my son Clayton's memorabilia collection."

Halsey followed *Roy Colt & Winchester Jack* by relocating with his growing family to America, where he published a novel based on his observations of the Italian film scene (*The Magnificent Strangers,* 1973), guest-starred in popular television series like *Columbo* and made-for-TV movies, and played a number of continuing roles on network soap operas, including *Love Is a Many Splendored Thing* (1972–73), *Search for Tomorrow* (1975), *The Young and the Restless* (1980–82), and *Rituals* (1984). He then returned to feature film work abroad, starring in several films for Lucio Fulci—including *Il miele del diavolo/Dangerous Obsession* (1986), *Quando Alice ruppe lo specchio/Touch of Death* (1988), *Demonia* (1990) and *Un gatto nel cervello/A Cat in the Brain* (1990, a film which "samples" his work in earlier Fulci assignments). After making Antonio Margheriti's *The Commander* (1988) and *Esmeralda Bay* (1989) with Jess Franco, Halsey returned once again to America, appearing in Francis Coppola's *The Godfather Part III* (1990). Today, he divides his time between homes in Toronto and Los Angeles.

Halsey's co-star, Charles Southwood, was born in Los Angeles on August 30, 1937. He moved with his family to the state of Oregon in 1945 and stayed there through most of his education, attending Oregon State University, where he majored in philosophy. He completed his philosophy studies at the Sorbonne in Paris, before moving in 1964 to Lyons,



France, where he toiled briefly as a dock worker. From 1964–1966, he made his living as an automobile insurance executive; it was also in 1966 that he took his first film-related side job: working as a lighting stand-in for actor Lex Barker on the set of Vittorio De Sica's *Woman Times Seven.* His first film as an actor in his own right was *The Battle of Hastings* (1966), in which he played the supporting role of King Harald's brother. In all, Southwood is credited with approximately a dozen films, including Demofilo Fidani's *Straniero . . . fatti il segno della croce!* (1967) and Mario Amendola's *Dai nemici mi guardo io!/I Protect Myself Against My Enemies* (1968), both Westerns, and in both of which he was top-lined—apparently due to the inverted iconography of his surname. Lanky, lantern-jawed, yet easygoing, with a look reminiscent of a young James Coburn or Sterling Hayden, Southwood was a natural actor as well as a convincing horseman, and continued to work in the Italian Westerns began to die out, circa 1972. In 1980, he founded the Death Tobacco Company, an anti-smoking organization, and he works today in the Los Angeles area as an independent research physicist. In *Roy Colt,* Southwood gives a fine performance, sly and virile, demonstrating considerable range over his previous role as the parasol-toting, poetry-reading Sabata.



"That [*Roy Colt & Winchester Jack*] was the best thing I did over there," Southwood enthused to interviewer Robert Monell. "It was improvised on a day-by-day basis. Mario Bava was the most creative director I worked with. He said the original script was shit and threw it out of the trailer door into a mud puddle—literally! We had a blast working on that film. We made the film up day by day in the trailer. His son, Lamberto, was there; everyone contributed ideas. It was hilarity every morning. We'd make up scenes in the trailer!"



FOUR *examples from the Italian fotobusta set.*

Brett Halsey was intrigued by his co-star: "We talked a lot during the shooting of the film, but didn't socialize much outside. Southwood was his real name. Everybody thought he picked 'Southwood' because of Eastwood, but he said, 'No, it's my real name.' As I recall, he was American and I think he was in Rome with his wife and family or something. But after that picture, I never heard from, or about, him again. Charles and I performed almost all of our fight scenes ourselves. It may have been foolish of us to do them, and for Bava to allow us to [do them], but we convinced ourselves that we could do them better than the stunt men, so we did. Fortunately, we survived with only minor scrapes and bruises. [My performance] was something I worked out with Southwood and how we played off each other. It was basically my approach to make Roy comic by stressing his tongue-in-cheek 'sincerity.' Southwood was a little more broad, and Marilù [Tolo] was a schemer. Bava had a marvelous sense of comedy, and we all enjoyed playing out the satirical qualities in the script."

Marilù Tolo, the female lead, was born Maria Lucia Tolo in Rome on January 16, 1943. A prolific young actress, she had already appeared in close to forty films at the time of *Roy Colt,* making her first film in 1959. A sultry, serious-looking brunette, she adapted well to the thrones of various latter-day *pepla,* including Vittorio Sala's *La regina della amazzoni/Colossus and the Amazon Queen* (1960), Umberto Lenzi's *L'ultimo gladiatore/Messalina vs. the Son of Hercules* (1964), and Alberto De Martino's *Il trionfo di Ercole/The Triumph of Hercules* (1964). She

made herself available to international co-productions as well, travelling to France and West Germany. After an unbilled appearance as a TV personality (with *Sei donne per l'assassino*'s Mary Arden) in Fellini's *Giulietta degli spiriti/Juliet of the Spirits* (1965) and a high profile role in Terence Young's *The Poppy Is Also a Flower* (1966), Tolo signed a contract with Dino De Laurentiis that resulted in two pictures, Henry Levin's spy film *Kiss the Girls and Make Them Die* (1966) and the omnibus film *Le streghe/The Witches* (1967). Tolo had been Bava's first choice to play the role of Eva Kant in *Diabolik*, but something had happened to sour De Laurentiis on her during *Le streghe* and he refused to cast her. The loss of her De Laurentiis contract did not slow the actress down; Tolo continued to work unabated, appearing in glamorous and sexy roles in such international fare as *The Oldest Profession* (1967), *Candy* (1968), *Bluebeard* (1972), and *The Greek Tycoon* (1978). Her screen persona made her the butt of a joke in Fellini's *Toby Dammit,* which contains a brief glimpse of a busty, but otherwise shallow, actress named "Marilà Lolo." Though she certainly courted a reputation as a cinematic sex kitten, when Tolo was called upon to remove her top for a love scene with Charles Southwood, she insisted on having her nipples covered with white tape, as is plainly visible when they embrace. At the time of filming, Tolo is said to have been dating a number of suitors at the time, including a Spanish prince and the young writer–director who had recently become Bava's heir apparent: Dario Argento. Retired from the screen since 1984, Tolo is somewhat miscast as Mahila—one is tempted to think that Bava turned this film into a comedy after seeing her in Native American makeup—but she overcomes her inauthenticity with a sly, survivalist performance in what is ultimately a cleverly written, feminist role.



GERMAN *A1 poster.*



TEODORA CORRÀ *as the dynamite-tossing revolutionary bad guy known as "The Reverend."*

Roy Colt & Winchester Jack was not Tolo's first role opposite Brett Halsey; the two of them had previously co-starred in Tulio Demichelli's *Da 077: intrigo a Lisbona/Intrigue in Lisbon* (1968) and Julio Buchs' Spanish/Italian co-production *I caldi amori di una minorenne/Perversion Story* (1969).

"It just so happened that [our pairing in] *Intrigue in Lisbon* 'worked,'" Halsey explains. "Marilù was a very ambitious girl. I don't think she thought of herself so much as an actress, but rather as a celebrity. I don't mean that in a negative way, but she was more of a performer than an actress. She was very interested in publicity. There was one incident where she tried to talk me into staging something for the paparazzi, so they would see me coming out of her apartment in the morning. And I said, 'Marilù, you're crazy! What would my wife say?' She said, 'Oh, she'll understand!' I said, 'You're crazier than hell—she would *not* understand!' She later went to Hollywood and married a Frenchman. They got a house and Marilù went on the talk show circuit, doing *The Tonight Show With Johnny Carson* and *The Merv Griffin Show*. She spoke passably good English."

The film's villain, the dynamite-throwing Reverend, was played by Teodora Corrà—who had given one of the best and most animated performances in *5 bambole per la luna d'agosto* as the beach house host, George Stark. Another PAC contract player, Corrà too had worked with Halsey before, in the "Montgomery Ford" Western *Oggi a me . . . domani a te!*.

Halsey: "I remembered him from the other film—a fine comic actor. He was very inventive, good to work



GIORGIO GARGIULLO, *a dead ringer for director Sergio Leone, plays Sam Lewis, who knows where the gold is buried.*

with. As an actor, it's so good to work with other actors! In Italy, this wasn't always the case; sometimes you would find yourself acting with friends-of-friends, girlfriends, and so forth. So whenever I found myself working with real actors [like Teodoro], it was always a pleasure."

The film's most prestigious casting, curiously enough, was that of Isa Miranda, who was saddled with the unlikely role of the aging madam of a sagebrush brothel. In her day, Miranda was among the most famous and elegant actresses in Europe, the very definition of the Italian *femme fatale.* Born Ines Isabella Sampietro in Milan in 1909, she was a former model and stage actress who won fame when Max Ophuls catapulted her from obscurity into the lead of his film *La signora di tutti* ("The Queen of Everything," 1934). Miranda went on to star in *Scipione l'Africano* (1937), Ophuls' masterpiece *La Ronde* (1950), *Rasputin* (1954), *La noia/The Empty Canvas* (1963), *The Yellow Rolls-Royce* (1964), Massimo Dallamano's *Das Bildnis des Dorian Gray/The Secret of Dorian Gray* (1970), and Liliana Cavani's *Il portiere di notte/The Night Porter* (1974). The wife of Italian writer–producer–director Alfredo Guarini—best-known for producing Roberto Rossellini's *Germania anno zero/Germany Year Zero* (1947)—Isa Miranda complemented her life as an actress with additional success as a novelist, poet and painter. Bava enjoyed the opportunity of working with her so much that he also cast her in his next picture, in the small but pivotal role as the wheelchair-bound Countess Federica in *Ecologia del delitto.*

Giorgio Gargiullo, who plays the small but pivotal role of map owner Sam Lewis, was cast owing to his strong physical resemblance to Sergio Leone. His screen credits are limited but include a couple of earlier, outstanding Italian Westerns: Tonino Valerii's *I giorni dell'ira/Day of Anger* (1967, scripted by Ernesto Gastaldi) and Giuseppe Vari's *Con lui cavalca la morte/Death Rides Along* (also 1967).

Of Jack's henchmen, Guido Lollobrigida was born in 1929 and began his acting career in the mid-1960s, appearing in Alberto De Martino's Italian/West German co-production *Upperseven l'uomo dal uccidere/Upperseven, the Man to Kill* (1965), starring Paul Hubschmid, Karin Dor, and Rosalba Neri. Moving immediately into Italian Westerns, he adopted the pseudonym "Lee Burton" for appearances in De Martino's *Centomila dollari per Ringo/$10,000 for Ringo* (1965) and Gianfranco Baldanello's *Uccidere Johnny Ringo/Kill Johnny Ringo* (1966), an unrelated Dick Randall production in which he appeared for the first time with Brett Halsey. Among his other film highlights are Riccardo Freda's spy film *Coplan oeuvre le feu à Mexico/Mexican Slayride* (1967), De Martino's Bond spoof *O.K. Connery/Operation Kid Brother* (1967), the Dario Argento-scripted *Cimitero senza croci/Cemetery Without Crosses* (1969), Antonio Margheriti's Gothic Western *. . . E Dio disse a Caino/. . . And God Said to Cain* (1970), and Terence Young's *Red Sun* (1971).



AS *Jack travels in search of buried treasure, he hemorrhages money every step of the way as Mahila earns her living from him.*





THESE *glass matte paintings by Bava appear at different points in the film, but make obvious use of the same basic scenery.*

Several of Lollobrigida/Burton's Westerns also featured his *Roy Colt* co-star Franco Pesche, who sometimes appeared in Italian/Spanish co-productions under the name Franco Oliveras.

Mauro Bosco, who plays the rebellious henchman Belletreccio—evidently an Hasidic Jew, who wears his hair in long *pe'ot* locks over his temples—had previously appeared in *5 bambole per la luna d'agosto* as the ill-fated houseboy, Jacques. Apart from a few notable features, such as Ettore Scola's *Splendor* (1988) and Pietro Nardi's *Eclisse totale* (1992), Bosco has spent most of his subsequent acting career on Italian television.

Finally, appearing under the thinly disguised character name of Boida ("Blondie") is Federico Boido, the tall, gaunt, scarecrow-like actor whom Bava had previously used to intimidating effect in *Terrore nello spazio* and *Diabolik*. Given Boido's name, the role of Boida would seem to be Bava's personal tribute to one of his favorite movie faces. When the Reverend scolds him, "Boida! Every time I look through the eye of a skull I see your face, looking back at me like a corpse!" one can't help thinking this was exactly the kind of exchange one might overhear between Bava and Boido on the set.

Production

The credits of *Roy Colt & Winchester Jack* state that it was filmed at DePaolis Studios, but Brett Halsey believes that only the interiors were filmed there, as he doesn't remember DePaolis having a standing Western town. He isn't certain, but he thinks the town scenes may have been filmed at Cinecittà, as the two studios were "just a short distance from each other, maybe five miles apart."

"We had a lot of fun with *Roy Colt,*" he says. "Some of it worked and some of it didn't, but it was a pleasant experience. Bava was more relaxed and had more fun on that one [than on *Four Times That Night*]. He was a *really* nice man, the kind of director you want to work for because you *trust* him. There are other Italians who . . . well, I don't know how they ever got the job! But Bava was a real pro, and he knew how to handle his people. It's nice to work with someone who knows what they're doing, and is relaxed with it, and knows how to keep his people relaxed. It was made with good, high spirits and camaraderie. Marilù had such a good time that she caused many scenes to be reshot because she would often break up with laughter in the wrong places."

The movie conveys a sense of having been more fun to make than it is to watch, and it was obviously filmed in haste. Antonio Rinaldi's cinematography is unusually chaotic and reckless, zooming frantically in and out of the gunfight scenes, as if hellbent on demonstrating to those critics who had charged Bava and him with overusing the zoom lens what overuse of zoom really looks like. While Southwood and Tolo get their share of close-ups, Halsey's lead role is not so well covered and the subtlety of his work sometimes suffers for it; we're seldom close enough to catch the wink of his performance or the sly laughter in his eyes. "Somehow I seem to remember being disappointed by the picture," Halsey confesses, "and maybe that's why. Maybe because of budget or something, he didn't shoot as much as he wanted to."

Asked to discuss the working relationship between Bava and Rinaldi, Halsey offers: "I thought Rinaldi was a talented guy. It never occurred to me that Bava was, in any way, imposing on him. Of course, as the director, Bava was calling the shots and all of that, but as I recall, Rinaldi was in charge of his own area of responsibility. Bava may have had his own ideas about lighting, but on the two pictures I made, I don't remember too many instances of unusual lighting. *Four Times That Night* was pretty bright, generally speaking, and *Roy Colt* we shot mostly outside."

It is true that *Roy Colt* presented few opportunities for Bava's trademark primary color lighting or macabre visuals, but a close examination of the camera set-ups reveal more signature Bava touches than may be immediately apparent. The only interior scene that feels readily familiar, in terms of style, is a comic episode featuring Southwood and Tolo, in which Mahila insists that the odiferous Jack take a bath before getting into bed with her. The warm upstairs lighting—warm red and amber gels around the fireplace and stove, with cool blue limning the actors' faces whenever they stand near a window keeping out the winter chill—turns more decidedly expressionistic as Mahila snatches Jack's pistol and leads him downstairs to a bathtub at gunpoint, dramatizing both his fear of water (and being clean) and of Mahila's dominance. In the bathroom, the lighting becomes more jagged and the contrasting gels no longer blend naturally, but paranoiacally. The bathtub itself, its old standing water covered with broken shards of ice (cuts sheets of clear polythene floating on the surface—maybe cut-up sections of the freezer bags used in *5 bambole per la luna d'agosto*!), is revealed in a shock pan movement that reveals it like a Lovecraftian thing of horror. The scene is followed by a bartering scene, with a freshly washed Jack being obliged to pay Mahila not only for sex, but for each item of clothing she removes. Throughout the scene (shot in a single, extended take), Mahila is consistently lighted in warm colors while Jack retains a bluish tinge, which works to underline her proven command of the situation. When Jack runs out of money and decides simply to take sexual charge of the situation, the scene ends with a suggestive shot of the knobby bedpost, rocking back and forth, which ushers Bava's work into a realm of frank sexual metaphor that was entirely new to his *oeuvre*. Even more suggestive is the subsequent shot, following a brief cutaway, of Mahila furiously scraping the old notches from her phallically upcurved *cuenta*, which is held just above the level of Jack's abdomen in the framing. For





LIKEWISE *with these two glass mattes, filmed near Bava's favorite location at Tor Caldara.*

a 1970 film, the frankness of this visual *double entendre* is truly startling.

The only real trick shots employed in the picture occur when the characters have followed the treasure map into Vulture Canyon. These scenes were shot at Bava's favorite location, the beach at Tor Caldara, heavily masked with glass matte paintings of mesas and cacti. For at least one shot, Bava created a glass matte with an illusion of depth: at screen left is a cluster of red rock formations and cacti that appears to be in the foreground, as the actors guide their horses behind it, while at screen right, in the far distance atop a hillside, are some majestic mesa ranges. This was all painted on the same plane of glass.

Halsey notes that some non-matte shots also called for foregrounded cacti: "Those tall cactus trees that you see were all flat, plywood cutouts. Because that type of cactus exists only in the American and Mexican deserts, it had become common practice with the Italian and Spanish Westerns to carry a supply of fold-up cactus cutouts, which the set decorators would run around planting here and there in the background." One of the plywood cacti also figured in a comic shot that occurs late in the picture, when Jack awakens to discover Roy and Mahila kissing; the camera cuts away from the kiss to a tight shot of Jack's angry face—his expression of dumb, smoldering outrage recalls the drunken Lee Marvin character from *Cat Ballou* (1965)—and then zooms out slightly to reveal the "arms" of a cactus in the background positioned like horns growing out of his head.

The only mechanical special effects in the movie, apart from the dynamite explosions, involved a pair of specially rigged crutches that could be "shot" away, a piece at a time, until Sam Lewis was left lying on his stomach, and a remote-controlled cobra that threatens Jack's life in the desert—a stiff, none-too-convincing robot built for the movie by Carlo Rambaldi. The violent camera shaking that accompanies the detonation of the dynamite was not done "live" but added in post-production via optical printing.

The bordello scene with Isa Miranda hovers in the center of the movie, completely disconnected from any other aspect of the storyline. Considering *Roy Colt*'s brief running time, this sequence may have been added at the last minute to make the film feature-length. Brett Halsey doesn't remember the specifics, but agrees with this assessment: "The bordello scene seems gratuitous and out of place. I can't remember why it was included, but your assumption may be correct that it was added late in production, to bring the running time up to scratch."

Charles Southwood recalls the bordello scene with particular relish: "There's a scene in a bordello where we're all participating in the *mise-en-scène*. Bava was very laid-back . . . He



BAVA, *keeping warm in an Indian blanket, while filming near the beach.*

was having fun; it was not a tense situation for anyone, especially Bava. He'd laugh like a madman after we'd made up a scene out of nothing. I thought we were extremely inventive. It was an extraordinary film!" The actor also remembers that Bava's good cheer didn't diminish, even when the tensions behind-the-scenes overflowed into the production. "In the middle of this film, the production and distribution starting fighting and they shut the film down. Bava threw up his hands and said, *'C'est la vie!'"*

Among Brett Halsey's favorite memories of the two Bava films he made is the personal working relationship that he witnessed between Mario and Lamberto Bava, with whom he would work again many years later.

"I don't remember Lamberto working in the manner of a normal AD [assistant director] at all," he says. "They had a very close relationship; it was more like a son helping his father than a cool, collected AD. I liked their relationship very much. I was a little disappointed later on, when I worked with Lamberto, that as a director, he didn't have his father's charm or his understanding. Lamberto was around the set as one of the producers while we were shooting *The Black Cat*, which was actually directed by Luigi Cozzi; I somehow remember Lamberto's influence more than Luigi's. As a director, I thought Lamberto was too much of an autocrat—like Freda, but he didn't have Freda's charisma, or his father's sense of fun. He's not his father, but how many Mario Bavas are there?"

Music

As with Bava's previous job for PAC, *Roy Colt & Winchester Jack* was scored by Piero Umiliani. Regrettably, the result is nowhere near the inventive triumph of *5 bambole per la luna d'agosto*. His music for *Roy Colt* is often brilliantly arranged, with some audaciously bizarre combinations of instruments, but the score itself is generally uninspired, derivative, and inappropriate to a Western or comic context.

One of the few musical high points is the main theme, a somber acoustic ballad titled "Roy Colt," whose performance is credited to the Italian folk-rock group "I [The] Free Love." The composition is jointly credited to Umiliani and Gizzarelli (presumably, the group's lyricist) and contains English lyrics. The piece is so hauntingly melancholy—anticipating in some ways Guido and Maurizio De Angelis' acoustic score for Enzo G. Castellari's *Keoma* (1976), equally rough-hewn but with more melodic sensibility—it must have been written and recorded prior to the movie changing its course to comedy. Opening with a percussion tattoo that branches quickly from a single high-hat to timbales, congas, and a full drum kit—in effect, imitating the percussion intro of Santana's "Soul Sacrifice"—the piece hits its stride with the introduction of six-string electric guitar (a finger-picked, seven-note riff), acoustic rhythm guitar, electric bass, and continuously clattering percussion. The middle-eight adds Umiliani's trademark Hammond organ washes to the overall group sound. The willowy vocal, sung by single male and female voices buried deep in reverb, bleeds so badly into the accompaniment that it is impossible to discern all the lyrics. "The world is much too hard for me" . . . "I need a cause to serve" . . . "I dedicate my life to you" . . . are some of the more apparent phrases, none of them relevant to the film at hand.

None of the remaining cues on Cinevox's 1999 soundtrack CD release are titled. Two of the film's main themes are first stated in the opening cue, which commences with double-tracked electric guitar, the right channel soon joined by solitary male whistling of the first theme—instantly familiar and, on reflection, absurdly similar to the opening bars of "I'm An Old Cowhand From the Rio Grande." Once this theme is stated, the second is stated by double-tracked banjo and guitar, a five-note melody that sounds like Danny & The Juniors' 1950s rock hit "Let's Go to the Hop," played off-key, and which quickly wears out its welcome. The "Let's Go to the Hop" theme is later reprised, with horns, in a sluggish, mariachi-flavored rendition that seems musically and geographically out of place.

The "Old Cowhand" theme is variously reprised—initially by bass woodwind, over a lovely riff plucked on acoustic guitar. (This riff is identical to a pattern that figures frequently in Umiliani's *5 bambole per la luna d'agosto* score, where it is usually played by vibes or electric keyboard.) It is elsewhere repeated by guitar, loping electric bass and caressing effusions of organ, the piece's outdoorsy, nature-loving mood soon shattered by a contemporary-sounding break with low brass and rattling congas, suggesting an intrusion of danger or intrigue.

The film's third major theme is a sentimental one, first heard in the film as an underscore to the words of the amusingly homesick letter written from Roy to Jack. The melody is carried by bass clarinet, giving it a wonderfully woodsy and woebegone quality, accompanied by clip-clopping organ and acoustic guitar; it sounds like the mopey accompaniment to a love story between man and horse. It's actually the inspired choice of instrumentation that makes the cue sound so pitifully dejected and ironic; later in the cue, when the melody is reprised by acoustic guitar, one derives a much better appreciation of the basic sweetness of the melody. This theme is also reprised in other cues with the melody played by a fiddle in the jazz-sweet style of Stephane Grappelli—perhaps by Grappelli himself, who was an experienced hand at studio jobbing.

Representing the Russian soul of the Reverend is a mazurka-like cue—complete with fleeting echoes of "Ghost Riders in the Sky"—that finds violin and percussion joined in a festive, ever-accelerating dervish, while the time-keeping drum kit periodically explodes into jazzier outbursts of improvised rolls and runs.

The "Man and Horse" cue is reprised in a fuller arrangement whose centerpiece is a surprisingly moving (and disappointingly short) Spanish solo trumpet passage, recalling the great arena themes which Ennio Morricone composed for the Leone Westerns. A separate cue gives fuller vent to Umiliani's ideas for the solo trumpet, which soars proudly and tragically over sparkling acoustic and electric guitar support, and an undertow of dissonant organ and rattling bongos.

A score that overstays its welcome on compact disc at a mere 37 minutes, Umiliani's contribution to *Roy Colt & Winchester Jack* is, if anything, even more tiresome in context. While the "Man and Horse" theme provokes chuckles on the first pass, the humor doesn't endure, and the other cues are plainly unsupportive of the movie's comedic aspirations. Especially when heard in the film itself, Umiliani's use of electric keyboard introduces unwelcome, jarring colorings that would have sounded more at home in a Hawaiian story or ice-skating sequence. With its "Let's Go to the Hop" theme chugging along, one is unpleasantly reminded of the Tijuana Brass-inspired music that underpinned the frantic Luna Park scenes of *Dr. Goldfoot and the Girl Bombs*—and the music becomes akin to a laugh track, having a good time for us. The feeling is neither mutual nor contagious.

Commentary

Often described as a comedy, *Roy Colt & Winchester Jack* more correctly belongs to the category of farce or satire. It is not a straightforward story with humorous dialogue, but more akin to a feature-length *Mad* magazine sketch that pokes fun at the traditions of Westerns in general, and Italian Westerns in particular, while wearing a poker face that occasionally becomes comic in itself.

The primary target of Bava's satire is the filmic universe of Sergio Leone, with whom he previously worked at least once, on the 1954 Aldo Fabrizi comedy *Hanno rubato un tram*, which employed Leone as assistant director. In *Roy Colt,* Leone is caricatured as Sam Lewis (note the shared initials), a boisterous, loud-mouthed cripple whose crutches are shot out from under him, inch by inch, by a sharpshooter with Tourette's Syndrome, whose violent behavior is punctuated by involuntary bird-calls—a jokey reference to Ennio Morricone's famous music for *Il buono, il brutto, il cattivo.* We can't be sure of what Bava's feelings were about Leone, nor did he make such intentions known to his cast ("If [mocking Leone] was his intention, I was unaware of it," says Brett Halsey), but there is a bitter edge to both characterizations that is hard to overlook or understand. Actor Giorgio Gargiullo, who plays Sam, is a dead ringer for Leone (as he looked in 1969, not in 1954) and the three characters of Roy, Jack, and the Reverend essentially reprise the roles

played in Leone's film by Lee Van Cleef, Clint Eastwood, and Eli Wallach—all three men pooling their resources, none too willingly, to reach a promised fortune in gold buried in a cemetery, each of them gaining (and abusing) the upper hand at least once, and hoping to ultimately cut the other two out of their shares. The Reverend, a Russian socialist (who turns out to be the greediest capitalist of them all) whose weapon of choice is dynamite, suggests an attentive familiarity with Leone's then-current project, *Giù la testa/A Fistful of Dynamite*, which featured James Coburn as a dynamite-chucking Marxist. Leone's film was simultaneously in production at Cinecittà but not released until October 29, 1971—more than a year after *Roy Colt*'s premiere. Therefore, some of the humor in Bava's film is surprisingly prescient, even when it's not particularly funny.

To make a comedy rooted in one's private feelings can be interpreted as yet another instance, conscious or unconscious, of Bava trying to sabotage his own career. Any viewer coming to *Roy Colt & Winchester Jack* thinking that they will see an ordinary Western, or even a comic Western in the style of the later Trinity films, has another think coming. This kind of farce involves a deliberate element of grotesquerie, resulting in sometimes overbearing exaggerations of nature, overstated action and distorted performances that are all too easy to interpret unfavorably. *Roy Colt* contains more artless shots than any other Bava film, but for an artist of Bava's caliber, we must assume this was a deliberate choice, and perhaps a statement in itself about the look of Leone's Westerns, which took a more neorealistic approach than did Hollywood Westerns, arriving at a style that was hot and dusty and as "natural" as manure. In the manner of a George Grosz sketch, *Roy Colt* exaggerates this aspect of Leone's films and takes that exaggeration way over the top.

A perfect example of this approach is a scene involving the Reverend, whose trembling face and beaded brow are photographed with a wide-angle lens (a modern device that no director



ITALIAN *due-foglia, art by Rodolfo Gasparri.*



GERMAN *A1 poster.*

would wisely employ in a period Western), greatly exaggerating what would otherwise look like a typically intense Leone close-up. As his cohorts run into the background of the shot and crouch to request orders, the Reverend fumes—we don't know if he is simply angered by their incompetence, or still shivering with cold—but, as the two men leave, the Reverend's face suddenly relaxes with heavenly relief, and we realize that he's been crouching and straining to defecate throughout the entire scene. In essence, the scene mocks Leone's style by implying that his sweaty, hard-faced close-ups made his actors appear constipated.

The film's emphasis on wide-angle (as opposed to widescreen) lensing gives the film a funhouse look of extreme caricature and makes some of its performances, especially Teodoro Corrà's, seem positively ogreish at times. Remarkably, under these circumstances, Bava is careful to ensure that all of the actors look their best and, though the film itself is ultimately a grating failure, sustained only by a few scattered nuggets of interest, they all manage to emerge with their dignity intact. *Roy Colt* might have been more successful—as a comedy, and as a commercial release—had its humor been more democratic, less privileged and interior, and its satiric elements certainly would have been more effective if Leone's magnificent epics were actually deserving of such severe lampooning.

Roy Colt & Winchester Jack is not one of Bava's signature works, but a close examination of its cinematography finds it generally in keeping with his usual habits. The film either introduces or reprises a number of the transitional habits that Bava was developing with Antonio Rinaldi: shots that open on a detail and zoom back, that commence by fading in or out of focus, or that begin up in the sky or in the trees and gracefully descend to frame the earthbound action. (As these transitional habits also occur in *Lisa and the Devil*, for which Rinaldi was replaced by another cameraman, we may assume that Bava was operating the camera, or that Rinaldi was following Bava's instructions with such ideas.) The exterior scenes at Jack's gang's campsite also manage to incorporate some familiar Bavian scenery, such as gnarling foregrounded branches to enhance the illusion of a wilderness, or the mystique of whorling smoke from an offscreen campfire. The camera setup underscores Bava's wary feelings about marriage when the first kiss between Jack and Mahila takes place behind the "prison bars" of a patch of tall unfocused reeds, their moment of intimacy slowly revealed as a wall of early evening fog dissipates. Later in the film, when Jack and Mahila are shown making love in a sleeping bag, their coital undulations animate the bag like a serpent—and composer Piero Umiliani comments on the shot musically with an Eastern-tinged cue, not included on the soundtrack CD, that suggests the ululations of a snake charmer. After making love, Mahila proposes marriage to Jack; when he refuses and she retaliates by tallying his debt on her *cuenta*, he throws the curved bone into a very suggestively shaped pond, positioned between two hillocks of rock. Roy Colt's return is signalled when his inverted reflection suddenly appears in the pool—a shot that quotes similar moments in *La maschera del demonio* and *Ercole al centro della terra* when faces made surprise appearances in goblets of wine or pools of blood. A macabre element is introduced with the use of an Indian skull to divine the location of the gold's burial place in an Indian graveyard, the camera set-up showing a bright sun shining from its hollow right socket—which echoes the reanimation of Princess Asa in her Moldavian crypt.

Bava's hand is also in evidence in the pay-off of the bordello sequence, when the Reverend—seized by a group of angry men and pushed through an opaque decorative screen where the silhouette of a curvaceous dancing girl is being projected as entertainment—reveals the "dancer" to be a grizzled old man wearing cardboard cut-outs to put curves in all the right places. It's a genuine shock on first viewing, and one of Bava's most effective admonitions for us not to believe in what we think we see.

But what is finally most captivating about this tale of two men is the woman at its center. The character of Mahila imbues *Roy Colt* with the hint of melancholy found in Bava's beloved Chaplin comedies. Here, as in many Chaplin classics, the comic male caricatures are buttressed by a somewhat more realistic female character who is alone in the world, with a painful past, who nevertheless meets each day with optimism and a determination to survive. The interior scene of Jack's first attempts to seduce Mahila opens with a close shot of her lighting a lantern—an ordinary domestic act, but the shot is infused with a mysterious sensibility that intuitively relates her to the occult women of Bava's earlier and subsequent features. Over the course of the film, we see Mahila "survive" by leaving one man for another, determined to marry or at least to attach herself to the strongest possible male companion until a true prospective husband comes along. Mahila also recalls the street children of the great neorealist classics, living from day to day in a postwar desolation zone, yearning for stability and security. In its final moments, with her achievement of independence, *Roy Colt & Winchester Jack* restates Bava's view of women as the wisest sex, the true governors of society, and the ultimate beneficiaries of men's dreams and labors.

Release

When Brett Halsey finally saw *Roy Colt & Winchester Jack*, more than thirty years after making it, he wrote to me that "I generally liked what I saw . . . I was particularly impressed by the way Bava would use his camera to get the maximum effect from a minimum of production values; Riccardo Freda's influence is quite evident. But the post-production values are pretty poor. Whoever wrote the Italian dialogue couldn't have followed the English script very closely."

In addition to *Roy Colt*'s arcane humor and its occasional, undisguised bitterness toward Sergio Leone and his Westerns, its comic intentions are made even more opaque by an Italian track that effectively destroys any glimmer of verbal humor it may once have had. The film's failure to secure any kind of real or lasting distribution in English-speaking countries has resulted, in the long run, of the loss of its native language and whatever elements of comedy it contained.

"I don't specifically remember whether or not I dubbed the picture," acknowledges Brett Halsey, "but I think all actors *want* to dub themselves. But it was in our contract that, if we exercised the right to dub our own performances, we would not be paid for it. I mention this because I sometimes did the dubbing for other actors, because for *that*, I *would* get paid. It worked out as a kind of bonus for me. My manager didn't give me a lot of freedom with my money, but the money I earned from dubbing I could put straight into my pocket. If a producer presold one of my films to the States, he would want to have my voice used in the dubbing, and I would do this. However, sometimes if the American sale didn't happen, or if it didn't happen until later, there might be a problem because I might be off working on another picture and wouldn't be available. So in those cases, they would have to get another actor to dub it." *Roy Colt* was one of those films that did not have a standing American distribution deal at the time it was made, so it was likely not dubbed until some time after production wrapped.

After an undistinguished Roman premiere in August 1970, *Roy Colt & Winchester Jack* waited two years—until after the successful premiere of E. B. Clucher's [Enzo Barboni's] popular comic Western *Lo chiamovano Trinità/They Call Me Trinity* (1971)—before receiving any kind of international release. In 1972, it was acquired by distributors in Spain, West Germany, and the United States. Though a *fumetto* adaptation of the film was published in the December 1971 issue of the French Western *ciné-roman* magazine *Star-Ciné Winchester* (under the title *A Moi l'or à toi le Colt*, or "The Gold for Me, The Colt for You"), the film was never given a theatrical release in France and only surfaced there, many years later, on television.

In America, *Roy Colt & Winchester Jack* was acquired by Cinevision—the company that picked up *Four Times*





FRAME *enlargements from Bava's Mobil Oil commercial, I FUTURIBILI: Title superimposed over a Bava matte painting, actors ascending in an elevator enclosed by windows, the principal actor watching as he ascends higher than the surrounding skyscrapers, and a child's game of football unfolds on the playing field of a domed rooftop.*

That Night around the same time—but with the possible exception of one or two minor playdates to qualify for a tax break, the film appears to have gone not only unreleased but unpromoted. In thirty years of collecting, I have never seen a US one-sheet poster or pressbook for the title. Some sources, like the International Movie Database, also mention US distribution being handled by Libert Films International—a small and short-lived (1975-76) company specializing in "unexplained phenomena" documentary features. The film's current owner, Alfredo Leone, doubts that more than a few prints of the English-dubbed version were ever struck, and as the film was being readied for its American DVD release in late 2002, no print or negative of the English-dubbed version was found to exist.

Though *Roy Colt & Winchester Jack* is one of Bava's lesser works, the present lack of an English version nevertheless represents a significant loss. The film's leads gave their performances in English, and some of the film's humor was clearly intended to be linguistic in nature, as indicated by the Reverend's fractured Italian—which cannot be adequately conveyed to English-speaking audiences by subtitles. In short, though *Roy Colt & Winchester Jack* survives, its true nature may be lost; its already limited interest further stunted by the loss of its basic language and sense of laughter.

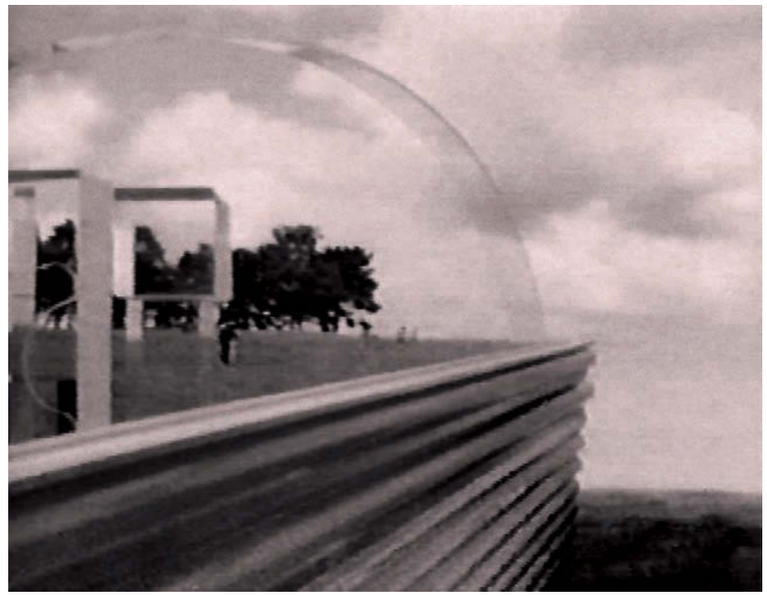
I futuribili

It was the beginning of a new decade, and Mario Bava must have experienced pangs of uncertainty as his final working years loomed before him. The glory days of the Italian Gothic cinema were long over, and he was approaching his 60th year at a time when the popular cinema was becoming synonymous with youth. He had spent the previous year filming in Westerns and erotica—two genres for which he had no real affinity—and very quickly fallen to a level of production far below that of *Diabolik*, which he had directed only two years earlier. It must have occurred to him that he may have been wrong to refuse Dino De Laurentiis' request for a sequel. "I blew it all, right from the start," he confessed in an interview with Luigi Cozzi. (Can you think of any director working today who would be capable of such candor in a print interview?) "I made two big mistakes—first of all, it's impossible for me to be serious for more than a couple of minutes, and if you're a director who doesn't happen to wear glasses, doesn't have a frowning, intellectual countenance, that 'serious' look—well, you aren't going to be perceived as a good director! Second, I always tried to make do with small, shoestring budgets. If I need a Ferrari Dino for a particular scene, but the producer delivers a Fiat 500, should I fly into a rage and raise hell until I get exactly what I asked for? No! When they bring me the Fiat 500, I shrug my shoulders and rewrite the scene so that it works, in spite of it. And what do I get for being nice? Instead of having them say, 'Good work, Mario . . . thanks to you, we came in under budget . . . you really know how to solve problems' and so forth . . . the next time I ask for a Fiat 500, they bring me a bicycle! So I have to make do again. It shouldn't happen this way, but it does, and it's nobody's fault but my own. I don't give a damn, anyway . . ." [4]

While waiting for new feature opportunities to materialize, Bava continued to do uncredited work. It was during this period that Bava accepted an offer from the Ted Bates Agency to write, direct, and photograph a series of black-and-white television commercials—known in Italy as *caroselli*—for Mobil Oil. ("I did it because they paid good money," he told Cozzi, defensively. "Why should I refuse?") These imaginative spots—each a few minutes in length—shared the common title *I futuribili* and utilized Bava's genius for economical trick photography. They depicted men and women interacting with various amenities of future life, which Mobil research would make possible. Among the subjects of these commercials were "The University of the Future," "The Telemarket," "Videoradar," and "360° Television."

In one of these commercials, the Manhattan skyline is shown straddled by an elaborate four-legged construction. A young adult man in an elegantly tailored jumpsuit enters a transparent, exterior elevator and ascends over the city to an enclosed rooftop; there he finds his son playing soccer in a natural park preserve. The boy is shown running precariously close to the edge of the rooftop and bouncing his ball off the curve of an invisible, shatterproof dome. The accompanying narration:





Tomorrow's people!

Imagine a different world—dream ahead to what reality will be for the people of the future! Tomorrow's people are just like you—people capable of imagining a different world, using the present to dream of the world their children will inhabit.

With Mobil, you can experience the future today, because we offer Mobil 42, the gas which adds a new gear to your engine—the gear of security![5]

The commercial is a model of economy, personal style and vision. The futuristic panorama shown at the commercial's outset is one of Bava's clever photo mattes, in which New York City is shown straddled by a customized version of the control tower at Los Angeles International Airport. The point-of-view shots of New York skyscrapers as the elevator rises above them were achieved by angling a photograph behind a sheet of trick glass, which distorted the image and created the illusion of receding. The rooftop oasis was shot at a real outdoor location, through a glass matte depicting the domed rooftop ledge. The illusion of the boy bouncing his ball off the transparent barrier was produced by filming the shot through a sheet of glass, on half of which the dome and sky were painted. The camera saw through the clear portion to the child actor, who was bouncing his ball off a wall blocked from view by the matte painting.

Another commercial in the series depicted how tomorrow's boxers might be able to heal their bruised and battered faces by stepping inside a "regeneration machine." This effect was engineered "without cuts or dissolves," according to Lamberto Bava, which in tandem with the black-and-white nature of the photography, suggests that it reprised the red and blue makeup/lighting interaction that Bava had used in *I vampiri*, *Caltiki*, and *La maschera del demonio*.

Ethereally scored by Giulio Sorgini, the *I futuribili* commercials show that Bava had lost none of his unique talent for pop science fiction imagery, showcased so excitingly in *Terrore nello spazio*, and makes it all the more regrettable that he was unable to convince producers to fund more of his science fiction projects.

Bava's 1970 interview with Luigi Cozzi took place shortly after his work had been presented to the Italian heads of Mobil Oil. "The other night, they had a big meeting at the company, where they showed my commercials," Bava said with some pride, and even more bewilderment. "There were lots of big shots, guys wearing gold rings and blue blazers, the sort who stink of money, I couldn't understand anything, it was so chaotic, with speeches and presentations and so forth. It was like the premiere of *Ben-Hur*! But at the end of all this, they showed my cheap little commercials, with all their homemade trick shots. At least they seemed to like them . . ."

Evidently Bava continued to direct commercials on the side during this period—as, indeed, his son Lamberto has done throughout his feature film directing career. Actress Penny Brown remembers Mario Bava directing her in an Italian TV commercial for home freezer units in the early 1970s. For decades, it seemed likely that Bava's commercials would never resurface, but finally, one of them was rebroadcast as part of RAI-3's Bava tribute on January 29, 1995. In June of that year, Marco Giusti arranged for the screening of two *I futuribili* commercials at a Bava tribute at the 13th Annual Anteprima festival of independent Italian cinema.

Seeing Bava's *I futuribili* commercials today, we can appreciate once again how his innovative approach proved prophetic and influential even within the field of advertising. In 1994, AT&T launched a similar series of commercials in America, in which AT&T customers were shown selecting first-run movies from a menu on a television screen that filled an entire wall, and writing messages on lapscreens by hand while lounging on the beach; their messages were then transmitted as faxes to the other side of the world. "Can't do these things yet?" the commercials asked. "Some day you will, thanks to AT&T."

I futuribili

"The People of Tomorrow"
1970
B&W, 1.37:1, TV commercials

Production: B. L. Vision. Producers: Sandro Bolchi, Mario Lanfranchi. Director, Script, Director of photography, Special effects: Mario Bava. Music: Giulio Sorgini. Agency: Ted Bates.

4 Luigi Cozzi, *Il cinema dei mostri* (Rome, Italy: Fanucci Editore, 1987), 249–60.

5 Narration translated from the Italian by Luca Rea.





Hellbound

"It is better to marry than to burn."
—New Testament, Corinthians 7:9

BARON BLOOD: *This Italian fotobusta detail shows Rada Rassimov in her dual role, as oracle Christina Hoffmann communicates with the spirit of executed witch Elizabeth Holle.*


JANO.



DETAIL *from Spanish poster art by Jano.*

ECOLOGIA DEL DELITTO

Twitch of the Death Nerve

AFTER COMPLETING *Roy Colt & Winchester Jack*, Mario Bava sensed that the intuitive, improvisational approach he had taken to his career was leading him into a professional *cul de sac*. If he continued to accept whatever jobs were offered him, he would be nothing more than an artisan posing as a hack. The time had come to take greater responsibility for generating his own projects. With this end in mind, he renewed his acquaintance with actress Laura Betti and the two of them set to work concocting new opportunities for collaboration. A gourmet cook in her private life, the *Il rosso segno della follia* star began inviting Bava to her dinner parties, and sometimes to private suppers, which he would attend with his aging basset hound, Centi.

Bava was devoted to Centi, but according to Armando Valcauda, taking it everywhere he went was also something of a pretext. During their first meeting, Bava confided to his young admirer that his wife became argumentative whenever he left their house, so in order to keep his social appointments, he had to either wait until she was napping or make the excuse that the dog needed walking.

Appropriately for a project born of kitchen talk, Bava and Betti cooked up a scenario they called either *Odore di carne* ("Stench of Flesh") or *Sapore di carne* ("Taste of Flesh"), about cannibalism at a Los Angeles college. According to Lamberto Bava, "Another title of this story was *Santanas*, referring to the wind that blows in those places, which has similar effects to those of our Italian *sirocco*." [1] When a roving RAI-Televizione camera happened to corner Bava for a short interview—his first-known television appearance—the uncomfortable-in-the-limelight director took the opportunity to mention it by name. Around this same time, Bava also took some meetings with producer Dino De Laurentiis, who, after the boxoffice success of Dario Argento's *L'uccello dalle piume di cristallo* and its follow-up *Il gatto a nove code*/*The Cat o' Nine Tails* (1971), was flirting with the idea of producing a *giallo* of his own.

It was while Argento's second film was in production that its young screenwriter, 27-year-old Dardano Sacchetti, was contacted by De Laurentiis. At the time, Sacchetti was involved in a public financial dispute with Argento and his producer father Salvatore Argento, over compensations due him for his involvement in the scripting of *Il gatto a nove code*. Argento had written the first forty pages of the script, based on an idea he had mapped out with Sacchetti, and the production had been set up on the basis of those pages; therefore, Argento wanted sole screenplay credit. Sacchetti (who received story credit) had no argument with this, but the change of credit also entailed a change in payment that made him quite indignant.

"Dario and I had a big quarrel, so big it made the newspapers, and Dino De Laurentiis called me after reading about it," Sacchetti reports. "He told me that he had a contract with Mario Bava and wanted to make thrillers. He knew that I had collaborated with Dario on *Il gatto a nove code*, so he asked if I would like to write something together with Bava. We wrote two stories together; one was called *Reazione a catena*, about children who had been abandoned by their parents and what became of them, and the other became *Schock* . . ." [2]

Bava and Sacchetti got along famously. "My personal memories of Mario are quite loving," he smiles. "Mario was just like a grandfather—he already had two grandchildren, Georgia and Roy. Mario had the face of a grandfather, always a gentle expression. He never raised his voice. He liked playing cards. I call Mario my 'teacher,' because I had never met anyone of such genius, especially with such a great sense of irony. Mario was the kind of person who could die of fright; to exorcise his fears, he made horror films. I, on the other hand, am afraid of nothing and never have been. My grandmother used to go to my grandfather's grave three times each night to exhume little pieces of his body, to convince herself that he was really dead! When I was 8 years old, she made me go with her to the cemetery—so I, too, have a sense of irony. That's how we were together: one of us absolutely terrified of everything, and the other with absolutely no sense of fear."

Bava and Sacchetti set out to write a *giallo* in which everyone was the murderer, a story of wall-to-wall homicide that would leave everyone, likewise, a victim. It was a play on the shock conceit initiated by Hitchcock for *Psycho* (1960), in which he surprised the audience by killing off the lead character, played by Janet Leigh, one-third of the way through the story. "Thirteen characters, thirteen murders!" Bava laughed. "I was [also] interested in depicting a variety of ways to kill, in presenting a veritable catalogue of crime." [3]

Sacchetti had his own goals in mind: "The film grew out of my concept of the evil in children. I'm convinced that children are much crueller than adults,



ISA MIRANDA *as the Countess Federica, struggling for her last breath.*

Ecologia del delitto

"Ecology of Murder"
Working titles:
Così imparano a fare i cattivi "That Will Teach Them to Be Bad,"
La baia d'argento "The Bay of Silver,"
La baia sanglante "The Bay of Blood."
Script title: *Reazione a catena,* "Chain Reaction."
Filmed at Elios Film Studios and on location
in Sabaudia and Frascati, near Rome
January 18 – February 1971
First released: September 8, 1971
Technicolor, 1.85:1, 85 minutes

Production: Nuova Linea Cinematografica (Rome). Producer: Giuseppe Zaccariello. Director: Mario Bava. Assistant director: Lamberto Bava. Screenplay: Mario Bava, Joseph McLee [Giuseppe Zaccariello] and Filippo Ottoni, with Sergio Canevari, Francesco Vanorio (uncredited). Story: Dardano Sacchetti, Franco Barbieri. Continuity: Patrizia Zulini. Director of photography: Mario Bava. Camera operator: Emilio Varriano. Camera assistant: Lorenzo Battaglia. Art direction: Sergio Canevari. Special effects: Carlo Rambaldi. Wardrobe: Sartoria Mayer. Wardrobe assistant: Rosanna Andreoni, C.S.C. Costume design: Enrico Sabbatini. Makeup: Franco Freda. Weapons: Adalgisa Favella. Production supervisor: Ferdinando Franchi. Production manager: Roberto Cicutto. Editor: Carlo Reali. Music: Stelvio Cipriani. Sound: Carlo Turchi. Sound recordist: Carlo Diotallevi, C.S.C. Stills: Franco Vitale, Studio Massa. Distributor: Nuova Linea Cinematografica.

Additional US credit: Post-sync dialogue: Gene Luotto.

Claudine Auger (Renata Donati), Luigi Pistilli (Alberto/Albert), Claudio Volonté (Simone/Simon), Anna M. [Maria] Rosati (Laura), Chris Avram (Franco/Frank Ventura), Leopoldo Trieste (Paolo/Paul Fosatti), Laura Betti (Anna Fosatti), Isa Miranda (Countess Federica Donati), Giovanni Nuvoletti (Count Filippo Donati), Brigitte Skay (Brunhilda), Paola Rubens [Paola Montenero] (Thérèse/Denise), Roberto Bonnani (Luca/Duke), Guido Boccaccini (Roberto/Bobby), Nicoletta Elmi and Renato Cestiè (Donati children, uncredited).

Argentina: *Baño de Sangre,* "Bay of Blood," Cinematografica Veneuzuela Pelimex C.A.
Belgium: *Bloed in het Meer,* "Blood in the Sea," Stellor Films
Canada: *Bay of Blood*, Ambassador Film Distributors
France: *La baie sanglante,* Audifilm, 4/3/73, 75m
Germany: *Im Blutrausch des Satans,* "In the Bloodlust of Satan," Wa Bo Mondial, Apollo Film, 1983
Italian reissue: *Reazione a catena,* "Chain Reaction," 1972
Spain: *Bahia Sangre,* Internaccional Films Distribución S.A., 1982
Turkey: *Kanli Körfez,* "Bloody Bay"
UK: *Bloodbath*, New Realm Entertainments, 3/80, 81m 3s
US: *Carnage,* Hallmark Releasing Corporation, 5/9/72. Reissues: *Twitch of the Death Nerve*, 12/72; *Last House—Part II*, Newport Releasing, 1977. Video: *Bay of Blood*
US (Spanish-American): *Carnage*, Columbia Pictures

for the simple reason that they must defend themselves against adults; in order to survive, they must be even more violent than their grown-up contemporaries. Our script started out as the story of two parents, who are determined to give their children a good future, and have the idea of killing someone to achieve this goal. Once they have done this, they must murder again and again and again, until the whole thing becomes one long chain and they lose track of how it all started—why they started killing in the first place! That is to say, they forget all about their children, whom they've abandoned for two or three days. In the meantime, the children, on their own, have grown hungry and afraid, so that when the parents return, the children kill them—finishing the chain of violence. [Mario and I] designed every scene as an isolated piece unto itself, as if we were preparing a series of video clips. For example, I came up with the scene of the old lady being killed in her wheelchair, because I liked the idea of someone dying only a few inches above the ground, but still not being able to save themselves. Mario had the idea of the two bodies being run-through with a spear while they were making love; he wanted them to be killed 'as one flesh.' The sequence with the squid in the boat came about because we wanted to play on the idea that the body under the tarpaulin might still be alive, because there was movement beneath it, only to have the tentacles of the squid pop out! Coming up with ways for each of the characters to die posed a great challenge to us both. We were determined to make each and every death as wild and absurd as possible!"

In those days, Sacchetti worked with a writing partner, Franco Barbieri, whose involvement was apparently to blame for Sacchetti not going on to write the shooting script. "Barbieri had many personal problems, and Bava didn't really like him, and there was a sensational argument between the production, Barbieri and Mario," Sacchetti explains. "Barbieri was fired, and since I was a nice leftist boy, I said, 'If you fire him, you must fire me too.' Essentially, I left the film after delivering the first draft."[4]

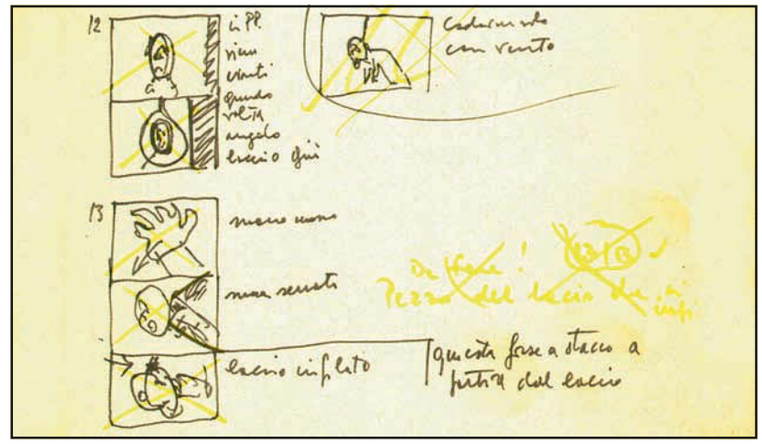
The original title, an inspired one, was taken from the closing words of the Sacchetti/Barbieri draft, spoken by the Donati children after shooting their parents: *Cosi imparano a fare i cattivi* ("That Will Teach Them to Be Bad"). As the material continued to be developed by Bava, other writers became involved; some print references list Francesco Vanorio and art director Sergio Canevari as contributors to the script, but the most important contributor was ultimately Filippo Ottoni, who came to the job through its eventual producer.

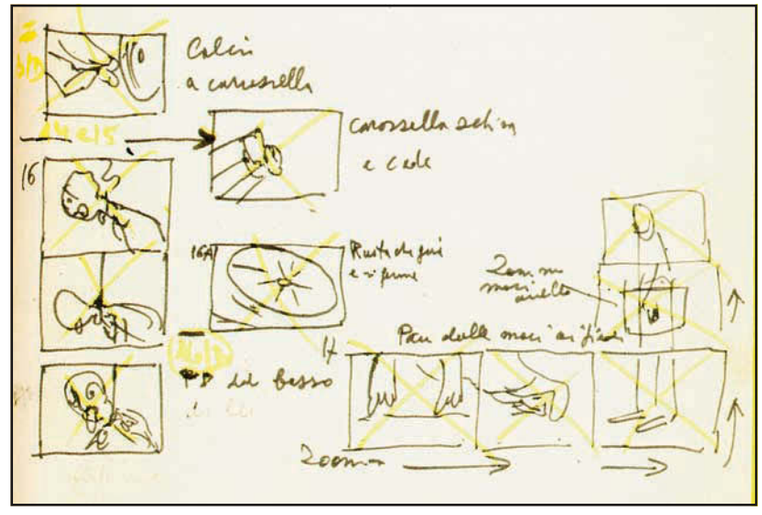
Dino De Laurentiis lost interest in producing the project when the Italian success of *Il gatto a nove code* was not repeated abroad, but it was not without a sponsor for long. Bava was able to secure a promise of financial support from Giuseppe Zaccariello, who had been a silent partner in the productions of both *Il rosso segno della follia* and *5 bambole per la luna d'agosto*. Zaccariello insisted on having the shooting script written by Ottoni, whose ambitious screenplay *L'uomo scomodo* ("The Uncomfortable Man") he had promised to produce before becoming convinced that it was too intellectual and poetical to be profitable, and reneging on the deal.

"The memory that I have of Mario Bava is that of a man obsessed with his taxes, who did this film because he had this deadline with IR," Ottoni says. "At that time, he owed something like 140 million *lire* [$87,000] in overdue taxes, which was a scary amount of money, so he needed desperately to get a film together. Therefore he approached Zaccariello . . . with this story, written by two young men. I remember Sacchetti; I don't think I ever met the other [writer, Franco Barbieri]. Since Zaccariello had this strange idea that I was a literary writer, his vivid imagination conceived that putting together a literary writer with an exploitation director could produce an extraordinary result. I told him that I didn't even like this genre that much. I knew who Mario Bava was because I had met him a year earlier at the De Laurentiis studio, where I worked as an assistant on *Waterloo*, which really was a Waterloo. Anyway, I tried to write this story. There was a treatment I had to flesh out, to enrich, especially writing all the dialogues. At the time we were working, I remember reading to Mario a couple of Chekov stories, since we were both lovers of Russian literature—and while listening, he would exclaim, 'What images! Cut here, cut there!' Every sentence for him was an image."[5]

Given the importance of landscape to the final script, Bava invited Ottoni to join him on location scouting expeditions. Ottoni: "We went location scouting in his Jaguar, the inheritance of a happier past, which guzzled about two gallons of gas per mile, so it wasn't cheap to drive. He was a very gentle character, suave and delicate. And the thing that struck me most about him was that, whenever we discussed the gruesome sequences, he got scared. I wondered, 'Is he serious, or is he pulling my leg?' But it was true—he really got frightened! The blade slamming into the man's face, for example, literally horrified him, just the idea . . ." Curiously, although the film's surprise ending was supposedly Sacchetti's contribution and therefore must have existed in the earlier draft, Ottoni has no recollection of it. "The ending, when the two kids kill their

ORIGINAL *Bava storyboard for Countess Federica's death sequence.*





1 Manlio Gomarasca and Davide Pulici, "Il Talento di Mr. Bava," *Nocturno Dossier* 24, July 2004, 6–32.

2 Dardano Sacchetti, *Mario Bava Maestro of the Macabre* interview transcript, 2000. All Dardano Sacchetti quotes are derived from this transcript.

3 Ornella Volta, "Conversation avec Mario Bava," *Positif* 138, May 1972, 44–48.

4 Gomarasca and Pulici.

5 Ibid. All Filippo Ottoni quotes are translated from this article.



CHRIS AVRAM *and Anna Maria Rosati as the mercenary Frank Ventura and his scheming secretary-lover Laura.*

parents, was added later," he says. "I didn't write this part, and it definitely wasn't in the script."

When the finished film was first screened abroad, it met with not only controversy but outright hostility. It must be remembered that the overseas distribution of Bava's films had been spotty for the past half dozen years, so American audiences had not been able to observe Bava's creative evolution step-by-step. In early 1972, *Kill, Baby . . . Kill!* had been the last of his horror pictures to receive any kind of widespread American distribution, and despite its lurid title which would have been perfect for *Ecologia del delitto*!), it was very much the sort of film that was expected of him. To be immersed in *Ecologia del delitto* without prior exposure to Bava's increasingly ironic work in movies like *Il rosso segno della follia, 5 bambole per la luna d'agosto*, or even *Diabolik* (which Paramount barely released in the US) was to induce a kind of culture shock. As often happens when audacious or prophetic works of art are unveiled, the film polarized Bava's already modest fan base—one side disgusted by the film's over-the-top, almost unprecedented bloody violence and seeming lack of plot, and the other applauding its inventive structure and outrageous, dark sense of humor. Both camps seemed to agree, though, that Bava's work had never been so far removed from the Italian gothic *milieu* that was synonymous with his name.

Thirty years later, it is now commonly accepted that no other Bava film was quite as lastingly influential as this one, by far the most outrageous horror picture he ever perpetrated. There was very little like it at the time, and in terms of horror cinema, there has been very little *un*like it since. Though not the first "body count" movie—a strain which Bava had innovated earlier with the clearly labelled *Sei donne per l'assassino*, *Cry Nightmare* (*Sette vergine per i diavolo*), and *5 bambole per la luna d'agosto*—*Ecologia del delitto* is now recognized as the smoking gun behind the phenomenally lucrative "body count" movie trend of the 1980s, which began with Sean S. Cunningham's *Friday the 13th* (1980)—a film that resulted in ten sequels, a television series, and countless imitations and parodies.

Synopsis

Wealthy, aged and invalid, Countess Federica Donati is wheeling herself through the empty rooms of her sumptuous, bayside villa when she is abruptly lassoed and hanged to death by her husband, Count Filippo Donati. On a nearby table, he places a "suicide note" in his wife's own handwriting ("O sweet Death, come swiftly, come silently!") bearing the current date of February 13—it is actually a page torn from her diary[6] of exactly one year earlier, when she was suffering a terrible depression. As he prepares to remove all traces of foul play from the scene of the crime, the Count is stabbed to death by an unseen intruder who absconds with his body.

Frank Ventura, an architect who lives near the Donatis on the bay, is having an affair with his secretary, Laura. Together they have been in talks with the Countess to persuade her to sign a land development deal, allowing her bayside home to be demolished to make way for casinos and other lucrative businesses. She has always refused, wishing to preserve the natural beauty of the landscape. As Ventura prepares to leave Laura's apartment, he mentions the news of the Countess' suicide and her husband's apparent disappearance.

Back at the bay, the amateur entomologist Paolo Fosatti searches the surrounding woods for an insect that has continually eluded his net. He is chided by the misanthropic Simon, a local fisherman who lives in a bayside shack, and the two men have a discussion about killing—Simon arguing that he, at least, eats the squid he catches, while Paolo preys upon insects for nothing more than his own intellectual distraction. Paolo's wife Anna, an occultist and alcoholic, discovers portents of death while reading Tarot cards and warns her uninterested husband that "the sickle of Death is about to strike."

Four fun-seeking teenagers—Duke, Denise, Bobby, and Brunhilda—are out joyriding when they discover the inviting, vacated property of Frank Ventura. They break into his empty cottage for a private party. As Duke and Denise retire to a bedroom, Brunhilda tries to tempt the reluctant Bobby to her side by stripping and going for a swim in

the bay. There, she discovers the dead body of Filippo Donati tethered underwater and flees the bay, naked and screaming. Before she can reach the cottage, her throat is slashed from behind with a billhook. Answering a knock at the door, Bobby has the same weapon slammed into his face. While Duke and Denise are making love in Ventura's bed, they are skewered by a tribal spear from their host's collection.

The Count's daughter, Renata, arrives at the bay with her husband Albert and their two children, expecting to inherit her stepmother's fortune and property, which includes the spectacularly scenic bay. She finds her chances complicated when the Fosattis inform her that Simon is actually Federica's illegitimate son. His direct bloodline makes him the rightful heir to her fortune and the bayside wilderness. The Donatis go directly to Simon and confront him about his patrimony. During their conversation, Renata notices movement under the sailcloth in Simon's boat and pulls it back, revealing her father's waterlogged corpse buried under a heap of squids. She is sickened by the sight, and Albert rushes with her to the nearest convenience—Ventura's cottage. As Albert goes for help, Renata looks for a place to vomit and discovers the mutilated bodies of the four teenagers artfully arranged in the bathtub. Ventura appears, holding an axe, and tries to attack Renata, but she shuts herself behind the bathroom door and then thrusts a scissors through its glass panel, stabbing Ventura in the groin. The Fosattis become aware of what's going on, and while trying to summon the police by telephone, Paolo is strangled with the phone cord by Albert, while Anna is decapitated upon discovering Ventura's bleeding body.

Laura arrives at Ventura's cottage and finds him badly wounded. He tells her to go to Simon's shack and fetch him back. Once she is there, Simon locks her inside and it is revealed that Laura seduced not only Simon, but also Filippo Donati to procure their signatures on deals with Ventura, granting him full development rights to the bay.



THE UNHAPPY *Fosattis: Tarot-reading Anna (Laura Betti) smirks as husband Paolo (Leopoldo Trieste) admires his latest incect find.*

She also persuaded Donati to procure his wife's diary, which Ventura knew contained a dated page that could be passed off as a suicide note, if Donati was to kill her on the anniversary of the day when it was written. Feeling used and betrayed, Simon moves threateningly toward Laura, who flings a boiling pot of water in his face. He grabs Laura and strangles her to death on the floor. Leaving his shack in a state of shock and heartsickness, Simon is abruptly speared to a wall by Albert, who is acting at his wife's encouragement—thus ridding themselves of the only other rightful heir to the property. Returning to Ventura's darkened cottage, Albert is attacked in the dark by a not-quite-dead Ventura, who finally dies in the scuffle.

Renata and Albert survive the massacre and plan to make a discreet escape, returning to the bay once they have been officially notified by the authorities . . . but in a final twist of fate, they are both shot dead by a double-barrelled rifle, which their two neglected children have mistaken for a toy.

The final score card: The Countess was hanged by her husband, the Count; the Count was stabbed by his stepson, Simon; the four teens were slaughtered in various ways by Ventura, whose property they invaded; Paolo was garotted by Albert; Anna was decapitated by Renata; Laura was strangled by Simon; Simon was impaled by Albert; Ventura was killed by Albert, after being stabbed by Renata; and Albert and Renata were shot by their two children with a double-barrelled shotgun—which leaves them to inherit the bay like two innocents given the keys to the Garden of Eden.

Cast

Bava felt that he had "a bit of luck" with the casting of *Ecologia del delitto*. Carried over from *Roy Colt & Winchester Jack* was formidable Isa Miranda as the Countess Federica, Bava may have been pulling his own variation on Hitchcock's *Psycho* stunt by casting her; to Italian audiences, Miranda was simply too big of an international star to be disposed of so quickly—literally within the film's first few minutes. Her role also makes an ironic comment on her starmaking performance in Max Ophuls' *La signora del tutti* (1934); here, too, she is "The Queen of Everything," owning the acreage which the film's other dozen characters so cravenly covet. Isa Miranda died on July 8, 1982, just a little over a year after the passing of her husband, writer–producer–director Alfredo Guarini.

The film's top-billed star, Claudine Auger was born Claudine Ogier in Marseilles, France, on April 26, 1941. She made her screen debut with two uncredited roles—one of them in Jean Cocteau's swan song *Le Testament de Orphée/The Testament of Orpheus* (1960)—and worked in mostly pulpy French and French/Italian co-productions until she won her most famous role, as Domino in Terence Young's

6 The diary, bound in red leather and framed in gilt, is identical to Isabella's diary in *Sei donne per l'assassino/Blood and Black Lace*, which launched its own set of murders.

James Bond blockbuster *Thunderball* (1965), working opposite *Diabolik*'s Adolfo Celi. Predictably, this achievement was followed by a number of second-rank spy adventures trading on her "Bond Girl" celebrity, the best and most imaginative of which was Alain Jessua's Pop Art satire *Jeu de Massacre/The Killing Game* (1967). After *Ecologia del delitto,* Auger appeared in Paolo Cavara's superior *giallo, La tarantola dal ventro nero/The Black Belly of the Tarantula* (1972). Auger—who declined to be interviewed for this book, having no particular memories of the film today—is well-cast as Renata, a modern Lady Macbeth who pushes her husband onward to greater acts of violence in order to obtain the spoils she believes are her birthright. Coolly attractive, feline, and calculating, Auger brings a believable sense of authority and ambition to the latest of Bava's redheads.

"Of the actresses," Bava averred, "the one I liked best was Laura Betti, the singer. She may be an intimidating woman, as they say, but she is a true animal of the theater. She has an incredible presence, and she's acutely intelligent—and intelligence, as long as we are speaking frankly, does not exactly abound in the cinema. When she did a singing tour of Paris, André Breton declared that she was as fine a stylist as Rimbaud."[7]

As Anna Fosatti, another of Bava's intuitive female characters (and, by far, the most vulnerable of the lot), Betti looks like an *art nouveau* Medusa, her mask-like face wreathed in coils of black, serpentine hair, as her Tarot deck ironically reveals the Ace of Swords in the wake of the young lovers' impalement. At the moment she sees it, she says, "Death"—an actual misreading of the card, which traditionally heralds the coming of new ideas and motivations. Later, when she discovers Ventura's stabbed body and kneels beside it, she sees the murder weapon—a pair of bloody scissors—and a close-up of her eyes confirms that she has recognized the recurrent symbol and knows this to be her own moment of truth. She does not run or fight, as the other characters have done, but closes her eyes and serenely accepts her fate—which does not keep her waiting.

In the wake of *Ecologia del delitto*, Betti's film career continued to rise to even greater heights, including such classics of the contemporary Italian cinema as Pier Paolo Pasolini's *I racconti di Canturbury/The Canterbury Tales* (1971) and Bernardo Bertolucci's *Ultimo tango a Parigi/Last Tango in Paris* (1972). In 1973, she did the job done by Mercedes McCambridge in the United States and Jeanne Moreau in France: she provided the raspy voice of the demon-possessed Linda Blair in *L'esorcista*, the dubbed Italian version of William Friedkin's *The Exorcist*. After the murder of Pasolini in 1975, Betti became his literary executor and founded the Associazione Fondo P. P. Pasolini, an organization dedicated to the protection and preservation of his collected works. In 1976, she gave one of her most acclaimed performances as Donald Sutherland's frightening Fascist paramour in Bertolucci's *Novecento/1900,* which was followed by Ettore Scola's *La Nuit de Varennes* (1982). Despite a career studded with lofty achievements, Laura Betti remembered the two films she made with Mario Bava as some of the best times she ever had. She suffered a fatal heart attack while recovering from major surgery on July 31, 2004—what would have been Mario Bava's 90th birthday.



DETAIL *from the Italian promotional brochure: Brunhilda (Brigitte Skay) arrives at Frank Ventura's cottage, while Ventura admires Laura's figure.*

Luigi "Gigi" Pistilli—born July 19, 1929, in Grosetto—plays Renata's weak-willed husband, Albert. His first notable screen appearance was as an incidental gunman in Sergio Leone's seminal Spaghetti Western *Per qualche dollaro in più/For a Few Dollars More* (1965, in which he was the last of Indio's men to be killed). He continued to specialize in the genre throughout the 1960s, dabbling in *gialli* like Romolo Guerrieri's *Il dolce corpo di Deborah/The Sweet Body of Deborah* (1968) and Riccardo Freda's *L'iguana dalle lingua di fioco/The Iguana With the Tongue of Fire* (1971). Reportedly distraught over the death of his wife, Pistilli committed suicide in Milan on April 21, 1996.

Like Pistilli, Leopoldo Trieste had previously worked for producer Giuseppe Zaccariello in Elio Petri's *Il chiascuno del suo/We Still Kill the Old Way* (1967). Born May 3, 1917, in Reggio Calabria, Trieste was one of Italy's most beloved character actors and creative spirits. He had worked previously with Bava when he served as cinematographer of *Città di notte*, which Trieste wrote and directed. Trieste complemented his writing and directing careers with work as a character actor in such international coproductions as his friend Federico Fellini's *Lo sciecco bianco/The White Sheik* (1951) and *I vitelloni* (1953), Vittorio De Sica's *A Farewell to Arms* (1957), Nicolas Roeg's *Don't Look Now* (1973), Francis Ford Coppola's *The Godfather Part II* (1974), and Tinto Brass' notorious *Caligula* (1979). Delightful in *Ecologia del delitto* as the

fretful and obsessive Paolo Fosatti—a character based on Roberto Omegna, Eugenio Bava's scientific colleague at the Istituto LUCE—Trieste manages to be simultaneously dour and ebullient as one of the film's many unambitious males bullied by a stronger female will. Aged 85, Trieste succumbed to a heart attack on January 25, 2003, at his home in Rome.

The film's most intense performance is given by Claudio Volonté, who plays the Countess' illegitimate son, Simon. The younger brother of Italian actor Gian Maria Volonté (best-known in America as Indio in Sergio Leone's *For a Few Dollars More*), Claudio had been working on stage and in films—including Antonio Margheriti's rarely seen *Contronatura/The Unnaturals* (1968)—under the name "Claudio Camaso" since the mid-1960s. *Ecologia del delitto* marked his apparently reluctant debut under his own name. Bava singled out Volonté for special praise, describing him as "a talented actor in the Japanese style. To me, he's even better than his brother; he attacks his performances with a certain savagery."[8]

Volonté appeared in only a few subsequent films, including Lina Wertmuller's *Tutto a posto e niente in ordine/All Screwed Up* (1973) and Giuseppe Ferrara's *Faccia di spia* (1975), in which he played Che Guevara—before personal problems began to get in the way of his career. Though more specific documentation has eluded my research, various interviewees told me that Volonté became a heroin addict in later years, was arrested and convicted of murder after stabbing a man to death in a robbery attempt, and committed suicide in 1977, while in prison.

Chris Avram, who plays the scheming architect Frank Ventura,[9] was born Cristea Avram on August 28, 1931, in Bucharest, Romania. Active in Romanian films since 1960, the course of his life changed when a French co-production—Henri Colpi's *Mona, l'etoile sans nom* (1965)—came to be shot in Bucharest. He was cast as the lover of leading actress Marina Vlady, and their relationship reportedly blossomed offscreen as well. Vlady arranged for him to leave Romania with her when the filming ended, and in 1968, they appeared together in Bernard Paul's *Le temps de vivre/Time to Live*, which was followed by a stand-alone role for Avram in Jean Aurel's *Manon 70*, opposite Catherine Deneuve and Jean-Claude Brialy. A handsome, rugged type with a cleft chin, Avram reportedly augmented his screen career by appearing in *fotoromanzi*. Though only 40 at the time he made *Ecologia del delitto*, Avram was already graying and, though still good-looking, could have passed for a man ten years older. His later work fell largely within the softcore category, including *L'ossessa/The Sexorcist* (1974, which paired him again with Luigi Pistilli) and Joe D'Amato's *Emanuelle a Bangkok/Emanuelle in Bangkok* (1977). He died on January 10, 1989, at age 57.



A SHOCKING *discovery awaits Renata (Claudine Auger) and Albert (Luigi Pistilli) as they interrogate Simon (Claudio Volonté).*

Almost nothing is known about Anna Maria Rosati, who plays Ventura's lover/secretary, Laura, except that her filmography includes only one other picture: Sergio Bergonzelli's *Silvia e l'amore* ("Sylvia and Love," 1968). Though not a very expressive actress, when Rosati re-enters the narrative late in the picture, looking quite voluptuous in her completely white and form-fitting ensemble, her presence amid the otherwise furtive *mise-en-scène* of dark shadows and bold primary colors is striking.

Brigitte Skay, once again removing her clothes as Brunhilda, had previously worked nude for Bava in *Four Times That Night*. Since that association, she had starred as the eponymous heroine of Bruno Corbucci's *Isabella duchessa dei diavoli/Ms. Stilletto* (1969, based on the S&M comic strip by Alessandro Angiolini), and in *Homo eroticus/Man of the Year* (1971). Footage of her and actor Brad Harris, shot for the Three Stars production *Quando suona la compana/When the Bell Rings*, inexplicably ended up in Luigi Batzella's *La bestia in calore/SS Hell Camp* (1977). Skay also recorded a pop single in Germany, *"Ich so Sexy bin"* b/w *"Fritz."* Her film career began to falter after her boyfriend Ugo Pirro persuaded her to fire her agent, in an effort to help her move up and out of exploitation movies. One more picture followed, Sergio Gobbi's *L'Enfant de la Nuit* (1978), which turned out to be her last. In the early 1990s, one of Skay's legs was severely damaged in an automobile accident, which now makes it difficult for her to walk. She lives today in Ariccia, Italy, with two beloved stuffed animals—Heidegunde the sheep and a Teddy bear named Arturo—and earns her living as an artist, creating portraits in fabric.

7 Volta.

8 Ibid.

9 Ventura is the first of a couple of architect characters to appear in Bava's filmography—along with Karl Hummel in his next picture, *Baron Blood*. The references to this occupation may reflect that Bava's daughter Elena became an architect.

Denise (or Thérèse), the other young woman in the "teenage" group—who manages to keep her face averted from camera for nearly all of her screen time—was played by a young actress billed as Paola Rubens. Rubens was, in fact, a Venice-born nude photographic model named Paola Montenero and *Ecologia del delitto* was her first movie appearance. In later years, sporting much shorter hair of a darker color, she specialized in hardcore erotic films, including Alberto Cavallone's coprophagic *Spell-dolce mattatoio* a.k.a. *L'uomo, la donna, la bestia* (1977), Franco Rosetti's *Il mondo porno di due sorella/Emanuelle and Joanna* (1979), *Dolce gola/Sweet Throat* (1980, directed by Lorenzo Onorato as "Lawrence Webber"), and two for Bruno Mattei: *La vera storia della monaca di Monza* and the horror film *L'altro inferno/The Other Hell* (both 1980). The former wife of the late director Massimo Pirri—who directed her in *Calamo* (1975), and later wrote and directed the autobiographical *Eroina/Fatal Fix* (1983, featuring Bava alumni Giorgio Ardisson and William Berger)—Montenero's career was derailed in the early 1980s by drug addiction and a number of arrests for heroin possession.

Roberto Bonnani, cast as Duke (or Luca), the cruder but more experienced of the two young men, previously appeared in Elio Petri's *Indagine su un cittàdino al di sopra di ogni sospetto/Investigation of a Citizen Above Suspicion* (1970) and Tito Schipa Jr.'s *Orfeo 9* (1970, the first Italian rock musical). He continues to be active in films, and was featured in the Billy Crystal romantic comedy *Forget Paris* (1995). Additional feature credits for Giovanni Nuvoletti and Guido Boccaccini don't appear to exist.

The red-haired daughter of Renata and Albert—one of the film's two survivors—was played by Nicoletta Elmi, who was born in 1966. "I made my horror film debut when I was 6 years old, and I was lucky enough to start with the very best," Elmi told Loris Curci in 1996. "I have never seen the film—can you imagine that? My parents were not at all concerned about their little kid committing murder in films . . . I don't remember Mario at all—I was too small back then—but I am told that *Ecologia del delitto* inspired a lot of American horror films, which, alas, I'll probably never get to see."[10]

Bava was evidently charmed by *piccola* Nicoletta, as he cast her again in his next film, *Baron Blood* (1972), as the youngest of his intuitive female characters. Elmi went on to play darkly mischievous or malevolent children in Paul Morrissey's *Flesh for Frankenstein/Andy Warhol's Frankenstein* (1973, in second unit scenes directed by Antonio Margheriti), Massimo Dallamano's *Il medaglione insanguinato/The Cursed Medallion* (1975), and Dario Argento's *Profondo rosso/Deep Red* (1975). After a ten-year disappearance from the screen, she returned as the forbidding yet foxy theater attendant in Lamberto Bava's *Demoni/Demons* (1985). She works today as a children's dentist in Bologna.

Nicoletta's brother was played by Renato Cestiè, a blonde, freckle-faced boy who would later become known as "the Italian Donny Osmond" during his adolescent years. Born in Rome on January 11, 1963, Cestiè made his first screen appearance in *Ecologia del delitto*, which was just the beginning of a very busy year in films, including Maurizio Lucidi's Bud Spencer Western *Si può fare . . . amigo/The Big and the Bad*, Sergio Sollima's *Il diavolo nel cervello*, the Dario Argento-scripted *Così sia su*, and still other theatrical and television films in 1972. In 1974, he was featured in Lucio Fulci's *Il ritorno di Zanna Bianca/Challenge to White Fang* and Joe D'Amato's *Giubbe rosse/Red Coat*. Cestiè had one of his last important roles in Ugo Liberatore's *giallo, Nero venezia/Damned in Venice* (1977), which roughly coincided with the time Mario Bava approached him with another project, which will be discussed later. Coincidentally, Cestiè and Nicoletta Elmi appeared together again on the popular Italian TV series *I ragazzi della Terza C* ("The Boys of Third C"—meaning the "C" section of the third and final year of high school), which ran for three seasons from 1987 till 1989. Today, Cestiè is retired from acting and manages a Roman gymnasium.

Production

The film went before the cameras in early 1971 under the *Così imparano a fare i cattivi* title, but it did not hold for long. Brigitte Skay remembers that the title on the clapboard at the time of her scenes was "*La baia d'argento*" ("The Bay of Silver," as in money), an ironic title which would have underlined the script's parable of greed, while also cleverly co-opting the name of Bava's chief rival for Italy's Horror crown. Certainly, had the film retained this title at the boxoffice, critics would have been quick to infer that the film's exaggerated acts of violence were meant to spoof Argento's increasingly graphic thrillers. But ultimately, Bava did not wish to remind his audience of the competition, so the title was changed once again, at Giuseppe Zaccariello's suggestion, to *Ecologia del delitto*. Filippo Ottoni found the title pretentious and opportunistic, seizing upon a word ("ecology") that was fashionable at the time, but it does have a reasoning behind it. "The Ecology of Murder" is the process by which nature preserves itself against the



TIMID BOBBY *(Guido Boccaccini) tries to temper Brunhilda's exuberance on Ventura's pool slide.*



MEXICAN *lobby card pictures Brunhilda's discovery of Filippo Donati's waterlogged body—and cannibalizes US promotional art for* THE NIGHT EVELYN CAME OUT OF THE GRAVE *(upper right corner).*

greed of men. It is, or so this story would have it, human nature.

Clearly, the genius of *Ecologia del delitto* was its hyperbolic extension of the body counts of *Sei donne per l'assassino* and *5 bambole per la luna d'agosto* to darkly comic extremes. One also imagines that Bava was implicitly aware that this story of mercenary cutthroats vying for control of a scenic property was a metaphor for his own relationship to the rapidly changing modern cinema. As this film amply demonstrates with its depictions of graphic violence and frontal nudity, Bava was capable of bending to the commercial demands of the day but, in return, it was necessary that he be allowed to continue expressing himself as an artist, in relative privacy and with complete autonomy. A character like Frank Ventura is not so different to the new breed of unimaginative moneymen then (as now) invading the movie business, for whom money was the sole standard of quality, and who, by raising budgets and exacting rigid control, were making it harder than ever for artisans like Bava to work in the craftsmanlike ways to which they were accustomed. Though Bava would surely have fought against such an "intellectual" interpretation, the bay—literally, a picturesque view—does offer a metaphor for cinema, a cinema poised on the verge of extinction, under siege by hatchet men.

Such times made Bava immensely grateful to Giuseppe Zaccariello. "Sometimes, I've had to work with impossible producers who wanted to meddle in everything," Bava told Ornella Volta. "There have been times when I've found myself standing in the basement, like a sleepwalker, without remembering how I got there, feeling around for a heavy stick or club to brain my producer . . . but, I must say, Giuseppe Zaccariello was extremely brave. He put up the money for this film without any certainty that it would find a distributor. He risked everything that he had." [11]

Bava seemed sincerely appreciative of whatever risks Zaccariello had taken, and made a point of expressing his gratitude publicly—and yet, according to Laura Betti, Zaccariello was hardly the prince Bava portrayed, having abandoned the production before it was completed. "The films I made with Bava were very cheap," she confessed, "and we worked for very, very strange producers. The producer of our second one—Zaccariello—left while we were still shooting, just disappeared, taking the money and everything, but somehow, Bava managed to finish the picture." [12]

Betti maintained that, despite the highly professional quality of the cast and the luster of its visuals, *Ecologia del delitto* was made with little more than spit, chewing gum, and Bava's own inexhaustible ingenuity. "If Bava had wanted a dolly on that second film, nobody would have given it to him," she said. "So he would figure out ways to 'have' a dolly *without* having one." The film contains some shaky handheld shots, but only when they are meant to illustrate a stalker's point of view. Elsewhere, the photography is as steady and elegant as you'll find anywhere else in the Bava canon—and it was all captured with no more extravagant means than a tripod and a child's wagon. Once again, the actors had to get items from their own wardrobe approved for the filming, and attentive viewers may notice some recycled props from earlier Bava films on the sets. For instance, the glass balls that bounced downstairs and rolled into the sunken bath where Jill Stark (Edith Meloni) committed suicide in *5 bambole per la luna d'agosto* can be seen here as a decorative item in Laura's bedroom after her tryst with Ventura.

Bava's good feeling about the picture may have been partly rooted in the fact that its budgetary constraints required that he once again act as his own cameraman, which he had not done since *La ragazza che sapeva troppo*—with the exception of the Spanish shooting schedule of *Il rosso segno della follia*. He no doubt felt guilty about not being able to include Antonio Rinaldi in the project, but his guilt was tempered with joy because the results showed him in renewed command of his neglected art. "I'm very enthusiastic about some of the film's photographic details," he later boasted. "For example, the slightly out-of-focus shot in which the screen appears to be filled by the sun but, as the image comes into focus, is revealed

10 Loris Curci, "Child of Horror," *Fangoria* 150, March 1996, 15. Translation revised slightly to improve readability.

11 Ibid.

12 When *Ecologia del delitto* was released on DVD in America in the 1990s, in a print bearing the export title *Bay of Blood*, it carried a 1971 copyright notice by Spectacular Films Co., Ltd., which was a company owned by Bava's *Four Times That Night* producer Dick Randall. With this in mind, it is possible that Randall stepped in the bail the film out, in exchange for certain distribution rights.









AN UNIDENTIFIED *stand-in tests the original, abandoned makeup rig designed by Carlo Rambaldi for the death of Brunhilda.*

as someone's peering eye." [13] Bava also used the opportunity of shooting this film to begin experimenting with the more languid, searching, elliptic style that was to characterize his final period, pivoting most of the film's edits on shots that lose focus, and then regain it on the other side of the cut.

Some of the interiors, such as the opening scene of Countess Federica being murdered, were shot at Villa Frascati. The scenes by the bay were filmed in Sabaudia, a beachside village on the Tyrrhenean Sea about fifty miles southeast of Rome. The interiors of Ventura's home were filmed in a *pied à terre* at Sabaudia owned by the producer.

"There were times that I absolutely couldn't continue to act, we were laughing so much," Betti chuckles, still tickled by the memory. "The script was set in the wild—and we needed a real forest, with lots of woods and lots of trees—but in fact, we were at the seaside because Zaccariello didn't have any money. But since he had a house that we could use in Sabaudia, that's where we went to see if we could find some sort of a forest! But there *was* no forest! *Not even trees!* Gigi Pistilli was supposed to walk in front of me, and we were supposed to run through this forest, very scared that somebody might want to kill us. And, at a certain moment, when we stood in front of the camera, we were supposed to stop and stare at each other in a devious sort of way. All of this had to occur in the middle of a forest! *But where was it?* Bava said, 'Don't worry, *I* will do the forest.' And he found a florist who was selling these little, stupid branches with bits of foliage on them, and he began to make them dance in front of the action—and we had to act terrified standing strictly in front of those branches—if we moved even an inch either way, the 'woods' would disappear! Oh, we couldn't stop laughing—and Mario was laughing, too! *Everyone* was laughing! And, on the screen, when you see it . . . it *is* a real forest!"

The appearances of Paolo Fossatti's little friend Ferdinando, the black beetle, also entailed some special effects trickery. For the Fossattis' scene with Renata and Albert, in which Paolo babbles embarrassing endearments to the bug, contained in a tiny clear plastic box, a fake beetle was moved from side to side by means of a slender filament secreted under the bandage on actor Leopoldo Trieste's hand. While on the subject of Ferdinando, *Ecologia del delitto* contained one shot that caused Mario Bava considerable distress: the pinning of the beetle—a significant shot in that it echoes the earlier shot of Duke and Denise impaled in bed. The man at the helm of this riotous procession of homicides had such a profound respect for all forms of life that he later confessed to being unable to sleep the entire night before filming the shot. By looking at the shot closely, we can see that Bava's sleeplessness ultimately resulted in life winning out over art; the beetle is not pinned straight through, but on its side—and just enough to hold it in place—with the angle of its body in relation to the camera selling the lie.

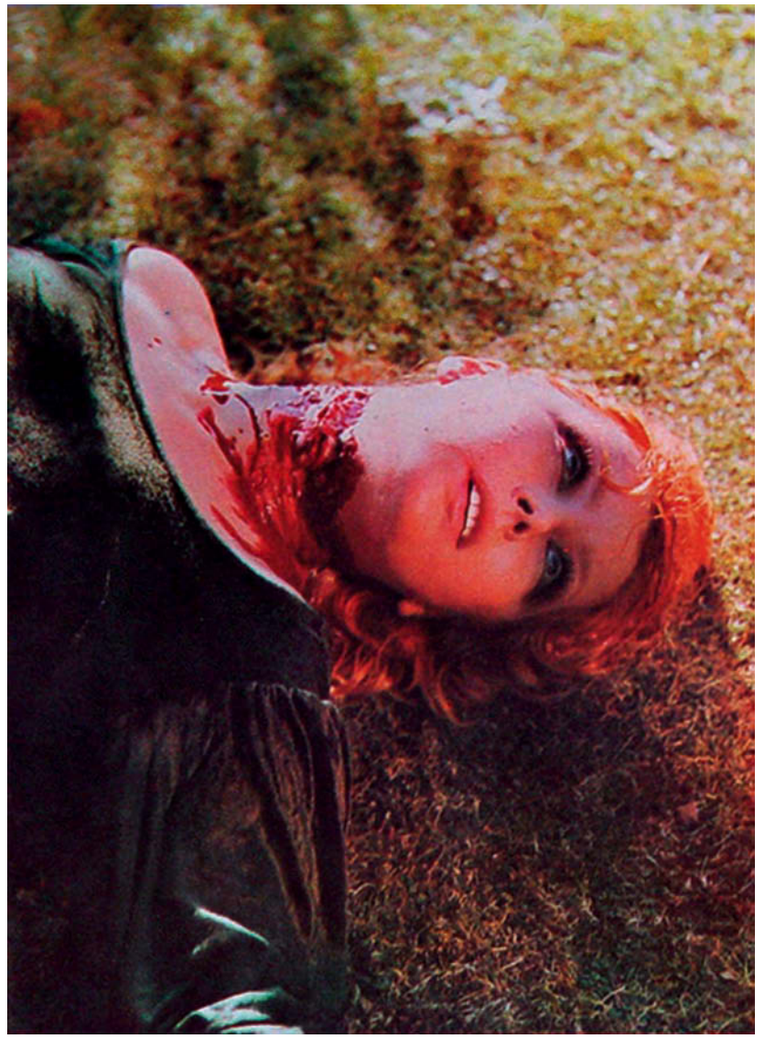
In charge of the film's splashy special effects was Carlo Rambaldi (credited simply as "Rambaldi," but only on Italian prints), whose innovative work on this picture would patent the way gore effects would be filmed for decades to come. Rambaldi supervised the construction of various wax effigies of the throats, necks, and backs of Anna, Brunhilda, and Denise, each rigged to expulse brightly colored blood during their respective violations. These pieces are primitive by contemporary standards but are given punch by Carlo Reali's superior editing. A superb wax head of Giovanni Nuvoletti was also sculpted for the nauseating shot of squid slimily undulating over Donati's dead face. Perhaps the most successful of the explicit makeup effects is the killing of Bobby, as actor Guido Boccaccini is bluntly slammed in the face with Simon's billhook. Boccaccini can be seen blinking "through" the blade itself, making the effect all the more excruciating, before the weapon is wrested out of the bleeding fissure in tight close-up. Naturally, the moment of impact involved nothing more than a smart edit, from which one is distracted by a sickening sound effect, revealing the mechanized prosthetic; the final shot was achieved by conforming a prop blade perfectly to Bonnani's profile, with a small concave area that matched his eye, allowing him to blink, which was then built up with a deep, putty trench down the middle of his face. When removed, the precut blade, which conformed to Boccaccini's profile, was pulled swiftly out of frame.

Each of the film's death scenes is imaginatively staged, but the murder of Brunhilda—arguably the highlight of the film—involved a greater degree of preparation than the others. As the scene was originally conceived, the killer was supposed to literally slash the dress from Brunhilda's body and then continue slashing away at her bared skin. Carlo Rambaldi designed a false torso front that would split along a pre-scored area, allowing blood to flow from the character's exposed breasts. Test photos exist, utilizing a stand-in, but the concept was scrapped before it went in front of the cameras.

Brigitte Skay reminisces about her involvement in the picture she calls *Reazione a catena*: "They auditioned a lot of girls, but when Mario Bava saw me, he said he wanted me. He told me I should always wear green, so I wore a little green dress in *Reazione a catena*, which I bought at Oxford Street, London. At the time of the shooting, some people gossipped that I was having an affair with Mario—*not true!* Both times I worked







BRIGITTE SKAY *in a sequence of still photos documenting Brunhilda's death scene.*

with Mario there was difficulty in communicating because I could only speak in German and English. Lucia Magni was the interpreter on set; she now owns a restaurant with her husband Lucio. I did the whole scene by myself. It took all afternoon to shoot. I remember they covered my body in ox fat and made me drink lots of vodka before I went swimming in the sea. I was swimming naked—absolutely bloody freezing!—and there was Mario Bava, in a big sheepskin jacket watching me swim. Mario did not like to see me completely naked. In all of my films, I'm always a little bit nude—it never worried me. Mario wanted to always shoot me from behind [or from the side], so you would not see everything . . . When they are cutting my throat, I did the scene myself. I think the end result is very horrible, but I look beautiful in the film. *Isabella duchessa dei diavoli* is my favorite film, but [my second favorite] is *Reazione a catena.* When I watch it, I can see that Mario Bava really knew how to film me. He made me look beautiful. I remember they covered my neck in wax—it took a long time for them to cut my throat! The filming took a long time—they kept on putting more wax on, and cutting my throat again and again. I think, originally, I was meant to be nude for the scene and I think they shot one [take] of me naked, from behind, as I am running away. The man who made the special effects [Carlo Rambaldi] . . . I didn't know he was so famous, but now I know he made *E.T.*, which is one of my favorite films, so that makes me very happy!"

Music

Ecologia del delitto was the first of three Bava films scored by Roman composer Stelvio Cipriani. Born August 20, 1937, in Rome, Cipriani wrote

13 Volta.



BOBBY *meets his maker.*



his first movie music for Eugenio Martin's *El precio de un hombre/The Bounty Killer* (1966), a Spanish/Italian Western starring Tomas Milian. He continued to work within that genre for a few years, until his happy affiliation with Tony Anthony on *Un uomo, un cavallo, una pistola/The Stranger Returns* (1968) rewarded him with an opportunity to transcend genre. Anthony used Cipriani again when he decided to star in a contemporary erotic drama, *Cometogether* (1971), which was produced by Allen Klein's Abkco Enterprises. The Klein connection enabled Cipriani's first soundtrack release to become one of the first albums issued on The Beatles' new Apple label. *Cometogether* was quickly followed by *Femina ridens/The Laughing Woman* (1969), directed by Piero Schivazappa and produced by Giuseppe Zaccariello, a dazzling sadomasochistic tale of abduction for which Cipriani composed one of his most memorable scores. This outstanding work surely resulted in Cipriani getting another

THÉRÈSE *and Luca (Denise and Duke in the English version) are joined as one flesh by a spear from Ventura's collection.*

call from Zaccariello to score *Ecologia del delitto,* though by this time the composer had also written two *giallo* scores for Riccardo Freda: *L'iguana dalla lingua di fuoco/The Iguana With the Tongue of Fire* (1971) and *Estratto dagli archivi segreti della polizia di una capitale europea/Tragic Ceremony in Villa Alexander* (1972).

Like his predecessor Piero Umiliani, Cipriani was greatly influenced by jazz and samba music, but unlike Umiliani, his influences were a bit more catholic, encompassing everything from classical music to psychedelic rock and tribal music. Several commentators have noted the resemblance of one of *Ecologia del delitto*'s cues (the one heard on the radio as Brunhilda dances) to Iron Butterfly's1968 Top 40 hit "In-a-Gadda-da-Vida." While Umiliani's best music tends toward the bizarre and humorous, Cipriani's music covers a broader range; it is primarily exotic and romantic, but it can also be strange, druggy and cacophonic, punctuated with tribal percussion, surges of atonality, and stabs of fuzz-toned electric guitar. The music for *Ecologia del delitto* was composed at roughly the same time that Cipriani was scoring another horror film, José Larraz' *Deviation* (1971), an Italian/Spanish/British co-production that makes interesting comparative viewing with the Bava film, because both were edited by Carlo Reali and their scores are very similar. One imagines that the two scores grew out of the same studio sessions.

Ecologia's main titles theme is a tense yet sensual and evocative piece, opening with isolated congas, woodblock percussion, and guiro scrapings, all recorded with slight echo, which are leisurely gathered together by electric bass underpinnings and an eerie influx of swirling strings, before an electric piano enters to state the theme. An electric guitar is also added, played percussively rather than chordally, adding a limber choppiness to the music which paints an inviting aural impression of rippling waters. As the theme continues, the percussion becomes increasingly turbulent, while the theme gains added support from organ, flute, and alto saxophone.



RENATA *discovers an artful arrangement of dead bodies in Ventura's bathroom.*

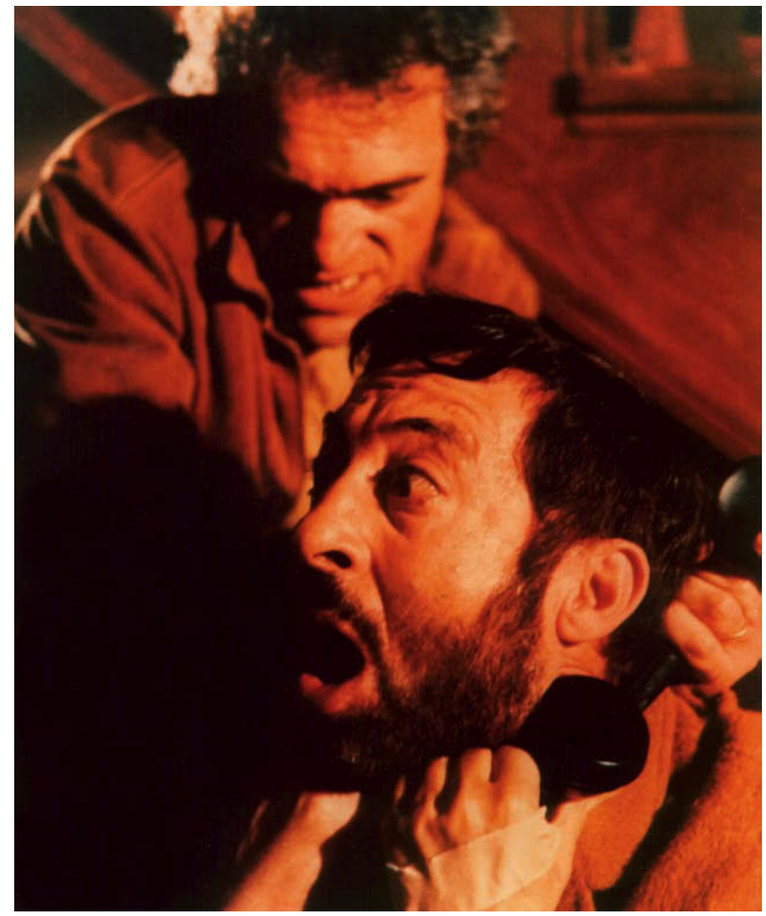
The Countess' theme, heard as Countess Federica wheels herself through her lonely abode on a stormy night, begins as an elegant, stately solo piano piece, which extends gradually into orchestral bathos, with increasingly fervent, overwrought string and kettledrum accompaniment, as well as alto sax coloring. The music ascends to a fever pitch, and climaxes with a cymbal crash, as her neck is looped with a noose out of nowhere. The piece is touchingly reprised in the gruesome aftermath of Simon's murder, lending an otherwise repulsive scene a startling infusion of spirituality while relating the deaths of mother and son.

Another theme, which tends to accompany views of the bay, is a wistful piece, with flute played over piano and muted strings. Like a metaphor for how human greed can complicate such beautiful simplicity, the cue's early serenity builds to complex involutions in the middle eight, which enrich and darken the theme.

The film's revelations of death—such as the discovery of the corpse in the bay—are usually underlined with stings of electric guitar, electric bass, and rolling conga, Brunhilda's run for her life is a highly percussive piece, with choppy jagged piano and an increasingly icy swirls of Hammond organ. The music comes to a full stop with her death, allowing some natural birdsong to register in the wake of the violence, and gradually a reprise of the romantic bay theme is heard. The cheerful end titles, which features the score's only use of a vocal chorus ("Sha-la, la-la"), was later reused in a sex scene between Paul Naschy and Erika Blanc in León Klimovsky's *Una Libélula para cada muerto/A Dragonfly for Each Corpse* (1973), whose CAM library score is credited to Angel Arteaga.

After *Ecologia del delitto*, Stelvio Cipriani would score two more films for Mario Bava—*Baron Blood* and the unfinished *Cani arrabbiati*—but, according to Alfredo Leone, Cipriani was not one of Bava's favorite composers. "When I hired Cipriani to write the score for *Baron Blood*, Bava was opposed to it, saying that his work was unoriginal," Leone says candidly. While one of its cues quotes "In-a-Gadda-da-Vida," and the structuring of another cue suggests that its scene may have been temp-tracked to one of Ennio Morricone's *C'era una volta il West/Once Upon a Time in the West* cues, the bulk of Cipriani's music for *Ecologia del delitto* is exactly what the movie needs, encompassing the full range of the beauty and brutality of nature. Though it is ill-served by the film's final sound mix, which causes it some distortion and break-up whenever its sound is fullest, it is the best score Cipriani would write for Bava, and one of the most effective scores Bava ever had.

Cipriani continued to work prolifically throughout the next three decades, eventually providing scores for most of the prominent horror directors in Italy. Among his subsequent accomplishments were the scores for the British film *Night Hair Child/What the Peeper Saw* (1971, a film with strong narrative similarities to Bava's



ALBERT *prevents Paolo from summoning the police.*

later *Schock/Beyond the Door II*), *La polizia chiede aiuto/What Have They Done to Your Daughters?* (1974), Massimo Dallamano's *Il medaglione insanguinato/The Cursed Medallion* (1975), *Frankenstein all'italiana/Frankenstein: Italian Style* (1977), *Tentacoli/Tentacles* (1977), *Solamente nero/The Bloodstained Shadow* (1978, a rock score performed by Goblin), Ruggero Deodato's *Concorde Affaire '79* (1979), Joe D'Amato's *Orgasmo nero/Voodoo Baby* (1980), Umberto Lenzi's *Incubo sulla città contaminata/City of the Walking Dead* (1980), James Cameron's debut feature, *Piranha II: The Spawning* (1981), and Lucio Fulci's *Aenigma* (1987) and *Voci dal profondo/Voices From Beyond* (1990). In 1992, he scored the Ovidio G. Assonitis film *Out of Control* under the pseudonym "Steve Powder," and most recently, he came out of retirement to write a new score for Alfredo Leone and Lamberto Bava's controversial recut of *Cani arrabbiati, Kidnapped* (2002).

Release

Nuova Linea Cinematografica first released *Ecologia del delitto* in Italy in early September, but it attracted little boxoffice excitement and soon folded. A month later, it played at the Sitges Horror Festival, held at the Cine Retiro in Sitges, Spain, under the short-lived title *Antefatto—l'ecologia del delitto* ("Before the Fact—The Ecology of Crime"). [14] An uncredited *Variety* reviewer caught its October 10 screening and seemed somewhat enthusiastic: "Mario Bava's newest blood-and-gore thriller should titillate horror buffs appreciative of new filmic techniques for mayhem. Using a minimal storyline, Bava unspools a welter of murders which are committed in an isolated country house. Though the motivations are murky and the killings gratuitous, the blood flows with curdling realism . . . Between killings, however, dialogue falters and the non-existent storyline makes for some slow pacing. But before we can become bored, Bava comes up with new ploys for violence and thus, till the final, unsatisfactory denouement . . . Bava's technique is effective enough in the scenes of violence, though the remainder of pic is pedestrian. Acting is stiff and one-dimensional, but this is of minor consequence in a pic relying wholly on stomach-churning horror effects . . . Pic should do well as a double-bill horror filler." [15]



ADVERTISEMENT *that appeared in the May 7, 1972 edition of the Boston Sunday Globe.*

With the film dependent on foreign sales to recoup its investment, Mario Bava was moved to the unprecedented extent of promoting it by consenting to be interviewed for the distinguished French film journal *Positif*. Conducted by Ornella Volta, and subsequently reprinted (in abbreviated form) in the Spanish horror fan magazine *Terror Fantastic*, it would be the longest, only career-length interview that Bava ever granted, not counting the memoir he would later pen—reportedly under duress and at the last possible minute—for the 1979 Cinecittà tributary book, *La città del cinema*.

Bava's film somehow came to the attention of Steve Minasian, whose Boston-based company Hallmark Releasing Corporation had a US distribution deal with American International Pictures, which enabled AIP to benefit financially from films they considered too violent, adult or crassly exploitative to carry their own imprint. Hallmark's first release had been the notorious *Mark of the Devil/Hexen bis aufs Blut Gequaelt* ("Witches Tortured Till They Bleed," 1969), a German production co-directed by British film critic Michael Armstrong and German actor–singer Adrian Hoven. An excessively gory account of witch hunts in 18th century Austria, the movie made headlines as the first picture to be released outside the sanctions of the Motion Picture Association of America's ratings system since its inception in 1968. Taking advantage of the MPAA's loophole that no producer was obliged to submit a film for a rating, Hallmark promoted *Mark of the Devil* as "The 1st Film Rated V for Violence!"—and further emphasized the nature of the film by presenting ticket-buyers with complimentary "vomit bags."

Minasian acquired the US distribution rights to *Ecologia del delitto*, which by this time became available in an English-dubbed export version called *Carnage*—a title perhaps informed by the film's roots in Bava and Betti's aborted *Odore di carne* project. On Tuesday, May 9, 1972, Hallmark booked the film at Boston's Astor Theater for an all-day "Free Public Preview," and placed newspaper ads that put Bava's name (misspelled) above the title and ballyhooed the picture as "The 2nd Film Rated V for Violence!" Large display ads were placed in the *Boston Sunday Globe* two days in advance of the booking, announcing that "*Carnage* is the real thing—the first movie that dares to show—'Hard Core Violence.'"

The appearance of this second "V for Violence" campaign (and the resounding success of the first) prompted the MPAA to bring suit against Hallmark, alleging that the company's advertising intruded on their exclusive right to rate motion pictures. After a brief stand-off, Hallmark relented and agreed to never use the campaign again. In the meantime, *Carnage* was temporarily withdrawn from release. (The MPAA subsequently fine-tuned their rules to state that, while no producer was obliged to submit a film to the MPAA for rating, any film not submitted must carry either a self-imposed X rating—"No One Under 17 Admitted"—or no rating at all.)

By November 29, Bava's film reappeared under the Hallmark banner with an outrageous new title—*Twitch of the Death Nerve*—and a new gimmick . . . or, more accurately, a refurbished old one, as it was somewhat indebted to the "Coward's Corner" conceived by William Castle for the release of his 1961 shocker *Homicidal*. Newspaper ads for *Twitch* announced that "Every Ticket Holder **Must** Pass

Through **The Final Warning Station! We Must** Warn You *Face-to-Face!*" The Final Warning Station was a two-color flyer (optional) passed out to ticket buyers, which brought to their attention the following five points:

> *Are you aware that* ***Twitch of the Death Nerve*** *contains scenes which may be the stimulus that initiates physiological shock?*
>
> *Persons under 16 should be warned that they* ***May Not*** *walk away from this one!* [16] *Young ladies 17 through 19 should be escorted.*
>
> *During scenes of intense shock, do not attempt to leave your seat. If necessary, close your eyes but remain seated until you have regained your composure.*
>
> *You should understand that all pictorial materials used in advertising this motion picture have been toned down to meet generally accepted standards.* ***The Illustrations Are Not Indicative of the Stronger Portions of the Film.***
>
> ***There are 13 Periods of Intense Shock. Do Not Subject Yourself to More Than One Strong Reaction.***

The Final Warning Station bore the copyright of a fictitious outfit called A/C Audience Control Services, apparently specialists in suppressing theater patron shock by means of exciting incipient audience hysteria.

On the basis of the print advertising for *Twitch of the Death Nerve,* one might assume that a sample print was drastically cut and resubmitted to the MPAA until it was granted an R rating, forbidding admission to persons under the age of 17, unless accompanied by a parent or adult guardian. But, as anyone who attended drive-in showings of Hallmark films will attest, their actual release prints were often intact and full of X-level material (frontal nudity, sexual violence), leading to various reports of traffic accidents as drivers were distracted from oncoming headlights by adjacent drive-in screen images of teenagers being skewered while making love and naked witches being vaginally impaled on tall, phallic stakes. After a period of controversy, it was left up to drive-in projectionists to edit Hallmark's 35 mm prints themselves, depending on whether or not their screens faced the open road. Wes Craven, whose film *The Last House on the Left* was released by Hallmark the following year (1972), has confessed in interviews that, after several unsuccessful attempts to deal with the MPAA, his film was finally distributed with an R rating that was cut out of another movie's negative (borrowed from a distributor with offices down the hall from Hallmark) and spliced onto his own! [17]



US *one-sheet poster.*

Twitch of the Death Nerve became a Hallmark perennial, and remained in circulation until the prints became so worn, so scratchy, splicy, and incomplete that they probably could have earned an R rating. At some point, Hallmark seems to have tried to beef up the substance of their depleted prints by adding silent, tinted "recap" footage.

"I saw an alternative version of [*Twitch*] at the drive-in around 1972," reports film journalist Robert Monell. "[It] had 'added scenes' tinted in red (!) . . . These were reprises of murders which had already happened. I have no idea who prepared this version and never saw it again. It was like the reprises in *Slaughter Hotel*, which was its co-feature. There was at least one scene missing—the machete in the face—and there were other trims. To add insult to injury, these reprises were silent except for an electronic buzz. These loops went on forever, it seemed, and caused quite a bit of horn beeping and guys screaming out of [their car] windows, 'Lousy movie!' You had to be there. I reviewed it for a local weekly newspaper. I timed it, as I did all my review material, with a stopwatch, and took notes on cards which I still have. The entertainment editor heard about this fiasco from a friend, who was [also] at the drive-in, and canned the review as I tried to explain to him who Mario Bava was. If you have twelve of these reprises (and it was at least that many) at 30 seconds a piece, that could add on another 6 minutes. I remember the manager calling this a 'franchise print,' which meant it was not [obtained] from the producer or distributor, but rather from the owners of the circuit who probably had a special version made. It looked incredibly botched and crude, as did many Euro and US low-budget drive-in prints at the time. I doubt if this was ever seen anywhere outside of regional Drive-in Land." [18] At some point during the film's prolonged US distribution, probably around 1977, Hallmark's ragged prints were picked up by Newport

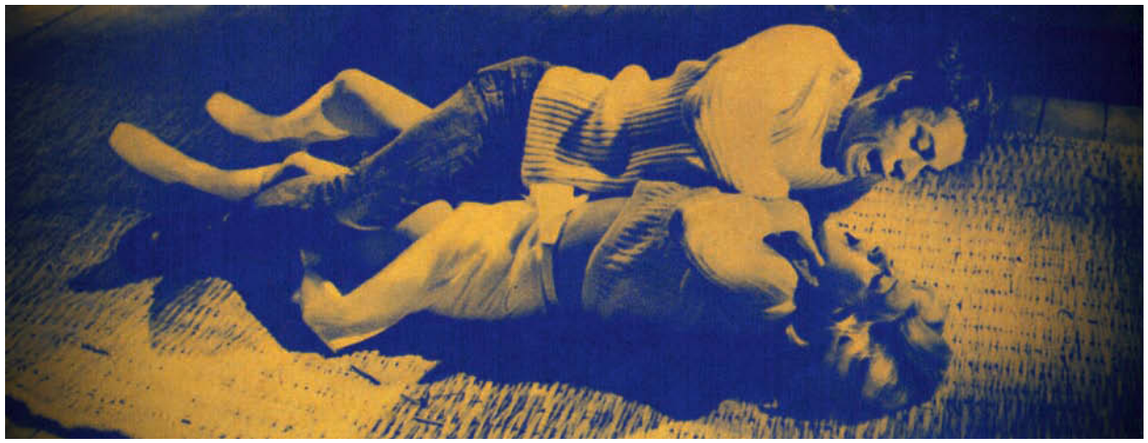
14 "Before the Fact" may seem an odd title for a thriller, but in fact, it was the title of the 1932 novel (by Francis Iles, a pseudonym for Anthony Berkeley) that provided the basis of Alfred Hitchcock's classic 1941 film *Suspicion*.

15 Anonymous: "*Antefatto* (*Before the Fact—The Ecology of a Crime*)" review, *Variety Film Annual*, October 27, 1971. Also screened at Sitges that year were Kim Kay Yong's *Fire Woman*, José Luís Madrid's *Jack el Destripador de Londres*, Eugenio Martín's *Escalofrio Diabolico*, José Maria Elorrieta's *Los Amantes del Diablo*, and Michael Skaife's *Necrophagus/Graveyard of Horror*.

16 This warning implies that patrons under the age of 16 would be admitted, regardless of the fact that it was an unrated picture and thus legally forbidden to anyone under the age of 17.

17 Craven tells this story in one of the on-camera interviews included on MGM Home Entertainment's DVD of *The Last House on the Left*.

18 Quoted (and somewhat condensed) from a posting on the Mobius Home Video Forum, www.mhvf.net (January 28, 2003).





SIMON *punishes Laura for betraying him.*

Releasing and put back into active service under the misleading title *Last House—Part II*.

While the film had tremendous success in America, Italian success was harder to come by. One year after its initial theatrical release as *Ecologia del delitto*, the film was reissued in Italy under the more commercial title of *Reazione a catena*, but still did not perform well. That same year, the picture was acquired for release in Great Britain by New Realm Distribution and screened for the British Board of Film Classification under the unwise title of *Bloodbath*. The picture was denied classification at that time and would remain effectively banned in Britain for the next eight years.

Bava's determination to promote his new film extended to his surprise agreement to introduce the picture at the 1st Festival International d'Avoriaz du Film Fantastique (February 9–11, 1973), at the ski resort of Avoriaz, high in the French Alps. Anticipation for Bava's first public appearance ran high, but predictably, the shy director—who had two more films under his belt by this time—disappointed festival attendants with a no-show. *Ecologia* received mixed jury notices and reportedly revolted guest of honor Christopher Lee, who caught the film to see what his old friend was up to. Though his feelings were apparently shared by the majority of the attenders, who were hoping for another *La maschera del demonio*, the film received the festival's award for Best Makeup and Special Effects.

Commentary

Ecologia del delitto opens with a death not usually included in the film's body count. After the main titles sequence, which is accompanied by various shots of the bay's natural scenic beauty, before ending on an ironic shot of a TV antenna. Bava's camera aims up and wavers around apace with the frantic buzzing of a fly . . . and then we see a tiny shape plop onto the water's surface, dead as a doornail.

It's an everyday happenstance of nature, a natural death, but in the context of a Bava film, it summons a unique catalogue of memories that reach all the way back to his work on Roberto Rossellini's early short *La vispa Teresa* (1939), with its highly magnified attention to the life and death spans of the insect world. It also has macabre echoes, such as the fly that tormented Miss Chester in *I tre volti della paura*'s *"La goccia d'acqua"* (there it goes, dropping in the water) and, even more appropos, the fly that John Harrington feeds to his pet bird during his opening narration of *Il rosso segno della follia*—the fly whose "insignificant life is a mere biological accident," and whose almost immediate appointment with death "is what makes life a ridiculous and brief drama."

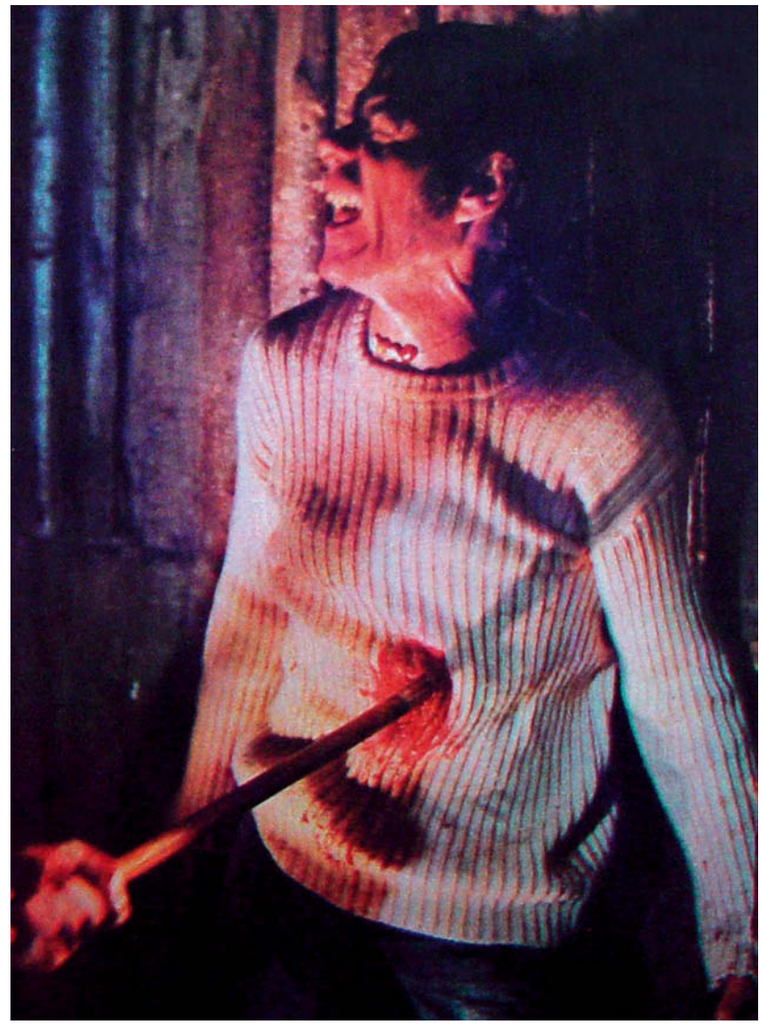
After the two-dimensional, overly cool, stylized schemata of *5 bambole per la luna d'agosto*, *Ecologia del delitto* takes a similar foundation—the usual, convoluted parable of greed—but ups the ante in every department. There are twice as many characters; they are more dimensional and interesting as people, and their dialogue is sometimes remarkably thoughtful; the violence is more hot-blooded, to the point of going completely over the top; and the story, more philosophic this time, accentuates the random absurdity of life and death—often to ironic and even humorous effect. The two films

have numerous narrative similarities (the waterfront setting, the *nouveaux riche* characters, the mercenary slayings, the victorious innocent, etc.), and there are also some purely visual correlations. Both films begin with lengthy sequences without dialogue, with *Ecologia* running almost a full 9 minutes (and three deaths, counting the fly) before its first words are spoken, nearly twice as long as the frantic preamble in *5 bambole*. Brunhilda's discovery of Donati's corpse in the bay and her naked sprint from the scene is a visual retelling of Mary's discovery of Charles' corpse aboard the launch. Both films also feature scenes of eyes peering through telescopic devices (binoculars, rifle sites), shock cuts to corpses covered with repugnant forms of sea life (crabs, squid), and artful arrangements of dead bodies (in the freezer, in Ventura's bathtub). In nearly every instance, *Ecologia del delitto* does it better.

Here, the overcomplicated plot of *5 bambole* is reborn as a black comedy of riotous proliferation. Bava's former reluctance with sexual and violent content is overthrown with anarchic vigor; the distancing pop artifice of the earlier film's decor is scrapped in favor of (mostly) natural location settings; the former's cold, mechanical editing is replaced by Carlo Reali's remarkably sensuous *plans-séquence*, which rank with Mario Serandrei's best work from Bava's classic period.

Moreso than Bava's direction, in this case, the play's the thing in *Ecologia del delitto*, and this point was not lost on Bava himself. In a most unusual touch, the script receives star billing on the picture, with the screenplay credits directly following the title, and there are no "starring" credits for the actors. Instead, the film that was eventually titled *Ecologia del delitto* is, first and foremost, a screenplay "with" Claudine Auger, Luigi Pistilli, and the rest. It might best be described as an Elizabethan revenge play, as





SIMON'S *murder of Laura originally climaxed in more gruesome fashion than is seen in the final cut.*

it might have been staged by madcap cartoon king Tex Avery. Like Avery's work for Warner Bros. and MGM, *Ecologia* is fuelled by the comic repetition and escalating outrageousness of certain violent acts. For example, in Avery's classic MGM cartoon *King Size Canary* (1947), a starving cat tries to create a feast for himself by fattening a puny, sickly canary with a bottle of "Jumbo-Gro"—which has the unforeseen effect of turning it into a mountainous, musclebound monster! This surprise disproportionment initiates a war of oneupmanship that ends only when the bottle of "Jumbo-Gro" is emptied and the planet has become too small for their war to continue. Similarly, in *Ecologia*, the violence escalates in outlandishness until too many cast members have been killed for the story to go on.

Asked why he pushed the film's violence to such graphic extremes, Bava replied, "I don't know . . . but I believe it's the same as in life. One tries to support everything with a rational explanation, but no one can really know the depths of such motives. Maybe it's true . . . that a great disproportion exists between the apparent motives and the violence of the crimes—but isn't that usually the case?" [19]

While the murders are undeniably shocking, and were especially so at the time of the film's original release, they possess none of the titillating, misogynist quality that one observes in so many other Italian *gialli*. The murders in *Ecologia del delitto* are actually quite conscientious in their depiction of what really takes place in a homicide—the awkward struggling, the heavy breathing, the nausea on both sides of the act—and none moreso than Simon's death at the hands of Albert. This scene hits the viewer as it hits Simon; we are taken completely by surprise as a spear is rammed through his midriff,

SIMON *meets his own end at the hands of first-time killer Albert.*

19 Volta.

pinning him to a wall, interrupting his (and our) train of thought. The scene is extremely violent, but knowing that we may have become inured to extreme violence by this point in the picture, Bava pushes it further. There is the usual spurting, twisting, oozing, and groaning, as Simon struggles to retaliate against his attacker, but the scene doesn't make the viewer sit bolt upright until Simon surprises Albert (and us) by vomiting blood onto his hand. *That* disgusts us. All at once, the scene resonates with accusation and guilt, and we're reminded that murder is a dirty business, that shed blood runs hot, and that violence is an ugly, degrading thing. Then, in an inspired bit of contrast, the scene ends with the camera slowly tracking away from Simon as he stands pinned to the wall, his face haloed in an almost holy light as he looks up, as if beseeching his Maker for an explanation, the awful percussion of murder replaced by romantic, elegiac piano and strings on the soundtrack—the music also heard by Simon's mother in the moments preceding her own death. Before our eyes, this nasty character is relieved of his human burden, perhaps forgiven his sins. And then his head drops down, dead. As always, Bava takes care to show us the angel in the wreckage.

The Elizabethan connection is supported by the script's characterization and dialogue: Albert and Renata are clearly patterned on Lord and Lady Macbeth, the man being goaded by his ambitious wife to use violence to gain a foothold of property and respect, and they summarize all the preceding carnage at the film's *dénouement* by saying, "All's well that ends well."[20] Most of the characters here can be traced back to a Shakespearean archetype—the heirs to a fortune, the evil merchant, the oracle—even Simon, the illegitimate (i.e., "subhuman") offspring who lives in a shack by the sea and feeds on the squid he catches himself, seems a distant relative of Caliban in *The Tempest*.

The script also contains other surprising literary allusions, undoubtedly the contribution of Filippo Ottoni. As Ottoni himself noted, after recently seeing the film for the first time, "What struck me was the literary—I won't say 'intellectual'—quality of the dialogue, which is spoken by characters who are nothing like that at all, so that it creates a weird sense of dislocation."

A classic case in point is the following *après*-sex banter between Frank Ventura and Laura:

LAURA:
Stay a while. Love isn't love without a little cuddling after.

FRANK:
Shhhh!

LAURA:
What is it, darling?

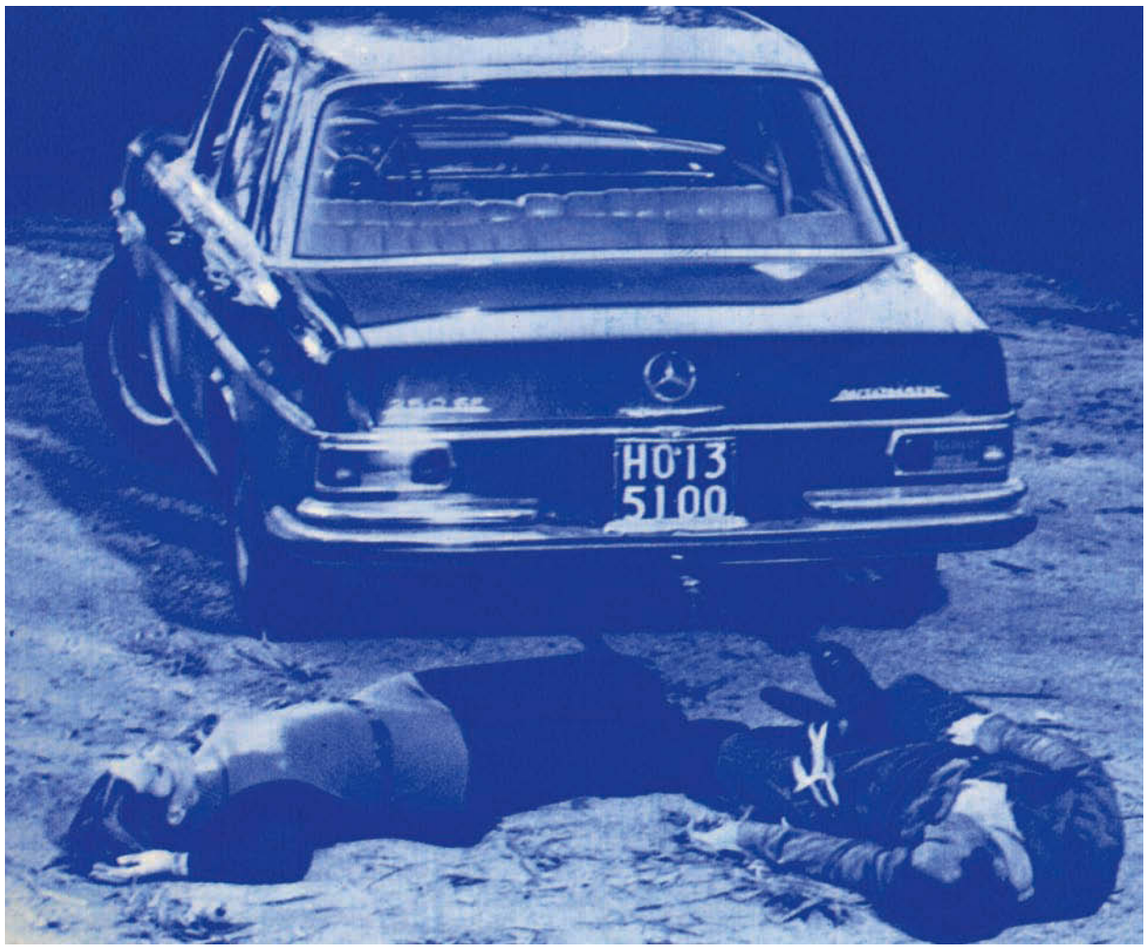
FRANK:
Can't you hear it calling? It was a squonk.

LAURA:
It was, huh? And what is that?

FRANK:
What's a squonk, eh? Well, for your information, a squonk is a . . . dark-colored creature . . .

LAURA:
Oh, Frank, why do you do that?

FRANK:
It's skin is covered with moles. It's equipped with long claws and strong teeth. Clever little beast. But it's still very easy to find. It only gives itself away because a squonk never stops whimpering. And do you know what it does when it's captured? It dissolves into tears. Some of its peculiar qualities are sulkiness, diffidence, and possessiveness . . .



RENATA *and Albert's children have the last laugh.*

In his observant 1995 booklet *Mario Bava*, Alberto Pezzotta notes that the "squonk" is a mythological animal catalogued in Jorge Luís Borges' work of fantastical zoology, *The Book of Imaginary Beings*. The purpose of this reference is to make us catalogue Laura (sulky, diffident, possessive) as a specific type of female personality; once we do this, we begin to take a larger view, a superior stance to the characters and the actions they subsequently perpetrate, and the entire *dramatis personæ* becomes comparable to the various insects pinned and catalogued by Paolo Fosatti. A number of the characters (Duke, Denise, Simon, Ferdinando) are literally pinned, as well, to make the point unmistakable. The point is not to deny these characters their humanity, but rather to portray how transient and meaningless are the schemes in which they involve themselves, compared to what is truly eternal: the bay, the planet, the heritage that we pass on to our children. For viewers aware of Bava's continued attention over the years to elemental imagery—earth, air, fire, and water—this prominent

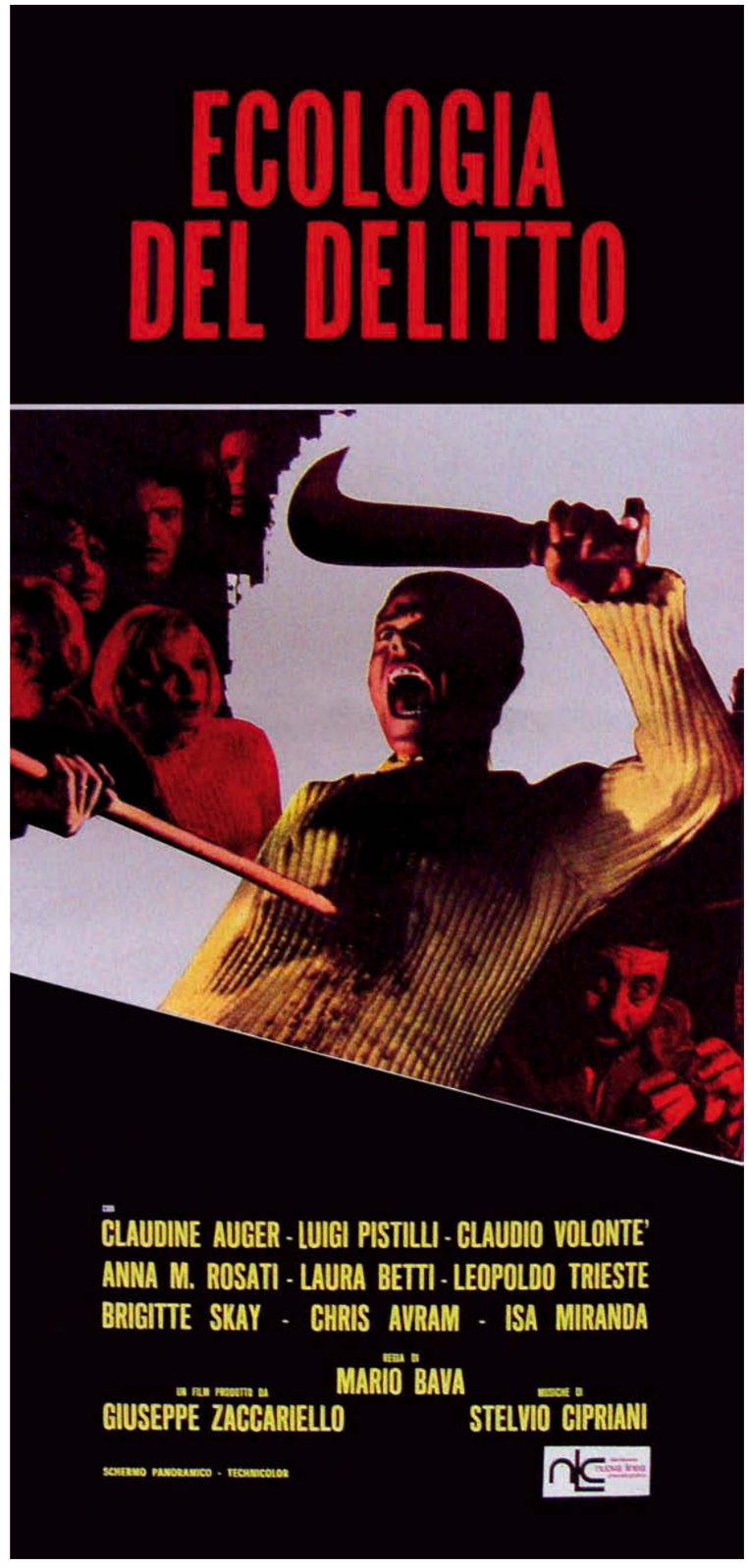
statement of an ecological theme marks an apotheosis in his work.

Bava also takes the opportunity of his ecological theme to probe the conscience of man's violent relationship to nature, particularly in the first conversation between Paolo and Simon. The latter, who at first glance is the more savage and unsophisticated of the two men, comes forth with the more defensible philosophy when he tells the insect collector, "Man should live and let live . . . at least I eat my squid; I don't kill as a hobby, like you do." Paolo retaliates by saying, "But Man isn't an insect, my dear Simon . . . We have centuries of civilization behind us, you know." Simon's retort provides what may be the most arresting instance of backstory in the entire Bava canon: "No, I *don't* know. I wasn't there." In other words, Simon is aware that history is bunk, that civilization is a respectable word used to cloak millennia of lies, mayhem, and murder, all committed for the sake of individual advancement. It's an astute observation, and though we may initially believe that Simon was too harsh on poor Paolo, it soon becomes apparent that this (after all) amateur bug collector probably got started in his hobby as a means of escaping the reality of his marriage to Anna—who has likewise escaped into occultism and alcohol. "Your women are queens, Ferdinando," Paolo whines to his prize catch, "not babbling fortune-tellers."

The film contains so many characters existing separately in their own isolated clusters, pursuing their own selfish agendas, that the episode of the four teenagers who invade Ventura's property—which runs mostly consecutively from the time of their arrival till the moments of their deaths—has the feel of being the film's centerpiece, a movie-within-the-movie, though these characters are the film's least well-defined and don't amount to much more than collateral damage. (They might well be leftover from the Sacchetti script's original theme of how the young are abused by the agendas of their elders.) Yet even when observing this microcosm of young society, Bava divides the group into those capable of appreciating the value of the bay and those who can appreciate only the value of its value. When Duke urges the girls to follow him inside, away from the location's scenic beauty, Brunhilda chides him. "You are full of hot dogs and Cadillacs and have no music in your soul!" she cries. Then, indicating the bay with a grand wave of her hand, she adds, "*This* is music—Sibelius, Mahler, Bach!" To which Duke responds with another of his many impatient remarks about "the kraut girl's" Germanic heritage: "*Und* Ludwig von Beethoven! Now get your ass up here!" Brunhilda's respect for the bay's natural beauty, a trait she shares with the Countess, marks her for death in a world where people are less concerned with the quality of life than with money and "making a killing."

The sequence of Brunhilda's murder is a feat of montage so impressive that it became the central image of the film's advertising campaigns around the world, most particularly in the United States and Spain. Apart from the shock of the blood spurting from her bare throat as the billhook ratchets around her neck, the sequence is bracketed by celebrations of nature, beginning with Brunhilda's skinny-dip in the bay, and concluding as she lies on the ground, her skirt and legs raised as though about to give birth, the sound of her last breath followed on the soundtrack with trees rustling, birds singing, water lapping—the ambient music of life as it goes on, unnoticing and unaffected.

Bava moves the action further uphill to Ventura's cottage with an unexpected series of shots. Rather than do the obvious thing—which would be to pan up from the body to the cottage—he cuts away from the moment of death to a shot of the sun setting on the bay, then returns to the dead girl, now photographed from a more oblique angle. From here, he uses his zoom lens to traverse the distance from her corpse to a window of the Ventura home; then he cuts to that vantage and zooms again from outside the window



ITALIAN *locandina, art by Enrico DeSeta.*

20 The line in full, from Shakespeare's play *All's Well That Ends Well,* is "All's well that ends well, still the fine's the crown / What e'er the course, the end is the renown." The meaning is that, regardless of man's actions, it is what endures that is important—and thus, Bava's message is that we should all serve the best interests of our world, because it will outlast us all. Considering the frequency with which this personal name appears in his filmography, it should be noted that this line is spoken by Helena—or, in the name's Italian form, Elena.

to inside, where Bobby is seen occupying himself with a book on the living room floor; after another cut, we are inside with Bobby, and Bava zooms from him to the bedroom, where Duke and Denise are making love; after cutting to a vantage inside the bedroom, closer view of the couple, he zooms away from their lovemaking to a glistening eye observing them—it looks like the shot of the eyes peering through the slatted blinds at Michèle Mercier in *I tre volti della paura*'s *"Il telefono."* Each of these individual shots lose focus before they cut, blurring into nebulosity, so that each shot seems fluidly, happily, sensuously linked to the next—*until this point,* when the camera executes a hard, disturbingly undiffused cut to the killer's actual point of view. The subsequent shots of Bobby's death and the skewering of the young couple are all collected with blunt, accelerated cutting that, following such sinuous camera movements, adds to their violent impact. Finally, once the naked couple are shown pinned together, the sequence cuts outside and Bava zooms toward the front of Duke's parked dune buggy, whose twin headlights and crescent fender form a mechanical face grinning with impish delight.

This extended sequence is one of Bava's finest: suspenseful, outrageous, masterfully composed, nastily ironic—and also quite innovative, in that it successfully transposes the *giallo* from its traditional urban setting—steeped in night and vice and corruption—to a provincial setting of great natural beauty in which most of its murders are committed outdoors, and in broad daylight. As in *Sei donne per l'assassino* or *Operazione paura*, where Bava's camera pans away from acts of violence to nearby stone cherubs (thereby comparing the brevity of our lives to everlasting art, or juxtaposing the harsh reality of death to our romantic concepts of the Afterlife), Bava's prowling, insinuating camera seems to float away from each paroxysm of violence back to elegiac views of the bay—the body of water that is mother to all that lives and breathes, the prompter of all this mayhem—its natural beauty unchanged and supremely unconcerned.

As in *Sei donne per l'assassino*, the violence of *Ecologia del delitto* is put



ITALIAN *reissue due-foglia.*

into action by words entrusted to a personal diary, dramatizing once again the superstitious notion that the written word is not to be trusted, but something capable of coming back to haunt us—or in the case of this film, granting others a license to kill us. Here, as in the majority of his films, Bava seems devoted to illustrating the disruptive power of secret knowledge, which can be as intimate as a diary entry, as biological as Helmut's paternity in *I coltelli del vendicatore*, or as vast as the guilty fear that governs the rustic village of *Operazione paura.* The spectrum always results in the violent release of a Demiurge, acting through either natural or supernatural agencies, bent on making its own truth known.

One area in which *Ecologia del delitto* transcends both *Sei donne per l'assassino* and *5 bambole per la luna d'agosto* is its plotting, which, though convoluted, never collapses into inconsequence (as in the former) or unintelligibility (as in the latter). That said, there is something inherent in the quality of Gene Luotto's English post-sync dubbing that may discourage us from absorbing anything but the most punched-up dialogue. Like Bava's earlier whodunits, *Ecologia* adopts the ironic perspective that no one is innocent, which makes it all the more remarkable that the film continues to play by the very rules it is breaking. For example, it takes care to supply a number of red herrings, the best of which follows the skewering of Duke and Denise with a shot of Anna turning over the Ace of Swords in a Tarot reading and rushing off to Paolo's study to share the news, where she finds the pinned Ferdinando kicking its legs in agony.

As *Ecologia del delitto* continues in the vein of *Sei donne per l'assassino*, the writings of Luigi Barzini once again become pertinent to our understanding of its characters' approaches to violence and nature. The Italian obsession with symmetry, which seems the correct explanation for the book-ended structure of *Sei donne per l'assassino*, is boiled down by Barzini to one obsessive word.

"The word for this," he writes, "is *sistemazione*. To *sistemare* all things is considered to be the foremost, perhaps the unique, mission of man on Earth. *Sistemare* means, according to [the authors of the latest dictionary], 'to arrange, regulate, settle,' and *sistemazione*, naturally enough, 'regularization, arrangement, settlement.' The English terms [systemize, systemation] are not colloquial and are mainly used in official prose, editorials and scholarly dissertations. The Italian words are, on the contrary, as common as bread and cheese. To begin with, *sistemare* means to defeat nature. Italians *sistemano* mountain torrents, marshy land, wild animals, spoiled children and unruly populations. *'Va sistemo io'* is a much abused threat. It means, 'I will curb your rebellious instincts.'" [21]

Systemation, then, is a word pertinent to the human wish to exert a triumph of will over nature, whether it be human nature or nature itself. The film's Italian title offers every proof that Bava and his collaborators were making a statement about the conflicting natures of human nature and Mother Nature—both depicted here in states of wilderness, one constant and self-sufficient and the other so short-lived as to require immediate material gratification. Ecology is sometimes

casually mistaken as a synonym for natural preservation, but it actually designates a branch of biology concerned with the relationship between living organisms and their environment. Frank Ventura can only come to terms with the world outside his villa by recognizing opportunities to make money from it; Paolo Fossatti by preying upon its insects and categorizing them on pinned cards; and Simon sees his inheritance as his only chance to gain the legitimacy he never had. These people have no relationship to their environment, only to their own selfish needs; thus, the environment is no poorer for their loss.

The smaller worlds on view within the film—its families and marriages—are colored by similar imbalances; the weak Albert is coerced into monstrous acts for which he is ill-suited by ambitious Renata; Ventura has molded Laura, his secretary and lover, into a seducer of other men to gain him advantage; and the most amiable union in the film, the Fossattis', is one of mutual harassment and oblivion. The counterpoint for these interpersonal struggles is Simon, who lives alone in a humble shack; he may appear strong and self-reliant, but he is also the only fatally systemized character of the lot, having been twisted by his mother's decision to keep him locked away, like an animal, throughout his childhood—and now lacking the emotional equipment to protect himself from being similarly exploited by Ventura. It is fitting that Bava stages Simon's violent death, speared like St. Sebastian, with the spiritual trappings usually reserved for Saints, bathing his head in spotlight, scoring his last righteous gasps with romantic music, as if, through his gushing blood, this eternal victim has glimpsed his final reward. He is what might have become of Renata's children, had they not intervened with the film's only innocent act.

For all its boldness and thematic richness, *Ecologia del delitto* is nevertheless in the nature of a flawed gem. The flashbacks that occur late in the film—explaining Ventura and Laura's theft of the diary page, and Laura's seduction of Donati—are too awkwardly and plainly inserted; they might have worked better had they been tinted, to accentuate their status as flashbacks. While the translated English dialogue provided by Gene Luotto works very well in most cases, the lines that he gives to the young carousers seemed twenty years behind the times even in 1971, playing like the repartée from an 1940s WWII shore leave romance, with the sailors and USO girls sporting hippie garb. And, with the exception of Simon's death, the last third of the movie lacks the sheer bravado of the earlier part, with the penultimate murder in the dark adding more confusion and uncertainty than suspense. By leaving this climactic murder to the audience's own imagination, the film obliquely admits the ultimate failure of its own.

That said, the film stays vigorously in the memory thanks to a wealth of wicked details: the spinning tire of the Countess' collapsed wheelchair slowing to a roulette-like stop as she breathes her last; her cold hands hanging down over the face of her dead husband/murderer; the eye gazing at Brunhilda's dance through a hole in a wall of wicker; the surprise cut from Anna's decapitation to a piece of pottery accidentally broken by the neglected Donati children; and the startling moment where Renata and Albert see the known-to-be-dead Filippo Donati "walking" through the woods, which turns out to be Donati's corpse, carried on Simon's back. The surprise ending is a delight, again hearkening back to the finale of *La vispa Teresa*, in which the triumph of nature over the whims of man is accompanied by a children's song. But the film is at its very best during the opening 9 minutes, and during its murder sequences, when its sense of cinema is most pure.

Considering the many ways in which Bava's life and career paralleled that of Alfred Hitchcock, it is curious that—just as *Ecologia del delitto* was receiving its earliest screenings and dividing audiences—Hitchcock was receiving universal acclaim for his first British film in more than thirty years, *Frenzy* (1972), which was greeted as a similarly revolutionary statement from its director. Both films seemed to be the work of men determined to break free of their former conservatism to claim a new generation of viewers, to prove that they were still relevant, by taking full and fearless advantage of the new freedoms available to commercial cinema. Ironically, though Hitchcock reaped the greatest immediate acclaim, the passage of time has proven Bava's film to be the more durable of the two works, and also the most influential.



THIS POSTER *from the film's belated Argentinian release in the 1980s combines elements from the poster art for MAKE THEM DIE SLOWLY and another unidentified Enzo Sciotti painting.*

Influences

Shortly before the release of *Ecologia del delitto,* another important title in the history of the "body count" movie debuted. Released by American International Pictures in May 1971, Robert Fuest's *The Abominable Dr. Phibes* was an *art nouveau* black comedy starring Vincent Price as a mad musician who avenges himself against the nine doctors he holds responsible for his wife's death, punishing them with elaborate death traps based on the nine Hebrew curses of the Old Testament. The film, inaccurately advertised as Price's 100th film, proved so popular that it spawned a sequel, *Dr.*

21 Luigi Barzini, *The Italians* (New York NY: Bantam Books, 1965), 118.

Phibes Rises Again (1972), which found Price and Fuest presiding over another series of more random, yet no less flamboyant, murders. The successful formula was repeated in yet another Price vehicle, Douglas Hickox's United Artists release *Theater of Blood* (1973), which found a mad Shakespearean actor avenging himself against his critics with death scenes scripted by the Bard.

While Bava's influence on these films is surely coincidental, it is far more palpable in a European co-production filmed after the release of *Ecologia del delitto:* Edward Dmytryk's *Bluebeard* (1972), which starred Richard Burton as the infamous wife-killer. Made on location in Hungary, the film was scripted in part by *La maschera del demonio*'s Ennio De Concini, photographed by Gábor Pogány (who shot much of Riccardo Freda's work before and after Bava), and featured a program of murders staged, once again, with the special makeup illusions of Carlo Rambaldi. In one sequence where Burton finds wife Nathalie Delon lying naked with prostitute Sybil Danning, he impales them both with a chandelier constructed from the antlers (and a single protruding tusk) of various hunted animals; the scene very much recalls the *"coitus interruptus"* scene of *Ecologia del delitto.* Each of these films is remarkable not only for adopting Bava's scorecard approach to acts of homicide, but for sharing his movie's diabolically dark sense of humor.

But *Ecologia del delitto*'s most notable influence can be traced back to *Twitch of the Death Nerve*'s days as a cash cow for Hallmark Releasing Corporation. Before founding Hallmark, the company's partners—Steve Minasian, Philip Scuderi, and Robert Barsamian—had worked together on an early hardcore sex film called *Together* (1970), which featured a pre-*Behind the Green Door* Marilyn Chambers in its cast. It was produced and directed by Sean S. Cunningham, and edited and partially photographed by his associate producer, Wes Craven. Craven and Cunningham later collaborated on a film tailor-made to Hallmark's needs, *Krug and Company*—which was eventually released under the title *The Last House on the Left* (1972). *Last House* regularly played at drive-in double- and triple-bills with *Twitch of the Death Nerve*, and as previously noted, *Twitch* was retitled *Last House—Part II* in 1977.

Just as *Twitch* (or whatever it was called) was disappearing from American screens in the late 1970s, it was finally cleared for belated exhibition in Great Britain. In early 1980, New Realm Distribution submitted a print of *Bloodbath* which had been shorn of close to 6 minutes, eliminating all of the gruesome punchlines that propelled Bava's dark comedy from scene to scene. This version was granted an "Adults Only" X certificate and released to theaters in March 1980 on the bottom half of a double bill with *Human Experiments*, a 1980 American film (originally titled *Beyond the Gate*) starring Linda Haynes, Jackie Coogan, and Aldo Ray. There wasn't too much of Bava's film left to appreciate when it was screened for *Monthly Film Bulletin*'s Tom Milne, who branded it "an absurdly over-plotted thriller which spends so much time floatingly observing its characters as they wander within reach of assorted lurkers with axes, spears and billhooks that it has no time to bother with characterization, Bava's camerawork and direction provide some striking images, despite (occasionally because of) variable colour processing, and despite cuts which have excised most of the climaxes (a copulating couple transfixed by a spear, for instance). The rest is mechanical in the extreme." [22]

Two months later, in May 1980, Paramount released *Friday the 13th*, a low-budget, independent pick-up feature directed by Sean S. Cunningham, which Steve Minasian and his partners financed in the autumn of 1979. Confirming that no one ever went broke by underestimating the taste of the public, this turgid and witless whodunit became one of the biggest cash cows of its decade. As many fans and critics noticed, the film mirrored Bava's body count movie in many respects—including its graphically violent murders and lakeside setting, although, despite its title, Cunningham's movie contains quite a bit fewer than thirteen murders. An explanation for the similarity is offered by Martin Kitrosser, who worked as a



THE FRENCH *affiche, which mentions the film's award-winning screening at the Avoriaz Festival.*

script supervisor on the first two *Friday the 13th* pictures and went on to co-author *Parts 3* and *5*.

"I was absolutely mesmerized by [Bava's] film," explains Kitrosser, who admits to being such a fan of the director that he named his first-born son Mario Bava Kitrosser. "In the late 1970s, while in college, I purchased a 16 mm projector and rented many 16 mm Mario Bava films from different mail order sources and eventually bought *Bay of Blood*, as well as *Blood and Black Lace*, for only 50 bucks apiece, though the quality left much to be desired. In 1978, Ron Kurz—a fellow writer and close friend of mine—mentioned that Sean Cunningham was interested in making a horror movie after seeing *Halloween*. Ron suggested that I lend my 16 mm copy of *Bay of Blood* to Sean and another writer, Victor Miller [to study], and lo and behold, here comes *Friday the 13th*! Later, Sean hired me to supervise Victor's script. He offered me $1,200 or 5% of the profits of the movie. Being just out of college, I went for the cash rather than the profits, because I didn't expect it to be the big hit it turned out to be! Soon afterwards, I was hired again as a script supervisor for *Friday the 13th, Part 2*,



GERMAN *A1 poster.*

this time with Ron, who this time suggested we pattern the killings after *Bay of Blood*. I agreed, and also wanted to include a dedication in the closing credits: 'To the Memory of Mario Bava.' Unfortunately, that [idea] was vetoed by the producers."

The enormous commercial success of *Friday the 13th*—in proportion to its production costs—resulted in a veritable blood flood of imitations: *The Burning*, *Just Before Dawn*, *Midnight*, and *Madman* (all 1981), to name only a few—all of which followed Bava's blueprint of staging their R-rated (barely glimpsed) mayhem in the midst of contrastingly attractive natural settings. Bava never lived to see *Friday the 13th* and its countless offspring and never understood that, by veering the *giallo* into less urban terrain, he was blazing yet another trail in the history of horror cinema. One imagines that Bava would have taken one look at the lush American forests that provide natural backdrops to these films and sighed wistfully, remembering how, on his film, he had been obliged to work without the luxury of real trees.

The influence of *Ecologia del delitto* was still going strong nearly a decade later, when the Spanish horror star Paul Naschy wrote and directed *El Aullido del Diavolo* ("The Howl of the Devil," 1988). Conceived as Naschy's tribute to the great masters of horror, the film opens with a title card acknowledging the likes of Boris Karloff, Bela Lugosi, Lon Chaney and makeup artist Jack Pierce, and concerns itself with the young son of a great, late horror star (Naschy) who appears to him throughout the film in the guises of the Frankenstein Monster, the Phantom of the Opera, Quasimodo, and Naschy's own werewolf character Waldemar Daninsky. As the film reaches its climax, Naschy adds Mario Bava to his list of hommages by including a flashback dramatizing the actor's death, as we see him and his wife making love when they are suddenly impaled together by a masked intruder. When the murderer removes his mask and we see that the couple's own son was responsible, the son begins to make sense of his own derangement—thus the sequence works as a tribute not only to *Ecologia del delitto*, but to Bava's Spanish horror film *Il rosso segno della follia*.

At the close of his *Positif* interview, Bava offered interviewer Ornella Volta a forthcoming description of his work outside the commercial cinema. "My current project is a documentary about vivisection," he said. "If you can imagine that, while filming *Ecologia del delitto*, the thought of having to pierce a live beetle kept me up all night, perhaps you can begin to imagine the effect *this* project is having on me. If I were dealing with a biopsy performed on a human, I could accept that more easily. But the mere idea of seeing it applied to an animal makes me shiver! When we were working with the dogs, we had to first cut their vocal cords to silence their howls because, naturally, they were never anesthetized . . ." [23]

Bava also occupied his increasingly spare time between features by lending his special effects expertise to a series of television commercials for Perugina's popular candy, Cioccolatini Baci ("Chocolate Kisses"). These commercials had been a staple of Italian television since 1967; each segment built around the same formula: To the tune of a catchy jingle called *"Tanti Baci Perugina"* ("So Many Perugina Kisses"), a young, arguing couple found their troubles miraculously solved by the intervention of a lovely blonde, chocolate-bearing fairy, known as the *Baci Fantina* ("Kiss Fairy"). Dutch actress Katia Christine (b. 1946) originated the role after supporting roles in two 1967 films, *Don Giovanni in Sicilia* and the Louis Malle "William Wilson" episode of *Histoires Extraordinaires/Spirits of the Dead* (in which she played a nude girl whose body is teased with a scalpel by the sadistic Alain Delon). When Christine became pregnant in 1968, the role of the *Baci Fantina* was passed on to Elisabetta "Emma" Piccolamini (a British actress of Italian descent), and then to the Akron, Ohio-born actress Sydne Rome (b. 1944). Katia Christine returned to the role in 1971, and traded it off and on with Rome through 1972—at which time Rome won the lead role in Roman Polanski's sex comedy *Che?/What?* a.k.a. *Diary of Forbidden Dreams*.

Bava photographed and devised the special effects for six different Cioccolatini Baci spots produced between 1971–72. These black-and-white commercials, created by the Brera Agency, were produced by Giuseppe Brun, scored by Italy's jingle king Franco Godi, and directed by Franco Rossi, Bava's directorial associate on *Odissea*. Bava did not direct any of the spots himself; instead, his duties were to dream up inventive new ways of presenting *la Baci fantina* (and her product)—making her glitter, fly through the air, float through forests, and so on.

These commercial projects were a welcome distraction from the fact that Bava's most recent film—still a year away from its first screenings in America—had not appealed to the same Italian moviegoers who were flocking to Dario Argento's thrillers in such great numbers. At home, his luck was nearly exhausted; but fortunately, there was an American producer for whom Bava's name was still synonymous with triumph over budget, and through his timely intervention, Mario Bava was about to embark on the last great creative period of his life and career.

22 Tom Milne, "Antefatto (Bloodbath)" review, *Monthly Film Bulletin*, 1980.

23 Volta.





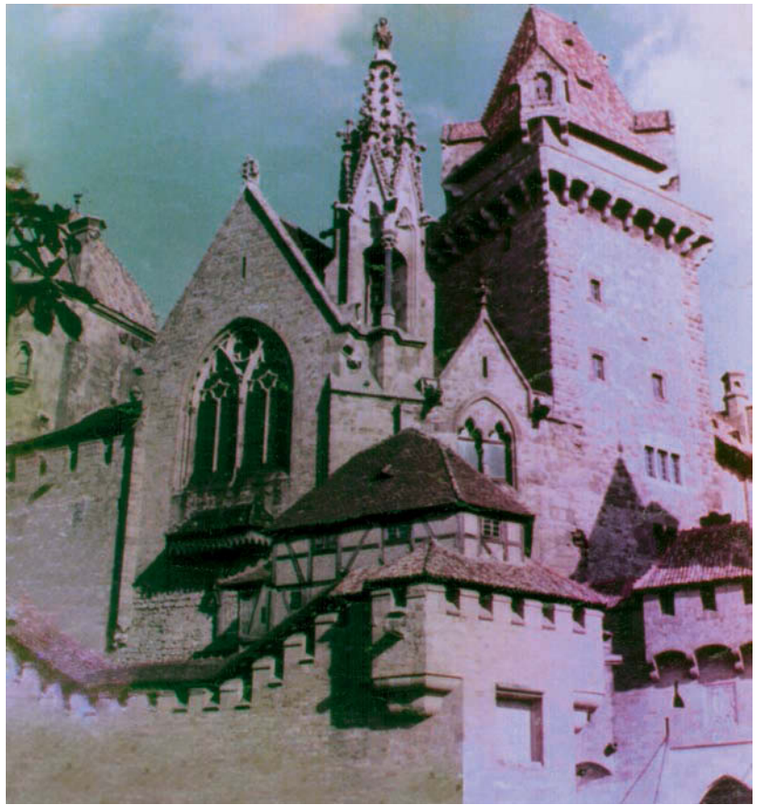
BARON OTTO *von Kleist emerges from the grave, to the terror of this bystander—a scene not included in the final cut of* BARON BLOOD.

Baron Blood

ONE OF THE MOST talked-about publishing events of 1972 was Raymond McNally and Radu Florescu's *In Search of Dracula: A True History of Dracula and Vampire Legends*. This pop historical text allegedly "proved" that Bram Stoker's literary creation had been based on Vlad Tepes of Wallachia (1431–1476), a bloodthirsty Romanian warrior who impaled his enemies on stakes arranged around his outdoor banquet table—thus winning him the nickname "Vlad the Impaler." The McNally/Florescu book was later turned into the semi-documentary film *In Search of Dracula* (1974), filmed in Romania by director Calvin Floyd, and starring Christopher Lee. This book, like the burgeoning ecology movement, reflected a growing concern, first within the counterculture and then rippling out into mass culture of the late 1960s and early '70s, about getting back to basics, going "back to the land" and examining one's "roots"—and these ideas naturally found expression in the fields of popular entertainment, including the horror cinema.

Mario Bava's next film, *Baron Blood*, is one of several horror films which modestly predate the arrival of the McNally/Florescu best-seller but share its interests in seeking out the truth behind an ancient figure of legend. Around the same time, American International Pictures released a spirited independent pick-up called *Count Yorga—Vampire* (1970, now known under its pre-acquisition title of *The Loves of Count Iorga*), which took the seemingly novel approach of reviving a centuries-old vampire in a contemporary setting. Actually, it wasn't the first movie to do this—the same could be said of Tod Browning's *Dracula* (1931)—but it felt like a new twist because the 1970s were more radically different to the vampire's natural *milieu* than the Edwardian 1930s had been. In Spain, actor–screenwriter Paul Naschy (Jacinto Molina) had already moved in this direction with modern-day appearances of vampires in *La Marca del Hombre Lobo/Frankenstein's Bloody Terror* (1967), *El Hombre que Vino de Ummo/Assignment Terror* (1968), and *Le Noche de Walpurgis/The Werewolf versus the Vampire Woman* (1970) but, for some reason, the trend did not seem wholly absorbed into the genre until Hammer Films responded by resurrecting Christopher Lee's Dracula in a remarkably dated, "contemporary" Chelsea in *Dracula A.D. 1972* (1971). Though the McNally/Florescu book was still a year away from publication as *Baron Blood* went into production, the film anticipates *In Search of Dracula* with impressive precision, showing that—while it now appears to be an old-fashioned return to Bava's own Italian gothic roots—it was also very attuned to the *zeitgeist* of its time.

Long before there was a best-selling book to bolster the idea's status, Antonio Margheriti had addressed similar material in an Italian horror film called *La vergine di Norimberga/Horror Castle* (1963). In this gothic melodrama, based on a novel attributed to "Frank Bogart" and "translator" Maddelena Guy which first appeared in the Italian pulp magazine *KKK I classici dell'orrore*, Rosanna Podestà played a woman newly wed to a German aristocrat (Georges Rivière) whose castle contains a museum commemorating the horrific deeds of a sadistic 17th century ancestor known as "The Punisher." The film co-starred Christopher Lee and was filmed in the same empty villa where, only weeks earlier, Bava had directed Lee in *La frusta e il corpo/The Whip and the Body*.



AN ORIGINAL *Polaroid location scouting photo of the Museum der Stadt Korneuburg, where BARON BLOOD was filmed.*

Baron Blood

Filmed on location in Korneuburg, Austria
September – November 1971
First released: February 25, 1972
Technicolor, 1.85:1, 98 minutes

Production: Euro American Productions (Rome), Wien Film (Vienna). Producers: Alfred Leone [Alfredo Leone], Dieter Geissler. Director: Mario Bava. Assistant directors: Lamberto Bava, Giuseppe Scavuzzo C.S.C. Original screenplay: Vincent G. Fotre, Wilibald Eser, Mario Bava. Continuity: Marion Mertes. Director of photography: Antonio Rinaldi. Camera operator: Emilio Varriano. Camera assistant: Gianlorenzo Battaglia. Art direction: Enzo Bulgarelli, Friedrich Juptner. Set decoration: Stefano Bulgarelli. Props: Angelo Coacchi. Special effects: Franco Tocci. Costumes: Alfonsa Olivieri. Makeup: Sylvana Petri. Special makeup: Carlo Rambaldi [uncredited]. Hairdresser: Rosanna Gigante. Stunt coordinator: Giulio Maculani. Production supervisor: Bruno Frasca. Production managers: Franco Coduti, Pierluigi Ciriaci. Production secretary: Armida Aichino. Editor: Carlo Reali. Assistant editor: Anita Cacciolati. Sound: Carlo Tarchi. Music: Stelvio Cipriani [C.A.M.]. Stills: Francesco Bellomo. Interpreter: Marina Oberreiter. Distributor: Jumbo Cinematografica.

Additional US credits: Produced by Alfred Leone [Alfredo Leone] for Leone International Productions, in association with Cinevision, Ltd. Executive producers: Sam Lang, J. Arthur Elliott. Adapted for the screen by William A. Bairn. Music: Les Baxter. Distributor: American International Pictures.

Joseph Cotten (Alfred Becker), Elke Sommer (Eva Arnold), Antonio Cantáfora (Peter Kleist), Massimo Girotti (Karl Hummel), Rada Rassimov (Christina Hoffmann/Elizabeth Holle), Alan Collins [Luciano Pigozzi] (Fritz), Dieter Tressler (Dortmundt), Nicoletta Elmi (Gretchen), Humi Raho [Umberto Raho] (Inspector), Valeria Sabel (Marthe Hummel). Uncredited: Gustavo di Nardo (Dr. Werner Hesse), Franco Tocci (Otto von Kleist), Kathy Leone (woman on plane), Alfredo Leone (man on plane), Mario Bava (passerby).

France: *Baron Vampire*, Selection C.A.A.
Germany: *Baron Blood*, TV only
Italy: *Gli orrori del castello di Norimberga*, "The Horror of Nuremberg Castle"
Mexico: *Camara de Tortura*, "Chamber of Tortures"
US: *Baron Blood*, American International Pictures, 10/27/72, 91m

Baron Blood began as an original screenplay written by Vincent G. Fotre, a Hollywood-based tennis pro who had been dabbling in screenwriting since the late 1950s. Fotre's screenwriting credits were few, despite a lengthy career in the business. One of his short stories was bought as the basis for an episode of *Alfred Hitchcock Presents* ("The Rose Garden," 12/15/56), and he later contributed to the 1960s ABC-TV series, *Honey West*. His first feature script was for Richard Cunha's low-budget *Missile to the Moon* (1958), followed by a US/Yugoslav co-production, *Operation Cross Eagles* (1969, the only directorial effort of actor Richard Conte); in 1970, a made-for-TV movie called *Wild Women*, directed by Don Taylor, was based on *The Trailmakers*, a 1961 paperback original novel by Fotre. Also in 1970, Fotre teamed with actor Keith Larsen to co-script and co-produce a US/Canadian horror film, *Night of the Witches*, which Larsen directed under the pseudonym "Keith Erik Burt."

Fotre's *Baron Blood* script was first acquired by independent American producer Jerry Briskin, who had started in the business as an associate producer on the Irwin Allen series *Lost in Space* and *The Time Tunnel*. Briskin then brought it to the attention of fellow producer Alfredo Leone in hopes of interesting him in a co-production deal. Leone read Fotre's script, liked it very much, and agreed to pool his resources with Briskin—but it didn't work out that way.

"I met my end [of the deal]," Leone chuckles, "but he couldn't meet his, so I just took over the property."

Leone was excited by *Baron Blood* because he had been looking for the right vehicle to reunite him with Mario Bava after *Four Times That Night*—a disappointing project which had nevertheless convinced him of Bava's

unique talents as a filmmaker. He now understood that erotic cinema was not really Bava's forte, while his horror films had almost always been international successes. When Leone sent Fotre's script to the man who was "always my Number One choice," Bava surprised him by turning it down. His reason had nothing to do with the script—Bava almost never turned down a script—but one of Leone's production associates, Wien Film of Austria, made it a condition of their "heavy investment" in the project that filming take place in or around one or more of the many available castles in Vienna.

"*Solamente in Italia, Leone*," Bava said, flatly.

Leone persisted and Bava continued to hold his ground, until the need to direct another feature became overwhelming. Bava had not directed anything since the Cioccolatini Baci commercials and, with the international success of new directors like Dario Argento and Sergio Martino, filmmaking in Italy was rapidly becoming a young man's game. Only a dozen years into his career as a director, Bava was now pushing 60 and *Baron Blood* was the only offer on the table. Reluctant to leave his secure niche of the world, his hypochondriac wife and the dog he nursed like a baby, Bava bit the bullet—encouraged to do so by his son Lamberto—and flew to Austria to scout locations with Leone.

Bava and Leone spent two or three weeks together, visiting castles and taking in the sights. "Mario was an invaluable help in scouting locations, because he'd had so much experience at location shooting," Leone says. "One of the castles we visited was used in *Where Eagles Dare*; it was stunning from the outside, but inside, it was completely empty! I tried to convince Bava that we could use it for exteriors, and use the interior of another castle, but he turned to me and said, 'Leone, do you know what it would cost to run cables up and down that hillside?' He was absolutely right. The guy from Wien Film showed us I don't know how many castles, and then he showed us the one we eventually used."

This was the Museum der Stadt Korneuburg, a magnificent castle located about 20 kilometers outside Vienna—a stone's throw from the Danube River. "Not only was the setting fabulous," Leone continues, "but it was furnished from top to bottom with precious antiques! I remember there was *one chair* valued at over half a million dollars! I asked the guy from Wien Film why he hadn't shown us this place first, and he said he'd held it back because it would be very expensive. It was, but it was worth it. When I told Mario we had a deal for the castle, he threw his arms around me and kissed me! He was beside himself, imagining all the ways he could shoot that castle and everything in it."

The shared experience of scouting locations in Vienna gave Bava and Leone many opportunities for conversation, and they discovered that beyond their professional relationship, they also had much else in common—including a mutual fondness for card playing. Leone also indulged Bava's hobby for collecting English expressions. "I was a great pinochle player in my time," Leone recalls, "and as we played, he wanted me to teach him some profanity in English. So when I won, I'd say—pardon the profanity—'Fuck you in spades, Bava!' And this went on to become a classic phrase of his: 'Fuck you in spades, Leone!' He was a wonderful man; I miss him dearly."

Synopsis

American college student Peter Kleist decides to spend his summer vacation with relatives in Austria, hoping to gain a better appreciation of his family history ("We all want to know where we come from, and from whom"). Peter is already aware of the most notorious leaf on his family tree: Baron Otto von Kleist, a 16th century sadistic nobleman who lived in an ominous castle overlooking his village.[1] *Known to the peasantry as "Baron Blood," Kleist was notorious for having locals brought to his castle and tortured in his dungeon, whereafter their battered bodies were impaled on long poles displayed from the high turrets of his forbidding home. Kleist's reign of terror came to an end when a witch whom he had burned at the stake—Elizabeth Holle, the only person whom he truly feared—cursed him before dying, which caused a fire to break out in his castle which burned him alive, as she had been. So strong was Elizabeth's hatred for the Baron*



SOUVENIR *photo of a festive party held the night before shooting began. Clockwise: Joseph Cotten, Mario Bava, Massimo Girotti, Luciano Pigozzi, Alfredo Leone, Patricia Medina Cotten and Elke Sommer.*

1 The description of "16th century" is actually an anachronism, as the Marquis de Sade himself was not born until 1740. For some reason, all references to Baron von Kleist's timeline in *Baron Blood*'s AIP pressbook say "18th century."



OTTO VON KLEIST *(Franco Tocci, wearing a mask by Carlo Rambaldi) rises from the grave outside Schloss des Teufels.*

that she left behind an incantation that, when recited aloud inside the charred room at the stroke of midnight, would restore the disfigured Kleist to life, so that he might reexperience the agonies of death again and again.

When Peter arrives in Austria, he is met at Flughafen Wien (the airport) by his uncle Karl Hummel, a professor of architecture at the University. Their conversation quickly comes round to the Baron, and Uncle Karl drives Peter to the Baron's old castle, known as Schloss des Teufels ("Castle of the Devils"), which is in the midst of renovation for its reopening as a hotel—"for foreigners, not for the locals," Karl says, implying that Baron's legend is more than a mere fable for the people of his town. They meet Eva Arnold, one of Karl's graduate students, who is overseeing the work of Herr Dortmundt's renovation team as a representative of the Commission for National Monuments, to ensure that the castle's original integrity is preserved. That night at dinner, Karl's young daughter Gretchen amuses Peter and Eva with her stories of having seen the Baron's ghost at the windows of the castle. When Karl mentions Elizabeth Holle, Peter surprises him by producing an ancient piece of parchment that he discovered as a child while visiting his grandfather; it contains the incantation which, according to legends of the witch, will bring the Baron back to life.[2] Uncle Karl cautions his nephew to be wary of the supernatural, but when he retires for the evening, Peter persuades Eva to return to the castle to have a go at the incantation. "Perhaps I can scare up a little family history," he jokes. The parchment also contains a counter-incantation, capable of returning the Baron to his grave, so "If we don't dig him, we'll ditch him."



PETER KLEIST *(Antonio Cantáfora) and Eva (Elke Sommer) read the incantation that brings the Baron back to life.*

Peter and Eva find the burned room where the Baron died and, using an ancient floorplan of the castle, uncover a secret passage that leads to a room where a portrait of Otto von Kleist hangs, defaced except for its blue eyes. They recite the incantation at midnight, after which the village belltower tolls twice—"2:00 was the hour at which Von Kleist died," Eva remarks in fright. They feel a formidable presence approaching, and see the handle of a door to the room twist and turn . . .

Eva urges Peter to reverse the incantation, which he does. Once the danger has passed, Peter suspects that Fritz—a moronic handyman working at the castle, who likes to tease the easily unnerved Eva—may have been at the door, playing a joke. The next day, Herr Dortmundt reports that Fritz has been fired for stealing from the property. That night, with the main suspect absent from the scene, Peter persuades Eva to test the incantation again. Once again, the belltower tolls twice, but before they can reverse the incantation, a sudden breeze blows the ancient parchment into the fireplace. Outside in the rolling fog, the disfigured Otto von Kleist pulls himself up from his burial place.

His body in bloody ruins, the Baron ambles in pain to the office of Dr. Werner Hesse, who tries to help him. When Hesse says he is obliged by law to phone an ambulance, the Baron kills him. He makes his way back to the castle, after Peter and Eva have fled, and murders Herr Dortmundt—hanging him down the center of a spiral staircase. Fritz, trespassing on the property, finds Dortmundt's body and takes his revenge by prying a ring from his dead finger, but the Baron clubs him, carries the handyman to the castle dungeon, and places him inside a spiked casket, whose lethal lid is dropped just as Fritz regains consciousness. Afterward, the Baron seeks out a secreted trunk, breaking the chains that bind it with his own ruined hands. Inside is a fortune in jewels.

With Herr Dortmundt dead, the castle's restoration cannot continue, and the property is put up for auction, where it is expected to go for "at least $600,000." The high bidder is Alfred Becker, an elderly newcomer to the village who is confined to a wheelchair. As he is congratulated by Karl, Peter, and Eva, he makes known his intentions to reside in the castle and restore it to its former glory. He invites Eva to assist him. They meet again when Eva delivers a tapestry, found in a local shop, that once belonged to the castle. While hanging it from a high mezzanine, Eva confides to Becker the story of the incantation and the parchment's destruction, and suddenly grows dizzy, nearly falling to her death. She excuses herself, but on her way out, she encounters the Baron—cloaked, hatted, horribly disfigured, leering at her. Eva is pursued, but Peter arrives in time to rescue her and drives her back to her apartment. As she returns to her rooms, Eva finds the Baron waiting for her in the darkness, and she escapes through a window into the foggy streets. The Baron hobbles after her, but she manages to reach the safety of Karl's house.

Karl is now convinced that the incantation was successful in reviving the Baron and addresses himself to the problem of how to send him back. Revealing himself to be not only an architect but also an authority on extra sensory perception, he mentions a local woman who achieved amazing scores in ESP testing: Christina Hoffmann, who is not only psychic, but claims to be a medium able to receive messages from the dead. Christina resents humankind ("Once you killed innocent witches and now you bring murderers back to life") but takes Peter and Eva to the place where Elizabeth Holle was burned to death. A bonfire is built, through which Christina communicates with the long-dead witch—with the aid of an amulet that was once her personal property. Elizabeth speaks through Christina, who expresses her gratitude to Peter and Eva for reviving the Baron, so that he may suffer his death agonies a second time. She informs them that "The Baron can be destroyed only by those he has himself destroyed."[3] When Christina returns to her home, she senses a visitation from the Baron, and as her door swings open to the night, she enfolds herself in her cloak to meet inevitable death.

Accompanied by Karl, Peter and Eva go to the police inspector—who is investigating the murder of Herr Dortmundt and the disappearance of the likeliest suspect, Fritz—to tell him the story of the incantation. He scoffs at the supernatural explanation. He also mentions the recent disappearances of a fisherman, a villager, and a peddler who were last seen in the vicinity of the castle[4]—which reminds Karl that Gretchen passes by there every day after school! They rush to her rescue and find her injured in the woods outside the castle, having fallen from her bike while trying to elude the Baron, who was pursuing her. Back at home, Gretchen surprises everyone by announcing that "Mr. Becker is the ghost." Eva reasons that if the Baron is able to return to life after centuries, he may also have the power to change his appearance at will. As they ponder what Elizabeth Holle meant when she decreed that the Baron could be destroyed only by those he had himself destroyed, Gretchen offers, "Maybe she meant the amulet."

That night, Becker invites Peter, Eva, and Karl to the unveiling of his finished restoration of the castle, which is complete to the extent of hanging impaled dummies from the castle turrets—though the "dummies" are actually the impaled corpses of the missing fisherman, villager, and peddler.



JOSEPH COTTEN *as Mr. Becker, an illusory disguise for the reanimated Baron.*

2 This 16th century parchment is the source of a continuity error that may be rather painful for conservationists of historical documents to observe. When Peter first produces the sheet in his uncle's dining room, it is folded in quarters; later, when he and Eva use it at the castle, it has been folded into eighths! How did this fragile document, handled so casually, ever survive the centuries?

3 In the English version of this scene, all references to the curse place it "300 years ago," which would make it the 17th century—once again, confusing the chronology of this "16th century" sadist.

4 Only one of these disappearances is explained in the film.

Becker also shows them the torture chamber, which he has furnished with stereo speakers that play tapes of voices screaming in pain and torment. Eva is disturbed and they agree to leave, but pause on the way out to share their belief that Becker really is the Baron. He overhears and steps out of his wheelchair, also revealing himself to be impervious to bullets when Karl discharges a small pistol in his direction. Eva later awakens in the torture chamber, bruised and with her clothes torn. Karl is tied to a rack and Peter is being terrorized by his ancestor, who is waving a red-hot poker in his direction. As she stands beside the open casket containing Fritz' punctured corpse, she drops the amulet on the body, which causes it to revive—and suddenly, the Baron's other victims arrive at the dungeon to exact their vengeance, as well. As they engulf the Baron and prepare instruments for his torture, Eva frees the two men and they drive away from Schloss des Teufels. As screams fill the night, the voice of Elizabeth Holle is heard across the centuries pleading with the Baron's murderers to "Save the last blow for me . . . Let me cut into his heart!"

MARIO BAVA *and Elke Sommer keeping warm on a cold November night in Vienna.*



Cast

A hands-on producer, Alfredo Leone took the liberty of casting *Baron Blood* himself, and he pleased Bava by assembling one of the most impressive casts he ever had under his direction. For the pivotal role of Alfred Becker, Leone knew that he needed a name actor, preferably someone with a known track record in the horror genre. "First I took the project to Vincent Price, but he wasn't interested," Leone recalls. "I later learned that he and Bava had a bad experience in common, which may explain why. Then I showed it to Ray Milland; he was intrigued but couldn't travel at the time, and turned it down. And then someone asked me, 'Why don't you try Joseph Cotten?' *Joseph Cotten!* I thought of *Citizen Kane* and *The Third Man* and didn't believe for a moment that he'd be interested in doing our type of film. But I took a chance and sent him the script and, needing the work, he accepted. Right after making our film, he made some other Italian horror films. *Baron Blood* was the start of a whole new career for him."

Born May 15, 1905, in Petersburg, Virginia, pudding-voiced Joseph Cotten was one of the original members of Orson Welles' Mercury Theater who, in addition to many classic appearances on American radio and stage, was featured in such classic films as *Citizen Kane* (1941), *The Magnificent Ambersons* (1942), *Shadow of a Doubt* (1943), *Portrait of Jennie* (1948) and *The Third Man* (1948, also filmed in Vienna). In 1960, Cotten made his first Italian film and married actress Patricia Medina, who acompanied him to Vienna. Cotten had made an earlier horror film for AIP, *The Abominable Dr. Phibes*, in 1971 and *Baron Blood* was in fact his second Italian horror film, following Mel Welles' *Lady Frankenstein* (1971). It would be the most commercially successful of his European films, which included subsequent efforts like *Sussuri nel buio* (1976) and Sergio Martino's *L'isola degli uomini pesce/ Island of the Fish Men* (1978, released in the US as *Screamers*, a partially reshot, re-edited version supervised by Joe Dante).

Though a native of Berlin, West Germany, Elke Sommer was actually "discovered" for the cinema in Italy. Born Elke Schletz on November 5, 1940, she was the daughter of a Lutheran minister who died when she was 14. Four years later, while vacationing with her mother in Rome, she entered a competition and won the title of "Miss Viareggio," which entitled her to a small role in a feature film—*L'amico del giaguaro* ("The Friend of the Jaguar"), directed by Giuseppe Bennati. The young Elke had intended to seek a career as a diplomatic translator, and had been educated in seven different languages, which helped her to become an international sex kitten in movies produced in Germany, Italy, France, and Spain. In 1962, she was

cast by director Cyril Frankel in her first British film, *Why Bother to Knock?* (1963), which opened the door to American films, including the female lead in the Paul Newman spy vehicle *The Prize* (1963) and Blake Edwards' classic Inspector Clouseau farce, *A Shot in the Dark* (1964). Sommer's appearance in the notorious turkey *The Oscar* (1966, scripted by Harlan Ellison) marked the beginning of a long descent into movie mediocrity, of which the highlights were the Bob Hope vehicle *Boy, Did I Get a Wrong Number!* (1966, in which she spoofed Brigitte Bardot) and *The Wicked Dreams of Paula Schultz* (1968, a movie featuring several cast members from TV's concentration camp sitcom *Hogan's Heroes*). *Baron Blood*, therefore, marked a return to a semblance of class for the actress. It may sound like ballyhoo concocted for promoting the movie, but Sommer claims to be an actual baroness. "I can trace my family back to the year 1120," she has said. "I'm really a baroness, but I don't like to use the title. My father told me, 'Don't use it unless you have to because you didn't earn it; it comes from your ancestors.'" [5]



LITTLE *Gretchen (Nicoletta Elmi, foreground) sees through Mr. Becker's disguise.*

A veteran at the time of more than fifty features, Sommer had never before appeared in a horror film, and this new ground was one of her primary attractions to the role of Eva. "I was not aware of Mario Bava, at that time, as a heralded director," she reveals. "I met with Mr. Leone through my manager, Bulle Sturgen, and said, 'Yes, I've never done a horror movie, so I am interested.' For me, it was just the fact that we were doing a horror movie. The fact that we were going to be shooting in Austria made it even more enticing, because I could visit my mommy and have a week at home. It was great." [6]

Sommer, a successful commercial artist in her own right, was enthusiastic about Bava as an artist and as a person. "I loved Bava with all my heart," she told *Fangoria*. "He was very quiet—as quiet as Italians can be—but he had *incredible* energy. He spoke very broken English, so we always conversed in Italian. His son Lamberto was the assistant director and he loyally followed all of 'Papa's' instructions. Bava was quite a patriarch among the whole group of actors and technicians." [7]

As Sommer later elaborated: "[Bava] was an absolute, brilliant technician and an absolutely trustworthy companion on the set. Mario was like a friend—a fatherly friend, I might say. He was never lecherous; he would never even make a *double entendre* around me, which is actually the kind of thing I find very funny. Mario was very straight, very professional. He was kind of a Papa figure to me, and he was very dedicated to Leone. We actually thought very much alike—we didn't even have to talk. It was like when I worked with [Peter] Sellers [on *A Shot in the Dark*]. I had the same thing with Sellers; we had something that was so big, you can't even talk about it. We could just look at each other and know what the other was thinking, what they wanted." Over the next three years, Sommer starred in three Bava films—a record for a lead actress—though, despite the sometimes excellent performances she gave, she was too bright, too golden, to become a symbol of his work, as Barbara Steele and Daliah Lavi managed to do with single performances.

Cast in the role of Karl Hummel was Massimo Girotti (born in Mogliano on May 18, 1918)—a real casting *coup* for Leone. In the years since he had worked with Bava on such early features as Francisci's *Natale al Campo 119* and Freda's *Spartaco*, Girotti had become one of Italy's most legendary film stars. Among his outstanding screen credits were Roberto Rossellini's *Un pilota ritorna* (1942), Vittorio De Sica's *La porta del cielo* and Luchino Visconti's *Ossessione* (both 1943), Pasolini's *Teorema* (1968), and Jules Dassin's *Medea* (1969). Upon completing *Baron Blood*, Girotti immediately flew to Paris to co-star in Bernardo Bertolucci's *Ultimo tango a Parigi/Last Tango in Paris* (1972). Girotti continued to act in films for the rest of his life, which ended at the age of 84 on January 5, 2003, due to heart failure.

The cast also satisfied Leone's international co-production agreements with Spain (Antonio Cantáfora), Germany (Dieter Tressler), and Italy (Umberto "Humi" Raho, Luciano "Alan Collins" Pigozzi). Cantáfora, looking quite a bit different, resurfaced many years later in Lamberto Bava's *Demoni 2/Demons 2: The Nightmare Continues* (1986), playing a role so insignificant that Bava failed to point him out during the audio commentary of a US LaserDisc and DVD release. *Baron Blood* marked Bava's only collaboration with Raho, who had been a staple of Italian horror/fantasy cinema through his associations with Riccardo Freda (*Lo spettro/The Ghost*, 1963; *Giulietta e Romeo/Romeo and Juliet*, 1964), Sidney Salkow (*L'ultimo uomo della terra/The Last Man on Earth*, 1963), Antonio Margheriti

5 Steve Swires, "Give Her a Hand," *Fangoria* 110, March 1992, 49.

6 All Elke Sommer quotes (unless otherwise attributed) are taken from a transcript of her audio commentary for Image Entertainment's DVD of *The House of Exorcism*, and may reflect material not included in the final edit of that commentary.

7 Swires.

(*Danza macabra/Castle of Blood*, 1964; *I criminali della galassia/Wild, Wild Planet*, 1965), Dario Argento (*L'uccello dalle piume di cristallo/The Bird With the Crystal Plumage*, 1970), Emilio P. Miraglia (*La notte che Evelyn uscì dalla tomba/The Night Evelyn Came Out of the Grave*, 1970) and Giorgio Ferroni (*La notte dei diavoli/Night of the Devils*, 1972). *Baron Blood* also marked the final collaboration of Bava and Pigozzi—at his best here as "the Italian Peter Lorre." He worked primarily for Margheriti in later years, before leaving Rome for a decade-long acting stint in the Philippines. He returned to Rome in 1996, where he now lives in retirement.

The film's most impressive performance is given by Rada Rassimov (the younger sister of actor Ivan Rassimov), who plays the dual role of Christina Hoffmann and Elizabeth Holle. Born Rada Djrassimovic in Trieste to Yugoslavian parents, Rassimov has worked primarily on the stage, though she did appear in a few Spaghetti Westerns, including *Il buono, il brutto, il cattivo/The Good, the Bad and the Ugly* (1966), *Non aspettare, Django . . . spara* (1969), *Django il bastardo/The Stranger's Gundown* (1969), and *gialli* like *Per il gusto di uccidere* (1966) and Dario Argento's *Il gatto a nove code/The Cat o' Nine Tails* (1971). A slender, graceful and handsome woman whose arresting gaze she shared with her brother, Rassimov is the most convincing of all the mystical women in Bava's films. Her character is notable—as was Fabienne Dali's role in *Operazione paura*—for not demonizing practitioners of Wicca, and actually sympathizing with their gnostic approach to life and nature. After *Baron Blood*, she starred opposite Diabolik's Michel Piccoli in the erotic comedy *Grandeur nature/Love Doll* (1973), after which her screen appearances become more irregular as she focused on stage work and television. She was also featured (with Mimsy Farmer) in the supporting cast of Fabio Carpi's acclaimed *Quartetto Basileus/The Basileus Quartet* (1982). Today, she has her own production company, Rada Film, and creates musicals for the stage. In 2000, she executive produced a mammoth real-time staging of *Verdi's La Traviata*, conducted by Zubin Mehta, which won her an Emmy Award.



LUCIANO PIGOZZI *(a.k.a. "Alan Collins") as the prankster Fritz.*

For the role of little Gretchen, Bava requested Nicoletta Elmi, the red-haired, 7-year-old actress who had been one of the two survivors of *Ecologia del delitto*. "I know that Mario Bava was a true *maestro* of the genre," Elmi recalls, "but I didn't even register that it was a horror film we were shooting. All I remember about that film is that we were all dressed up in heavy costumes and I had no scenes involving blood. Lamberto, his son, was always around, and I was overcome with nostalgia when we met again on the set of *Demons*." [8]

The casting of *Baron Blood* also has its share of mysteries. European cast lists mention several players who do not appear at all, while failing to note at least one actor with an actual speaking part. Appearing in the role of Dr. Werner Hesse is the uncredited Gustavo De Nardo, a featured player in *La ragazza che sapeva troppo*, *I tre volti della paura*, *La frusta e il corpo*, and *La strada per Fort Alamo*. De Nardo's voice was provided in the English version by Mel Welles, who once



RADA RASSIMOV *as Christina Hoffmann, the most impressive of Bava's many occult women characters.*

again directed the English-language dubbing sessions; in nearly every other case, at Leone's insistence, all of the principal roles were dubbed by the actors who played them. Ely Galleani, the young actress who had played Isabella in *5 bambole per la luna d'agosto* under the pseudonym "Justine Gall," is credited by some sources as playing Elizabeth Holle, and likewise, Maurice Poli (*5 bambole*, *Cani arrabbiati*) appears on some cast lists, but does not appear. The blonde young actress who plays Dr. Hesse's assistant Madeline (named in tribute to Alfredo Leone's wife) is uncredited.

Production

Production of *Baron Blood*—"always the film's title," says Leone, deflating the provenance of the cumbersome Italian title—began in September 1971 in Korneuburg, near Vienna. Virtually all of the film was shot in or around the Korneuburg Museum, and the cinematography makes it quite obvious that Bava was dazzled by the castle and its seemingly infinite arcane, antiquarian furnishings.

According to Leone, Bava approached the film with absolute dedication. "Mario was the sort of director who would do a storyboard every night, so he would know exactly where his camera was going to be the next day, what he was going to shoot, and at what angles. He was always prepared. Onscreen, the photography is credited to [Antonio] Rinaldi and [Emilio] Varriano, but it was always Mario. He worked mostly with Rinaldi at that time, who worked as his operator and got the second unit shots, and when he and Rinaldi got into some kind of disagreement, he brought in Varriano or somebody else."

Some critics have accused *Baron Blood* of being badly photographed, with crude zoom shots, but it is probably the handsomest and steadiest of the films attributed to Antonio Rinaldi, and the zoom shots continue Bava's experimentation with ways of visualizing and externalizing the emotional impact of shock. The notorious serial (quadruple) zoom that accompanies Eva's first sighting of the Baron follows a shot in *Ecologia del delitto* in which Claudine Auger, discovering four corpses in a bathtub, is photographed with three zooms out from her close-up, followed by one last zoom into her close-up.

Bava not only directed the film, wrote additional scenes, and (according to Leone) supervised the cinematography; he also took an active hand in decorating the sets. One production still shows him lovingly applying a mixture of makeup blood and glycerine to the spikes of the casket lid that impales Fritz. For a Bava film, *Baron Blood* contains surprisingly little in the vein of in-camera optical effects. The only such moment occurs during Christina's vision of Elizabeth Holle, as Rada Rassimov shares the screen with herself—as Christina, foregrounded at screen left, with the remainder of the frame unexposed, and then as Elizabeth, inserted into a bonfire by means of a reflector that merged the actress with adjacently positioned flames. Bava achieved the shot with the rock-steady Mitchell camera he had inherited from his father, to which Lamberto Bava sometimes referred as "*mi sorella*" ("my sister").

One week into production, *Baron Blood* suffered a near catastrophe when the source of Leone's funding suddenly bottomed out. "I had a letter of credit which was being discounted by the Bank of America in Rome," the producer explains, embarking on an epic anecdote. "When President Nixon made a speech about surcharges, word spread throughout Europe that America was going broke. Suddenly, you were able to buy American dollars at the Rome airport 300:1. At the time, the exchange rate was 6.25, so at a 50% discount, everyone was selling their dollars. Our crew was on location in Austria—in suburbs of Vienna and at the castle in Korneuburg—so the Bank of America in Rome that had agreed to discount my letter of credit suddenly refused to do it. So I had to come up with some money fast.

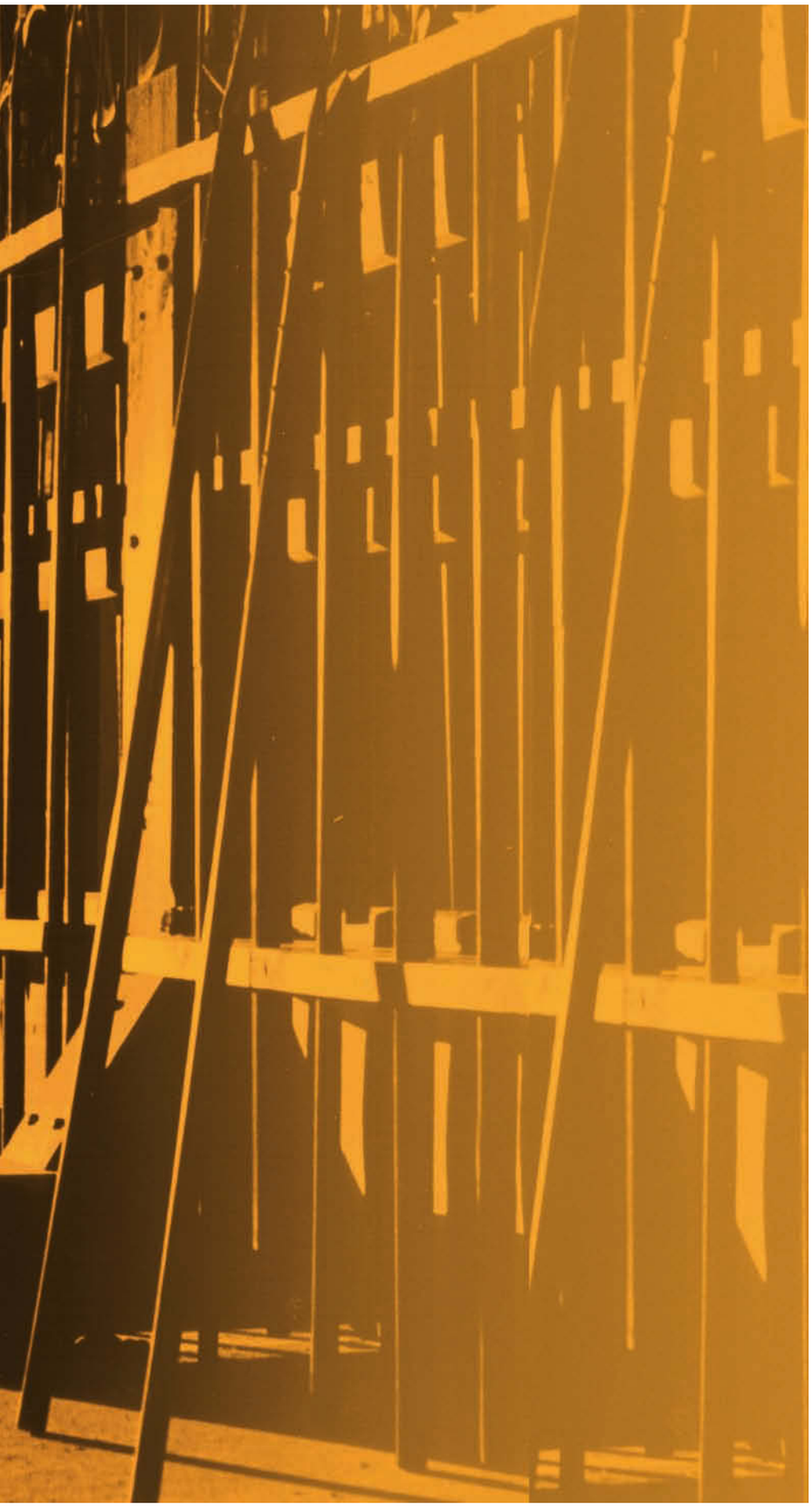
"I flew from Vienna to New York on a Thursday, and went to The Lamb's Club in the hopes of meeting some people and raising $125,000. I met with J. Arthur Elliott there, and he arranged for me to have breakfast at 9:00 the next morning with a guy named Sam Lang. I didn't have very high hopes for the meeting because, while Arthur was a nice guy, he was also the kind of guy who was always in trouble, if you know what I mean. I visited my brother—who was a doctor, God rest his soul—and he told his wife to write me a check for everything they had in their joint savings. I asked him if they had $125,000, and they didn't—they maybe had $40,000—so I told him he was a good brother for offering, but I wouldn't be a good brother for accepting. So I went to breakfast the next morning, not expecting very much. I get there, and there's Arthur and Sam. Sam is wearing this wig . . . *forget about it!* I get a bad feeling about this, but I sit down to breakfast, and Sam says, 'Arthur speaks very highly about you and your



MARIO BAVA *applies some finishing touches to the spikes that will mean the end of Fritz.*

8 Loris Curci, "Child of Horror," *Fangoria* 150, March 1996, 15.





DELIGHTED *with the well-stocked castle acquired for the filming by producer Alfredo Leone, Mario Bava takes a stroll through the armory.*

pictures . . . How much money do you need?' I told him $125,000. He said, 'Okay—do you think you could take $40,000 now and come back next week for the balance?' I said I certainly could. Then he asked me if I could take it in British sterling. Absolutely, why not?

"After breakfast, Sam expressed an interest in seeing some of the work Arthur had spoken so highly of, and it so happened there was a print of *Four Times That Night* over at the Preview Theater on West 43rd St., where I had been screening it, trying to sell the picture. I set up a screening, and Sam called the bank, arranging for a cashier's check to be messengered to us there. We were watching the picture—first reel, second reel—no messenger! Finally, it's going on 3:30 and I'm thinking, 'This guy is full of crap!' I say, 'Sam, where's the goddamn messenger? I have to catch a 5:00 flight back to Vienna.' He called the Chase Manhattan Bank and they told him, yes, the messenger was sent, but he couldn't find the theater! So they agreed to send him back out. Sam goes back to the screening and I wait downstairs for the goddamn messenger to show up! Finally, he comes and he asks me, 'Are you Sam Lang?' 'No, I'm not, but that envelope is for me.' 'I'm sorry, but I'm authorized to deliver this only to Sam Lang.' *I'm going out of my mind!* 'Have you ever seen Sam Lang? How do you know I'm not Sam Lang?' He wouldn't budge, so I pulled Sam out of the theater again and got him to sign for it. As I'm hailing a cab for the airport, Sam asks me if I could give him and Arthur executive producer credit on the picture. Yes! Yes! I agreed! Only me and my laundry know how nervous I was!"[9]

Leone returned to Vienna on Saturday only to find himself entrenched in more money problems. It was his agreement with actor Joseph Cotten that payment was to be made weekly to his bank account in Rome, but when the actor heard that Leone was in New York trying to scrape together additional production funds, he demanded to be paid right away—in cash that Leone didn't have. Leone had a cashier's check for $40,000, but when he took it to the bank in Vienna, he was told that the bank manager's signature did not match the example in their books. The manager of the New York City bank had included his home telephone number with the check, in case his verification was needed over the weekend, but even though the Vienna office called and received this verification, they still refused to give Leone his money. How could they be sure that the man they had spoken to was really the manager of the New York office? His hands were going to be tied until the following Monday. This was unacceptable to Cotten, who rebelled by walking off the set and flying to London until his dollars were confirmed in his account. "Everyone else understood the situation," Leone says. "We shot without him, the scenes that didn't require him, and we shot around him, until he came back. He was the only problem we had."

Actually, there were other problems, though not related to money. *Baron Blood* was filmed with the idea that it would be eventually released in America by Allied Artists, with whom Leone had a "pre-sale agreement." One condition of this agreement was that every violent scene had to be shot in two versions: one (anything goes) for theatrical release, and the other (softer) for television. In accordance with this agreement, the final shot of Dr. Hesse's murder was filmed first with the slash across his throat clearly visible, and then with the lapel of his lab coat raised to conceal the fatal wound.

Some of the film's violent set pieces created endless headaches for the crew, such as the murder and hanging of Herr Dortmundt. "That was a difficult scene," Leone groans. "If you'll notice, it didn't come off too well, even

9 Alfredo Leone, interviewed by the author, June 21, 1999.

When Leone flew back to New York one week later to collect the balance of Sam Lang's investment, Lang told him that he and Arthur Elliott were forming a distribution company called Cinevision. He made it a condition of the funding that Cinevision would receive US distribution rights to *Four Times That Night* and Antonio Margheriti's Spaghetti Western *Joko, invoca Dio . . . e muori!/Vengeance* (1968), which Leone had also produced.





THE BARON *traps Fritz inside an Iron Maiden then lifts the lid from the gruesome result.*

in the full version. For some reason or other, the dummy gave us a lot of difficulty." (No matter how many times it was dropped or how many ways its limbs were weighted, as the rope went taut, they bounced about like a dummy's.) This scene was too much trouble to spend time restaging for television, so the TV version simply removes certain shots from the full-strength version: the breaking of Dortmundt's neck, the close-up of his face as the rope is pulled taut, and any shots of his dead face turning toward the camera were removed.

As a producer, Leone was usually in accord with anything Bava wanted to do, but he was also very much a hands-on producer—something Bava had avoided since his unhappy experience with Dino De Laurentiis on *Diabolik*. "Frequently," Leone admits, "I'd walk over to Bava while he was setting up a shot and we'd talk about ideas I'd had. He never lost his temper. Sometimes he'd say, 'It's a good idea, Leone, but I don't think so.' Then he'd go away to shoot, and sometimes he'd come back and say, 'You know, maybe you have something there; let's discuss it a little further.' On occasion, things would be done my way."

The story behind one of Leone's suggestions paints a telling portrait of their working relationship. While filming the scene in which Fritz is dragged unconscious to the dungeon and placed inside the spiked casket by the Baron, Leone told Bava—who had already storyboarded the sequence—how he thought it should be shot. "I wanted the camera to be placed in the casket, not on the outside," Leone says. "I wanted to see those spikes coming right into the eye of the camera, but it didn't come off that way."

What is interesting about Leone's suggestion is that Mario Bava had built his career on threatening the camera eye with sharp objects—such as the spikes lining the mask in *La maschera del demonio*—so if Bava had elected not to include a point-of-view angle, it was either because he was hesitant to repeat himself (not likely in a film that quotes *I tre volti della paura*, *Sei donne per l'assassino*, and even movies that Bava did not direct) or because he was conscious of the difficulties that such an idea would entail. Though the crew were probably aware of the irony of the situation, Bava never let Leone know that his idea was nothing new, and particularly nothing new to him. It says a lot about Bava's personal nature, and his desire to please Leone, that he proceeded to incorporate his wishes as best he could. The film contains something like a point-of-view shot of the spikes descending, but it was shot outside the casket—not inside, as Leone suggested. The "money shot" occurs just afterwards: a shot of Fritz' screaming face, in profile—a convincing life mask molded and painted by Carlo Rambaldi—as it receives the final slam of the lid with eyes and mouth wide open.

LUCIANO PIGOZZI *with the mask of his face created by Carlo Rambaldi.*



Another case in point: The script for *Baron Blood* opened with Peter Kleist's arrival at the airport in Austria, but during production, Leone had the brainstorm of getting some extra publicity for the picture by arranging for it to become the first production to film aboard a Pan Am 747 jet—a double-decker, luxury airliner which had only recently taken to the skies for the first time. Leone remains very proud of this *coup*. "The opening in-flight footage was stock footage that Pan Am had," he concedes, "but the landing of the jet is the actual landing of a Pan Am. It was the first time the airline allowed a 747 to be used in a film." Not only did Pan Am actually pay Leone $1,500 for this early bit of "product placement," the scene provided Leone and his daughter Kathy with opportunities to appear

on-camera. On the plane, Leone can be seen seated directly behind Antonio Cantáfora, who settles next to Kathy. (Speaking of cameo appearances, Bava himself can be seen walking past the camera, slightly hunched in a brown sweater, early in the film—immediately after Karl's car is shown driving toward the portcullis of the castle.) As someone uncomfortable with air travel, Bava saw the 747 shooting as a means of instilling his personal fears and superstitions in the picture from the very first frame.

Leone observed another instance of Bava's superstitions during the filming: "I didn't know this, but Mario was deathly superstitious about owls. For the scene where Rada Rassimov is killed by the Baron, the set decorator [Stefano Bulgarelli] installed a stuffed owl on the set. As soon as Bava saw it, he said, 'Bad luck,' and demanded that it be removed." Perhaps the prop owl reminded him of *Operazione paura*, made six years earlier, which had run out of money and had to be finished by the charity of the cast and crew. Bava had no problem with allowing a stuffed owl to be featured prominently in that film, so whatever unlucky associations the prop held for him had been acquired since that production.

Demonstrating his customary efficiency under what must have been occasionally stressful circumstances, Bava completed the film under budget and three days ahead of its six-week schedule. The budget, which Leone prefers to be kept off-the-record, was considerably less than its official production cost of "about a million dollars."

By the time the film was completed, the credit on the film's screenplay had grown a bit more convoluted. The main titles of the American International Pictures release read, "Original screenplay and story by Vincent Fotre, Adapted for the Screen by William A. Bairn." According to Leone, *Baron Blood*'s script was almost completely the work of Fotre, with the exception of some additional material devised by Bava, such as the business of the blood creeping under the door during the invocation scene. "William Bairn was a US writer brought on, more or less, as a dialogue coach," Leone explains. "We gave him a screen credit, but he really didn't have too much to do with it." To confuse matters further, European prints extend additional credit to Wilibald Eser. "That was probably done for the benefit of the Italian/German co-production agreement," Leone says. "Eser is just a fictitious name."

Fifteen years after the filming wrapped, at a 1987 Florida book-signing for his autobiography *Vanity Will Get You Somewhere*, Joseph Cotten was asked about his *Baron Blood* experience. The actor remembered the film without affection in light of the money incident, but as he signed a *Baron Blood* lobby card over the objections of his wife Patricia Medina ("You don't have to sign that"), he spoke favorably of Mario Bava, whom he recalled as "a very interesting and talented man." Needless to say, *Baron Blood* did not rate a mention in the (highly selective) filmography in the back of Cotten's book. The distinguished actor died of pneumonia on February 6, 1994, in Westwood, California.

Leone tells an amusing story about the first screenings of the finished picture at FonoRoma: "The first time we screened it, Federico Fellini came. I believe the film was still on interlock [synchronized playback of separate picture and sound elements] at the time. He stood at the back of the screening room and watched; he was a big fan of Bava's and he told us afterwards how much he enjoyed [*Baron Blood*]. The second time we screened, I'll never forget . . . it was the first screening of the first answer print. There was a small group of people that Bava invited over to see the picture, and I had a hell of a time concentrating on it because the guy sitting next to me fidgeted through the whole picture! It was driving me crazy! When it was over, people stood up, and I went over to Mario and asked him what he thought, and he was beaming. 'I loved it!' he said. 'What did *you* think?" he asked me. And I told him, frankly, that I'd had a hell of a time







THREE *shots illustrating Rada Rassimov's seance with herself: Rada as Christina Hoffmann, standing beside a bonfire; Rada as Elizabeth Holle, photographed against a black backdrop; a double exposure places Elizabeth in the flames, as in this posed publicity photo.*



BAVA *directs Massimo Girotti prior to filming Karl Hummel's arrival at the airport.*

paying attention because of the fidgeting of this guy who was sitting next to me. 'What is it with him?" I said. Bava laughed and said, 'Ah, that's Antonioni! He has tics!' I had no idea what Michelangelo Antonioni looked like, so I hadn't recognized him, and I didn't know this at the time, but he had a nervous condition and made these involuntary movements. Mario took me over, introduced me to him. Antonioni was also very complimentary about the picture. It was an amazing time."

Music / Variant

Considering how perfectly much of *Baron Blood* recaptures the rapture of Bava's "Golden Age" releases, it is unfortunate that Carlo Rustichelli was not invited to score the picture. Instead, Alfredo Leone hired Stelvio Cipriani, who had followed his work on Bava's *Roy Colt & Winchester Jack* and *Ecologia del delitto* with a successful and much-praised score for Enrico Maria Salerno's *Anonimo veneziano/The Anonymous Venetian* (1970). To Leone's surprise—and to yours and mine, no doubt, considering his fine work on *Ecologia del delitto* in particular—Mario Bava was unhappy with his selection.

"Bava didn't want Cipriani to score *Baron Blood*," Leone admits, "but I insisted. I thought he was a prize catch, especially after *The Anonymous Venetian*. Bava didn't care for his work. He pleaded with me, saying, 'Not Cipriani! He's not original; he copies everything!' But I feel that he gave us an outstanding score." [10]

Despite Leone's enthusiasm for Cipriani's contribution, in contrast to the eerie, samba-flavored music that fuelled *Ecologia del delitto*, his score for *Baron Blood* is murky and unmemorable. In a sense, Cipriani's earlier score was able to work because *Ecologia* was a contemporary story, with a balance of exterior and interior settings; *Baron Blood*, on the other hand, is primarily an interior set piece, and though it is a contemporary story, its atmosphere is oppressively historical. Cipriani's music acknowledges neither of these conditions; with one or two exceptions (such as the musical sting when Gretchen's ball rolls past the hand of the Baron, watching her from behind a tree), Cipriani doesn't seem to have scored the film so much as supplied it with ready-made tracks that might be called "Travel," "Chase" (very similar to the music heard during the build-up to Brunhilda's murder in *Ecologia*), and "Mysterioso." A bolder sound mix might have helped, but the tenor of the music is completely passive and it is usually present only in short murmurs. The main theme would make passable cocktail hour music for a classy '60s bar on the Riviera, but it is inappropriate as a mood-setter here, especially when it is reprised over the end titles—after a crescendo of horror that leaves the heroine in hysterics, as though she has been traumatized to the point of madness.

As mentioned earlier, Alfredo Leone produced *Baron Blood* with the expectation of selling the distribution rights to Allied Artists. However, when he learned—prior to signing his contract—that Allied Artists intended to release the film only as a double feature co-attraction, he declined their offer and shopped the completed picture around.

Leone's first stop was Samuel Z. Arkoff at American International Pictures, where Bava had his first big success with *Black Sunday*. Newly separated from longtime business partner James H. Nicholson, Arkoff was gratified to be offered a new Mario Bava film so well-drenched in atmosphere as *Baron Blood*, which looked uncannily like a horror film from AIP's heyday. Without hesitation, he called Leone, told him that it was "a great movie" and paid him $125,000 for the US theatrical rights.

Leone: "Arkoff couldn't get over how good it was! He said to me, 'It's a great picture, Al! How did you get Bava to do it?' I said, 'What do you mean? Bava's a genius! There's nothing he can't do!' And Arkoff explained to me that Bava had suffered a nervous breakdown during the last picture they had done together [*Dr. Goldfoot and the Girl Bombs*], which had not gone so well, and it had frankly put him off working with him again. But Sam admired Bava and was very pleased to see him come back with a good, strong picture." [11]

Despite Arkoff's enthusiasm for *Baron Blood*, it should come as no surprise to anyone familiar with AIP's past involvement with Bava's films that the picture was subjected to some post-production meddling. Leone remembers that Arkoff called him, requesting permission to show *Baron Blood* at his in-home screening room, to a test audience of his children and their high school friends. The screening was a moderate success, but Arkoff felt that the film was overlong at nearly 100 minutes and needed to "lose a reel."

The editorial changes imposed on Bava's films by AIP in the past were sometimes constructive, sometimes not, and often completely unnecessary. However, in the case of *Baron*

Blood, AIP's post-production revisions amount to nearly a complete success. Though the European version contains additional exposition, atmosphere, and graphic violence, its leisurely pace dissipates its force; it does not have the impact of the AIP cut. The Euro version seems to contain all the coverage of the Korneuburg Museum that Bava shot; too many scenes are preceded and accented with moody contemplations of the castle's medieval icons and weaponry, its high groined ceilings, its tapestries, its antique ironwork. A little of this would have accentuated the atmosphere—note the remarkable, first interior shot, which Bava makes all the more dazzling and disorienting with a 24 mm wide-angle lens—but a little goes a long way.

Among the material cut from the AIP version:

• Shots of Peter relaxing with a drink aboard the 747 and also deplaning.

• Subjective shots of the drive to Schloss des Teufels, with the discussion of the castle's name placed later in the shortened montage.

• More shots of Karl's Mercedes driving through the castle grounds.

• A jokey moment prior to the reading of the parchment, when Peter spreads his arms and announces, "And now the incantation!" in a camped-up, spooky way which is inappropriate since he immediately objects to Eva's similar pronouncement of "Kunik Sator Holmat," telling her that the incantation must not be read disrespectfully.

• A short dialogue exchange after the reversal of the incantation, as Peter stands outside on a balcony overlooking the courtyard—Eva says, "It had to be Fritz" and Peter adds, "I hope so."

• After the second incantation: footage of the parchment falling into the fire; the plans of the burned room floating out an open window; and more suspenseful build-up to the Baron's approach.

• After the blood pours under the door and the danger subsides, Peter says, "I can't understand it—it's impossible," and Eva blurts out, "Peter, there is something horrible and terrifying out there and we have released it!"

• The shot of Dr. Hesse on the floor after his stabbing was replaced by the softer, TV version of the shot.

• An additional establishing shot of the university where Karl teaches, followed by shots of him parking his Mercedes and the arrival of Peter and Eva in a separate car.

• A brief diversion after Dortmundt approaches the Coca-Cola machine, as he opens a wooden cabinet to the right of the soda dispenser, stashes away some letters he was carrying, and pauses to quickly read one—as the camera zooms over his shoulder to reveal the Baron lurking in the rafters just behind him.

• The extended shot of the spiral staircase after the Baron carries Dortmundt's dead body upstairs, as the rope bannister is pulled up and tied around his neck.

• An overhead shot of the Baron carrying the bludgeoned Fritz away, with Dortmundt hanging in the center of the shot.

• The first part of the castle auction, as twenty crated large-screen color television sets are sold.

• Some unnecessary confusion as Peter drives into the castle courtyard and hears Eva's screams after she comes face-to-face with the Baron inside—he shouts her name and begs her for a hint of where she might be, as the camera points up to pan around the towers of the castle.

• Shots of Peter running inside the castle, up a long flight of stairs and through several rooms before he reaches Becker (the AIP cut makes it seem like Becker was right inside the door, so that it seems odd that he could have traversed such a distance in so little time).

• After driving Eva back to the student hostel, Peter kisses her and they exchange some romantic talk ("Don't say anything; we don't need words.") before he suggests that she move into his uncle's house—but she demurs.

• Inside the hostel, Eva picks up her room key at the register, pauses



ELKE SOMMER *takes a lunch break with her director, who seldom ate with his actors.*

10 Bava's opinion actually has some validity. A British/Spanish/Italian co-production made around the same time, José Larraz' *Deviation* (1971) sports a very similar Cipriani score, possibly assembled from outtakes recorded during the Bava film sessions. Likewise, Cipriani's score for *La polizia chiede aiuto/What Have They Done to Your Daughters?* (1974) was reworked from his earlier score for Roberto Infascelli's *La Polizia Sta A Guardare* (1973). The earlier arrangement can be heard in the trailer to the later film, and it was even later recycled as the main theme of Ovidio Assonitis' *Tentacoli/Tentacles* (1977).

11 Though AIP had handled the physical distribution of *Twitch of the Death Nerve*, Arkoff probably paid little attention to this side of his business, so it is not surprising that he was unaware of handling Bava's previous picture.

to think of Peter, smiles wistfully to herself, then walks down the hall to her quarters.

• Slight trims were made to the "night stalking" scene, including Eva's attempt to flag down a taxi.

• Prior to the Baron's arrival to exact his revenge on Christina Hoffmann, the scene is abbreviated, omitting shots of the medium as the voice of Elizabeth Holle warns her, "Death awaits . . . death, death . . . In you, he sees Elizabeth Holle . . . you cannot escape him, Christina . . . you cannot escape him"—and the camera zooms into the face of the Baron, peering through her window.

• The first part of the scene in the police inspector's office, as he questions Eva about the man in her room, and Peter suggests that he take it easy on her, because she's been through a terrible ordeal.

• Some extra footage of Gretchen staring at the castle, before dropping her apple.

• An addition, as the sound of howling dogs was added to the unveiling of the impaled corpses hanging from the castle turrets—recalling the moment in *"I wurdalak"* when Gorka's dog howls at the scent of the severed head in his travelling bag.

• The overhead shot of Peter, Eva, and Karl fleeing the torture chamber, as Eva shrieks, "Look behind you, he's coming for us!" which is followed by a scene in the main room of the castle where Eva seems hysterical to the point of madness.

• The shot of Peter and Eva inside the car plays differently in the Euro version, with Peter calming her by saying, "Don't look back, Evie"—which is dubbed differently in the AIP cut.

• And finally, prior to the end titles, the shot of the Baron standing on a balcony of Schloss des Teufels is freeze-framed before the credits roll whereas, in the Euro cut, the Baron vanishes into thin air as Elizabeth Holle begs for the right to cut into his heart.

UNCLE KARL *takes aim against the undead.*





The AIP version, which is approximately 7½ minutes shorter than the European cut, carries no mention of who supervised the US edit, but it was likely Salvatore Billitteri, the editor of the AIP version of *Black Sunday*, who continued to provide post-production services of such AIP titles of the period as *Frogs* (1971) and *Blacula* (1972). Overall, the pruning was judicious and strengthening. The *de rigueur* romance between Peter and Eva adds nothing to the picture, and after the removal of the kiss, there is nothing in their later interactions to suggest that it ever took place. The only truly regrettable cuts are the violence trims (including the impressive overhead shot of the hanging Dortmundt as Fritz is being dragged away) and the extended version of the "night stalking" sequence which, in the Euro version, goes on only slightly longer but crosses that invisible line where

FRITZ *emerges from his spike-lined coffin in a classic Italian gothic shot.*



FRANCO TOCCI *in two stills affording a better look at Rambaldi's Baron Blood mask.*

Eva begins to seem lost in a metaphysical realm where the past and present blur. Seen in its original form, the sequence looks ahead to the early sequence of Lisa getting lost in an unholy Toledo in *Lisa and the Devil*.

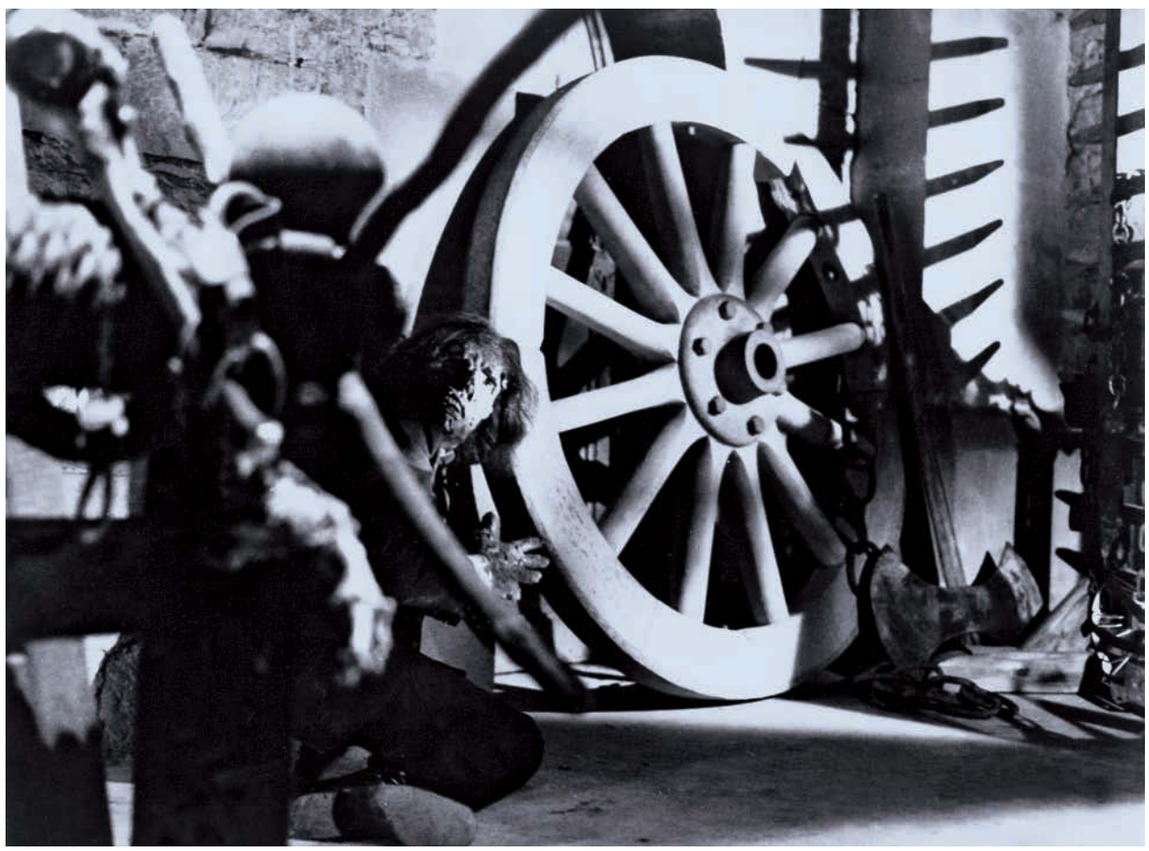
"After making the cuts," Leone remembers, "Arkoff felt there was still something lacking, which he attributed to the soundtrack, the music score. He asked me how I would feel about changing it, and I told him I'd have to rely on his expertise—after all, AIP was *the* horror company in those days. They had a guy running the company named Dick Zimber who, in his own way, told me that I'd better think long and hard about this, because it could be a mistake. But I was not too astute on distribution, so I trusted Sam's instincts and allowed the score to be changed."

And so, as had happened many times in the past, Arkoff hired Les Baxter to hurriedly compose a replacement score. The last-minute nature of this decision is reflected in the fact that AIP's theatrical trailer for *Baron Blood* utilized the Cipriani score, as Baxter's was being composed right up until shortly before the revamped film's October release.

Baxter's replacement score is a triumph. An immense boon to the picture, it makes us feel from the very first shot that we are watching a horror film of epic ambition. Baxter underscored the sequences set in and around the castle with a French horn fanfare that is at once regal and mellowed yet ominous, and he added greatly to the film's metaphysical presence with atonal stings and accents. There were performed with aberrant instrumentation like strummed piano wires, Moog synthesizer, and piano and guitar played back at varying tape speeds (sometimes with added reverb), producing a quivering abyss of sound evocative of the Beyond. He also introduced leitmotifs into the picture, so that minor French horn parts heard during our initial views of the castle are repeated and reinforced by full orchestra at the time of the Baron's resurrection. Likewise, the music heard as the amulet revives Fritz also infuses the scene with the occult presence of Christina Hoffmann and, by extension, Elizabeth Holle. Attentive touches like these give the AIP version a resonance that Bava didn't put there (but surely would have approved) and show just how lazily Stelvio Cipriani had approached the assignment.

Release

Though they were made nearly a decade apart, the narrative similarities between *Baron Blood* and Antonio Margheriti's *La vergine di Norimberga* were not lost on Bava's Italian distributor. When the film was released in Rome on February 25, 1972, it made its bow under the title *Gli orrori del castello di Norimberga*. Adding a bewildering touch of the bizarre to the coincidence is that the advertising campaign subsequently devised at American International Pictures for





ITALIAN *fotobusta showing Mr. Becker torturing Uncle Karl on the rack—a scene not included in the final cut.*

the film's US release cribbed extensively from the promotional art which accompanied the German release of Margheriti's film under the title *Das Schloß des Grauens* ("The Castle of Terrors").

At the time *Baron Blood* was made, AIP was one of many independent film companies whose product seemed to be singled out for editorial interference from the Motion Picture Association of America. Financed by Hollywood's major studios, the MPAA always seemed willing to play ball with the pillars of the studio system, while cracking down on independent exploitation releases. Seen today in its uncut form, *Baron Blood* seems almost too tame in its violence to qualify for a PG-rating, but the MPAA branded the near-bloodless film with an R rating on its first pass. AIP wanted a PG rating to maximize the film's commercial reach, and resorted to using the softer version of Dr. Hesse's death (with his coat lapel blocking the view of his slashed throat, which Bava had filmed for the TV version) in the theatrical cut. They also darkened certain shots, such as the Baron raising the lid of the spiked casket from Fritz' punctured body, rendering the shot less brightly gruesome.

"The picture was ready to open in July, but AIP's additional work on the picture pushed our opening back to October—so we missed the [summer] drive-in business," Leone complains, still annoyed by AIP's mishandling of the film. "Not only did we miss the drive-ins, but by October, AIP had released the first black horror films—*Blacula*, and so on—and they started a fresh trend. The old type of horror film had suddenly become passé!"

In an effort to make the film seem more graphic than it had been even before it was cut, AIP test-marketed the alternate titles *The Thirst of Baron Blood* and *The Torture Chamber of Baron Blood*. The latter stuck in all of AIP's print advertising—with the exception of lobby cards, which pluralized the title to *The Torture Chambers of Baron Blood*—but the onscreen title remained, simply, *Baron Blood*. The print advertising also trumpeted the picture as "An Alfred Leone Film." As *Baron Blood* hearkened back to the style of AIP's horror films of the early '60s, so did the print campaign, which contained this Special Notice: "The Management disclaims any responsibility for patrons who suffer A.) Apoplectic Strokes, B.) Cerebral Hemorrhages, C.) Cardiac Seizures, or D.) Fainting Spells during the shockingly gruesome scenes in this film."

Unusually, upon its release, *Baron Blood* received a notice in *Time* magazine, whose critic Jay Cocks opined: "Director Mario Bava has made a great many other films of this sort (*Black Sunday* being perhaps the best known), each displaying a formidable interest in interior decoration matched by a lofty disregard for intelligence. Hitchcock has his staircases, Bertolucci his interludes of dance; Mario Bava likes to bring on the Iron Maiden as a particularly personal touch. Here, as always, he makes appropriately ghastly use of it." [12]

Variety critic "Murf." gave the picture a conflicted, but ultimately passing nod: "*Baron Blood* is an okay horror exploitationer . . . [it] has some strong visual assets, which help overcome weak acting and some plot limps . . . Mario Bava's direction has many good moments of mood, but excessive use of zooms is self-defeating, and some shrill histrionics by Cotten and Sommer often send the film into dated meller [melodrama] orbit, even for the film's potential audiences. Supporting players are adequate. Les Baxter's eerie music helps in many places." [13]

For many years, the AIP cut was standard in America, and it was this version that was released by Thorn HBO Video in the 1980s and on LaserDisc by HBO/Image Entertainment in 1991. This changed when the film's US rights reverted to Alfredo Leone in 1992. In 1996, Leone sold the US video rights to Elite Entertainment for three years, and at that time, the Euro version made its American debut on LaserDisc as part of a double bill with Bava's *Lisa and the Devil*. Since then, it has become the standard American version, with subsequent VHS release by Anchor Bay Entertainment. When Elite's contract expired in 1999, Leone licensed the film's video rights to Image Entertainment, who released the European cut on DVD.

The AIP version of *Baron Blood* currently resides in legal limbo. AIP's rights to the film expired a decade ago, and even if Alfredo Leone wished to resurrect the AIP cut, he would have to make financial arrangements with MGM to acquire their materials, which he is not likely to do. The negative materials of the AIP version are almost certainly in the vaults at Sony, who currently own most of AIP's classic library, but Sony is in a similar bind: They no longer have any right to release the picture, yet they do have a unique version, with its own unique soundtrack. As Leone has shown with his copyrighted editions of public domain fare like *La maschera del demonio*, it is possible to assert copyright by changing a film's soundtrack. However, *Baron Blood* is not a public domain title; it is owned by Alfredo Leone, and this puts the AIP version in deadlock. At present, only if Leone sells the film back to Sony in perpetuity is this alternate cut likely to resurface.

Commentary

Coming at this point in Mario Bava's career, *Baron Blood* is analogous to John Coltrane's *Ballads* album—which was recorded after a series of adventurous "free jazz" releases to prove to more conventional jazz listeners that the brilliant saxophonist could still play traditional jazz if he chose to do so. *Ballads* is a lush, beautiful album—fine enough to have made another musician's career, had anyone else recorded it—but coming after *Giant Steps* and *My Favorite Things*, its assured familiarity seemed a regressive, time-marking, and therefore unsatisfying statement. Like the Coca Cola machine in Schloss des Teufels, *Baron Blood* is an anachronism: a '60s style matinee shocker in the style of *Black Sunday* or *Black Sabbath*, the movies upon which Bava's reputation as a horror specialist were founded. *Baron Blood* proves that Bava—if he wanted to, or had to—could do what many horror buffs at the time hoped he would do, and bring back the more conservative, gothic horror of AIP's heyday. The look is there, the feel is there, sometimes even the heart is there, but coming from a director who has shown us scenes of real terror, real shock, in increasingly inventive guises, *Baron Blood* gives us Mario Bava imitating Mario Bava. Like Peter Kleist, he is communicating here with his own past.

Baron Blood is one of the few films in which Bava stoops to slavish imitation, including self-imitation. The shot of blood burbling under the locked door after the Baron's resurrection quotes a shot from Jacques Tourneur's *The Leopard Man* (1943), and the night chase scene is virtually a shot-by-shot remake of a similar, classic scene involving Vincent Price and Phyllis Kirk in Andre de Toth's *House of Wax* (1953), a film in which the disfigured villain also disguises himself as a cultured older gentleman in a wheelchair and returns to his old haunt after his "death." Leone confirms that Bava was responsible for introducing both scenes to the film, and curiously, both of these quotations refer to directors with whom Bava had previously worked as a cameraman and uncredited co-director. [14] The incantation and chase sequences are marvelously executed, but for anyone familiar with the originals, they compare unfavorably. During the scene of Dr. Hesse's death, Bava even quotes himself—or rather, *Sei donne per l'assassino*—by placing a swinging telephone receiver in the background of a shot. The film also quotes *I tre volti della paura* when Fritz meets his death after stealing a ring from the finger of the dead Dortmundt, and the storyline also echoes *La maschera del demonio* in many ways, being the story of a noble European family terrorized by an evil, resurrected ancestor immortalized in portraits (the burned room of von Kleist is analogous to the Vajda family's ruined chapel), and a curse bellowed across centuries by a witch burned at the stake. The actress who plays that witch gives a dual performance, and the resurrection of Baron von Kleist is similar to the famous shot of Javutich climbing out of his muddy grave.



ITALIAN *manifesto depicting Fritz' gruesome reawakening as Christina's amulet works its magic.*

However, by comparing *Baron Blood* to these other films, one can see how much more juice Bava was capable of squeezing from spent grapes. If Bava's approach to this film was not wholly original, there are several factors that could explain this. For one thing, it was "work for hire"—"An Alfred Leone Film," as the picture's American ads say—a project that did not originate with him, that was not particularly close to him, that he had not instigated himself. Secondly, working on the picture forced him to leave the home environment in which he was most comfortable while working, so his creative adjustment was compounded with a more significant personal one. But, in a greater sense, *Baron Blood* must have seemed like backpedalling to Bava, after making a film as shocking and innovative as *Ecologia del delitto*. [15] This is all the more frustrating because *Baron Blood* seems to promise much more mayhem than the previous film did, and fails to deliver. Production photos exist that show Becker torturing Karl on the rack in his torture dungeon, but there are no such scenes in the film; indeed, the murders that are committed onscreen do very little to reinforce the Baron's legend as a connoisseur of inflicting pain. Only one scene conveys a powerful sense of this monster's capacity for cruelty: when Becker shows the principals how he has decorated the castle turrets as the Baron did, with impaled bodies. Our heroes are led to think that these are merely effigies, but as they return inside the castle from the balcony, Bava cuts away to a memorable close-up of one victim's profile that shows a telltale gleam of humanity in his dead, staring eye. This moment also quotes a scene from an earlier picture: Arne Mattsson's *Mannekäng i rött* (1958), one of the likely influences on *Sei donne per l'assassino*.

Another reason for Bava to revisit his cinematic past in this context is to underscore the theme at hand, which is the importance of preserving and

12 Jay Cocks, "Baron Blood" review, *Variety,* March 5, 1973. In fact, no true Iron Maiden appears in any of Bava's films, not even *Baron Blood.*

13 Murf., "Baron Blood" review, *Variety*, October 25, 1972.

14 Bava photographed and co-directed Tourneur's *La battaglia di Maratona/The Giant of Marathon* (1959), and contributed uncredited work to de Toth's *Morgan il pirata/Morgan the Pirate* (1960).

15 Also, as some of his friends and colleagues have noted, Bava had been trying during this period to work in other genres, to break away from the horror genre. It could be argued that all of his films since *I tre volti della paura* had been attempts to rework or transcend the horror genre, but *Baron Blood* had no ambition other than to be a commercial success.



FRENCH *affiche.*

respecting the past. It is in this context that *Baron Blood* is most interesting. The subplot about the refurbishment of Schloss des Teufels into a tourist trap hotel parallels the threat of "development" overhanging the bayside property in *Ecologia del delitto.* When Alfred Becker completes his own authentic restoration of the castle, Eva questions his decision to restore the only known portrait of Otto von Kleist without also restoring the part of the canvas that was slashed to erase his facial features. Becker sensibly replies, "Artistic integrity, dear Eva. Since no one knows what the Baron actually looked like, would you have a painter give him a face that was not truly his own? I've restored not only the furniture of the castle, but its atmosphere, the personality of its owner." While this was supposedly Eva's own task as the previous supervisor of the restoration, Becker's question exposes the essential frivolity and irresponsibility with which she and Dortmundt undertook that venture. And so the plot boils down, once again, to Bava's outrage that something of beauty, like Schloss des Teufels, would be compromised for the sake of making a profit.

Similarly, the earlier shot of Dortmundt walking through a series of ancient corridors laden with centuries of exquisite craftsmanship to reach a Coca-Cola machine speaks volumes of *auteuriste* disdain; when the Baron's ravaged hands twist Dortmundt's neck to a curt snap, the product placement in the shot makes the scene about more than what is happening in it. Peter's idle curiosity about his ancestor is portrayed as a different kind of disrespect toward history because his interest is rooted at once in narcissism and in his glorification of villainy, without cognizance of the tremendous suffering his ancestor caused, or sympathy for his victims. When Becker responds to Peter and Karl's suggestions that Otto von Kleist was insane and a sadist, he calls these words "matters of terminology," meaning that the accusations are relative, and just as applicable to the fools who summoned him back.

Three sequences in particular find Bava working at the peak of his powers. The first is Peter and Eva's discovery of the hidden room within the

castle, where they encounter the slashed, web-strewn portrait of Otto von Kleist. Only the penetrating, ice-blue eyes of the Baron remain intact, and seem to gaze balefully at them across a gulf of centuries; Bava accentuates this sense of communication with reverse shots of the couple, standing on the other side of the web, with only their eyes visible in the darkness. Viewers of the film will notice that the painting shown in close-up differs from the one shown in a long shot. According to Leone, the latter—which is shown hanging on the wall of the castle—was executed prior to filming by someone on the film's art crew, according to Bava's instructions. This painting did not lend itself to the effect Bava had envisioned for the close-ups, so after the production wrapped, he painted and photographed his own version in Rome and included these pick-up shots in the editing room. Bava's lucid, classical rendering of the Baron's cold eyes peering from a faceless darkness provides the film with its most poetically unsettling moment. Equally effective, especially in the Les Baxter-scored AIP cut, is the second incantation scene, which conveys a palpable sense of dread and panic. The power of the scene is badly deflated in the Euro cut, which presents it without music and reduced to the ambient sounds of wind, rattling windows and the creaking of the turning, rusty door handle.

The other highlight is Rada Rassimov's appearance as Christine Hoffmann, the last in a long line of supernaturally inclined women who figure in Bava's films, beginning with Lidia Alfonsi's red-cloaked sybil in *Le fatiche di Ercole* in 1958. These characters appear so forcefully, and with such frequency, in Bava's films that we must assume they had great personal significance for him, but it is difficult to tell whether his feelings about them were positive or negative. In the context of his historical and mythological films, Bava's oracles are helpful guides with the power to verbalize for mere mortals the dictates of Destiny; however, in his horror films, these women are mostly depicted as lonely, isolated creatures who have embraced the supernatural as a substitute for sexual fulfillment or out of a thirst for revenge. As Uncle Karl



ITALIAN *due-foglia, art by Piero Ermanno Iaia.*



MEXICAN *lobby card, picturing the Baron stalking Gretchen outside the castle.*

cautions Peter about the occult in the course of introducing Christina, "One's obsession with it could be the real danger." Nevertheless, as played by Rassimov, Christina is an example of a woman wholly empowered by her occult knowledge, a significant return to the authentic, all-powerful oracles of the Hercules films. Though a solitary soul, Christina is in no way diminished by her solitude; indeed, she speaks as though her mind has risen above the needs of the flesh and become equally attuned to all points in time—past, present, and future—and her movements have a weirdly graceful choreography that adds greatly to the impression she makes. When Baron von Kleist enters her room (the camera curiously cutting away before we can see more than the edge of his garment), Christina submits to death as serenely as Anna Fosatti did before her in *Ecologia del delitto*—as though she has seen it foretold a million times. She crosses her braceleted arms above her head, enfolding herself in her black cloak, and waits for the blow to fall. Art director Enzo Bulgarelli also deserves acknowledgment for his contribution to Rassimov's scenes, as the furnishings of Christina's dwelling are every bit as arcane as the antiques of the Korneuburg Museum.

Of the film's other performances, Antonio Cantáfora makes a fair impression as Peter Kleist, despite being somewhat miscast; his American college student is shown smoking and drinking aboard the 747 like a debonair European man of the world. Cantáfora takes pleasing advantage of opportunities for humor, such as his reaction to Herr Dortmundt's hope that he hasn't inherited any of his forebear's sadistic proclivities ("One never knows!"), and to a menu of those proclivities ("Sweet guy!"), offering glimpses of wit and humor that one wishes were more pronounced in the picture overall. Peter's early fascination with the Baron, the amusement he takes in visiting his ancestor's dungeon, and his unexplored obsession with resurrecting him, hints that Peter has probably inherited some of his ancestor's dark traits, but unfortunately, this aspect goes unexplored.

Joseph Cotten is better at playing Otto von Kleist than Alfred Becker, which, despite the wheelchair, is a role that he simply walks through. It doesn't help that (as in *House of Wax*) the invalid Becker's true identity is never in question; as he stands and steps out of his wheelchair, the revelation carries no charge whatsoever. Needless to say, the 65-year-old Cotten did not wear the Rambaldi-designed latex mask and gloves of the disfigured Otto von Kleist; those scenes were played by Franco Tocci, who was given a "special effects" credit on the picture. When not playing the Baron, Tocci was in charge of on-set effects, like the malfunctioning dummy of Herr Dortmundt, and providing a flaming brazier in the Baron's torture chamber.

Elke Sommer's performance suffers from bad writing, miscasting, and some of the most distractingly garish wardrobe ever worn by an actress in a '70s movie. Sommer was 31 at the time of filming, yet her character is written like a petulant college intern, alternately imperious, bland, or helpless. This was Sommer's first horror film, and her reactions to horrific situations are without subtlety or nuance—she actually shoves her fingers into her mouth when she screams—which makes her as startling as the things provoking her reaction. Also, the way Eva and Peter's relationship vaults suddenly from playful flirtation to serious love after he rescues her from Baron von Kleist is hard to swallow, and both Sommer and Cantáfora seem to know this. However, by working with Sommer, Bava intuited her real strengths and put them to much better advantage in their next collaboration.

Massimo Girotti gives a good, earnest performance in the face of some absurd dialogue—such as when his professor of architecture mentions, "As you know, part of my work here at the University involves research in extra-sensory perception!"—and Luciano Pigozzi is a welcome presence, adding to the film's sense of tradition and providing the film's greatest single image of graphic horror, as the spiked body of Fritz is revived by Christina Hoffman's amulet. *Piccola* Nicoletta Elmi is an almost obnoxiously cloying presence, saying, "Good night!" three times as she leaves a room, and forever being fawned over by the adult characters. Gretchen is the least subtle of Bava's many psychically attuned child/female characters. One of the movie's most grating moments is when the adults are trying to make sense of Christina Hoffman's assurance that they have the power to defeat the Baron, and Gretchen peeks around the side of a door and drones, "Maybe . . . she meant . . . *the amulet!*" The dubbing of Gretchen (which the monolingual Elmi performed herself) is excruciating throughout, due in part to Leone's insistence that the actors speak their lines in English, phonetically if need be, to be post-synched later. However, this particular moment contains another of Bava's references to his earlier work, namely *Operazione paura*, as Gretchen is clutching a ball.

Gretchen's name, incidentally, may have been inspired by the title on a book prominently carried by Girotti in one scene—and kept too prominently in frame for its selection to be irrelevant: Thassilo von Scheffer's 1938 reference *Die Kultur des Griechen* ("Greek Culture"). Bava characterized himself, in a late interview, as "very Greek for an Italian . . . more heretic than Catholic," [16] which may explain his unusual open-mindedness toward pagan religions and the compassion he shows for the witches who were burned to death by good Christians like Otto von Kleist. One of von Scheffer's other books, *Hellenische Mysterien und Orakel* ("Hellenic Mysteries and Oracles," 1948), covers this very ground.

Despite its faults, it must be acknowledged that *Baron Blood*—whichever version you might see—is an atmospheric, old-fashioned above-average horror movie. Alfredo Leone's support and the sheer production value of the Korneuburg Museum resulted in a more expensive-looking product than Bava had created in many years—glossy, well-cast, and unmistakably commercial. His production skills raised Bava back to a level of respectability in the Italian film industry that he had not occupied since the completion of *Diabolik*. Unfortunately, much of the film's original luster is lost in the currently available, fairly drab home video transfers. Bava and Leone complemented each other well, and the films they made together rank high among the most sumptuous-looking pictures Bava ever made. But it is in the AIP version of the film, currently unavailable, that their collaboration here is most effective, and one hopes it will resurface in the years ahead.

Leone remembers Bava on pay day: "He was a very humble person. When I paid him, he said, 'You know, Leone, I feel guilty and ashamed to be taking this kind of money.' He didn't believe that he was entitled to it, that he had earned it. And he was *underpaid*, if anything!" Leone demurred from revealing Bava's exact salary, saying, "I don't think that would be fair. He was well-paid, but compared to what directors are earning today? My God, it was criminal!"

As *Baron Blood* went into release and sought its fortune around the world, Bava continued to keep himself occupied by accepting occasional uncredited day jobs on other directors' films. One known project dating from this period is *La vita a volte è molto dura, vero Provvidenza?/Sometimes Life Is Hard—Right, Providence?* (1972), an Italian Western directed by Giulio Petroni and starring Tomas Milian, Janet Agren, *I vampiri*'s Paul Müller and *5 bambole per la luna d'agosto*'s Maurice Poli. In the movie, Milian plays a pool shark whose mastery of the stick causes billiard balls to defy any and all physical laws. The special effects involving the unnatural movements of the balls were Bava's contribution. With Bava's time between November 1971 and September 1972 otherwise unaccounted-for, it is likely that he accepted several other such advisory jobs during this period, which have remained as secret as he wished them to be.

Gli orrore nel castello di Norimberga grossed 262,741,000 *lire* [$164,000] during its Italian release—not on the level of *Le spie vengono dal semifreddo*, but not significantly less profitable than *Diabolik*. Though meager in contrast with what the film earned in other countries, the film's Italian earnings were sufficient for it to qualify as Bava's most profitable horror film ever in his home country.

Despite its loss of summer drive-in revenues in the States, and the off-the-top expenses of Americanizing the picture with a re-edit and a new score, *Baron Blood* triumphed with a memorably gruesome ad campaign and a nationwide opening in hundreds of US theaters just in time for Halloween. "Was I happy with how well *Baron Blood* performed?" laughs Alfredo Leone. "I was absolutely delighted. That film made me a fortune!"

American International Pictures was sufficiently impressed by the film's domestic boxoffice returns to extend a formal invitation to Bava and Leone to relocate to Los Angeles and make films exclusively for them.

"Sam Arkoff wanted Mario and me to come back here and sign a contract," Leone says. "I pleaded with Bava to come to the States, and he considered it. Working in Vienna had helped him, I think, to overcome his superstitions about flying. In the last ten years of his life, he flew to Spain, to England, even to Israel. I really don't think the flying problem existed at the time of his death . . ."

But it was too soon to expect so much from Bava—too soon, and at the same time, too late. Bava may have considered a short trip to America, but to change countries for the sake of his career—especially now that he had grandchildren—was unthinkable to him. Beyond that, there was something naïve, something Old World in Bava's personal character that he cherished, which he knew might be destroyed by crossing the Atlantic—so he never went. Bava's rejection of the offer must have rankled Leone, who had been working for years to achieve such an invitation, but he also understood that he might never have received it, if not for Bava. So he took satisfaction where he could, in knowing that *Baron Blood* had been a boxoffice success in America and most other world markets—except Germany, where the movie was, ironically, never given a theatrical release. [17] The important thing was to keep his association with Mario Bava going, whatever it took.

16 Mario Bava, posthumously quoted in Levin Safao, *Libération*, May 5, 1980.

17 According to Alfredo Leone, the German distribution fell apart when Cinerama's going bid of $75,000 was topped by Sam Lang and J. Arthur Elliott's $125,000 to have the film distributed in Germany by their fledgling Cinevision company. Leone accepted their high offer, but Cinevision went out of business before the German release could take place.





LISA AND THE DEVIL

CELEBRATING THE GOOD fortunes of *Baron Blood*, Alfredo Leone and Mario Bava continued their friendship off the set. "We became more like relatives than producer and director," Leone describes. "We were fond of one another and we began to socialize during the week, going out to dinner. He took me to special places he knew, out in the country. He had a dog that he loved, a big basset hound that was kind of old and sad-looking. Mario would comment how dogs often resembled their masters, and say, 'Look at the dog and look at me!' He complained frequently about the care and attention that he had to give the dog. He took it with us to the restaurants and the owner would have to make a special dish for the dog, and he'd sit there, feeding it! It was wonderful!"

A COLLAGE *of faces from LISA AND THE DEVIL (clockwise): Telly Savalas (framed by that familiar headboard!), Elke Sommer, Alessio Orano (twice), and Sylva Koscina.*



DO PETS *resemble their masters? Mario Bava poses with Centi at Tor Caldara.*

At one of these get-togethers, Bava and Leone spoke expansively about their professional dreams. "Mario said that he had never had *carte blanche* on a film and he wished that, someday, he would find a producer who would give him what he wanted," Leone recalls. "I said, 'If you had that, what would you do?' He told me about a story outline that he had—I think it originated with someone else—and I told him to go ahead with it. I gave him all the freedom he wanted, but that was Bava's problem, you see. Give Bava a restricted budget of $500,000 and he would come back and present you with a brilliant picture. Give him *carte blanche* and he was in trouble."

Bava's *carte blanche* picture, *Lisa and the Devil*, is the pivotal chapter of his career. It is the most ambitious of his films, and also his most personal and oblique; it is also a film for which, at the time, no audience existed. It was a horror film and also an art film, which made it effectively neither in terms of marketability. As a result of this lack of niche, it was never given a legitimate theatrical release except in Spain and, after its initial screenings for distributors, it disappeared from circulation for nearly a decade. Bava himself would never live to see the film released as he intended it to be seen. Since Bava's death, the film has been shown on television, and subsequently revived on home video, where it has attracted a dedicated cult following. But during Bava's lifetime, *Lisa and the Devil* was at once his masterpiece and the battleground for the greatest artistic conflict of his life.

Synopsis

Lisa Reiner is an attractive young member of a bus tour visiting Toledo, Spain. As a tour guide lectures to her group about a medieval Christian fresco depicting the Devil carrying away the dead, Lisa is charmed by the fetching melody of a distant music box. She follows the music to an antiques shop, where she sees a bald man—identical to the Devil in the painting—carrying the life-sized dummy of a man. She admires the music box—a carousel with six rotating figures—and asks its price, but the shopkeeper explains that it belongs to the bald man. Regretfully withdrawing from the shop, Lisa finds that she cannot retrace her steps back to her tour group, to the fresco, or even back to the store, but becomes ever more lost as she wanders desperately through a labyrinth of streets where no one is willing to speak to, or acknowledge, her.

In an empty square, Lisa encounters Leandro—the bald man from the antiques shop—and his dummy. She asks for directions back to the fresco of the Devil and the dead, but his instructions don't lead her there—but rather to a keyhole-shaped passage, on the other side of which she is approached by the exact, living twin of the dummy carried by Leandro. He seems to know her, but addresses her as "Elena." Frightened, Lisa repels his urgent familiarity, accidentally

Lisa and the Devil

Working title: *I diavoli e i morti*, "The Devil and the Dead"
Filmed at Villa Frascati (Rome),
another villa "on the outskirts of Madrid,"
Barcelona Airport, and on location
in Toledo and Madrid, Spain
September 10 – November 28, 1972
First shown: May 9, 1973 (Cannes Film Festival's Market)
Eastmancolor, 1.85:1, 96 minutes

Production: Leone International (Rome), Tecisa (Madrid) and Roxy Film (Monaco). Producer: Alfredo Leone. Director: Mario Bava. Assistant director: Lamberto Bava. Screenplay: Alfredo Leone, Mario Bava (US); Roberto Natale, Giorgio Monlini, Mario Bava (Italy); Natale, Monlini, Bava, Leonardo Martín, Jose G. Maesso (Spain). Director of photography: Cecilio Paniagua. Production manager: Bruno Frascà. Music: Carlo Savina, "Concerto d'Aranjuez" by Joaquín Rodrigo, performed by Paul Mauriat (Philips Records).

Elke Sommer (Lisa Reiner/Elena), Telly Savalas (Leandro), Alida Valli (Countess), Alessio Orano (Maximillian), Sylva Koscina (Sophia Lehar), Eduardo Fajardo (Francis Lehar), Gabriele Tinti (George, the chauffeur), Espartaco Santoni (Carlos), Franz von Treuberg (antiquarian), Kathy Leone (tourist).

France: *Lisa et le Diable*, TV
Germany: *Der Teuflische*, "The Bedevilled"
Spain: *El Diablo se Lleva los Muertos*, "The Devil Carries Away the Dead," Procinor S.A., 11/25/74
US: *Lisa and the Devil*, Allied Artists TV, c. 1983



LISA REINER *(Elke Sommer) is lured into a strange adventure by the melody of a music box.*

knocking him down a flight of stairs. He lies there like a broken doll; his pocketwatch spills from his vest, its hands crossed like a crucifix. Afraid of what she's done, Lisa hurries away.

She continues to walk the empty streets until night falls. The distant headlights of a car lead her to an encounter with Francis and Sophia Lehar, a bourgeois, middle-aged, married couple, whose chauffeur George is trying to repair their broken-down Packard. Lisa begs a ride from them but, as they eventually drive away together, she senses a palpable but unspoken tension between the other passengers. Almost immediately, the car breaks down again—this time, outside a resplendent villa where they are soon met by the resident majordomo—Leandro! Lisa recognizes him and, instinctively, tries not to be noticed. The lady of the house, a nameless Countess, demands that the visitors be sent away, but after seeing Lisa, her adult son Maximillian pleads with his mother to let them stay. She finally agrees, but insists they not be admitted "in here—show them to the cottage."

As Leandro escorts the guests to their rooms, he speaks confidentially to Lisa, impressed by the coincidence of their earlier encounters. Once settled in, Lisa bathes and Sophia sneaks away to an assignation with George, which is witnessed by someone prowling outside their bedroom window.

Later, dinner is served by Leandro, who formally introduces the Countess to her four guests. The Countess demands to know where the fifth guest is, her question answered by a sudden noise directly upstairs—in the empty study of the Countess' late husband and Maximillian's stepfather, Carlos. After the main courses, Leandro unveils a cake "with chocolate sprinkles." Maximillian excuses himself, taking the first slice to someone upstairs, someone whom the others have not met. He takes the dessert into a secret room behind a mirrored wall, where he addresses someone named Elena, hidden behind the dark curtains of a canopied bed. Max addresses her scornfully, saying, "He's come back . . . but you'll never leave this room—never!"

After dinner, the Lehars invite Lisa to accompany them when they leave, but Leandro intercedes, announcing that Lisa will not be going with them, as she has been invited to stay by Maximillian. The Countess enters the room and asks Leandro to describe Lisa to her, shocking everyone with the revelation that she is blind. As he offers a lyrical description, Maximillian visits Carlos' empty, dusty study, opens a book, and finds a vintage photograph of Elena tucked inside, lovingly inscribed . . . to Carlos. She is Lisa's twin. Max strikes a match, sets fire to the picture and watches the flames consume it.

Francis discovers Sophia outside, looking for George, who was last seen working on the Packard. They argue, Francis slaps his wife and she is knocked against the car, causing the



LISA *meets Leandro (Telly Savalas) in the antiques shop.*

door to open, releasing the dead body of the chauffeur, his throat slashed and bloody. Inside the villa, the Countess handles a pair of long, blood-drenched scissors. The body is taken inside, and Leandro presides over a funereal procession; he later meets confidentially with Mr. Lehar and suggests that he go at once with his wife, and leave the corpse at the villa for discreet disposal. Sophia, distraught by the loss of her lover, does not wish to abandon George; Francis insists and pushes her into the car, but Sophia rebels by getting behind the wheel herself and running over her husband repeatedly until he is dead. Leandro calmly observes the murder from an upstairs window.

In her room, Lisa accidentally knocks over a pocket watch and its broken hands cross, as they did during her earlier encounter with the amorous stranger, who is now revealed to be Carlos. Within moments, she sees Carlos peering at her through a frosted window and flees the cottage in terror. Outside, she runs toward the villa but sees Carlos marching toward her, stiffly and mechanically, like a doll; she changes direction and runs into the embrace of the living Carlos, who rhapsodizes, "For years, I've waited for this moment." Lisa breaks free and is intercepted by Maximillian, who sweetly compliments her beauty and encourages her to stay. Lisa is more responsive to Max, but their encounter is cut short by the arrival of the Countess, who lures her son back to the villa. Left alone, Lisa witnesses some furtive movements outside, as Leandro is carrying something through a side door. She spies through a window as Leandro prepares a body for burial—presumably that of George, but soon revealed to be that of Carlos—his head split open! Lisa screams and runs inside the villa to tell someone, but stumbles upon a large room filled with wax figures. Carlos steps out from among them, grabbing her arm, and she faints. Carlos romances the inert Lisa on a fur rug in the mannequin room, calling her "Elena." He is so intent upon his lovemaking that he fails to hear another person, mantled in scarlet, enter the room behind them. The intruder clubs Carlos to death, the blood splattering on Lisa's blouse.



LEANDRO *surprises Sophia (Sylva Koscina) and Lisa by producing the music box melody on a cassette recorder.*

The murder is witnessed by Sophia, who is pursued by the crimson-cloaked assassin into a small room where she is bludgeoned to death. Lisa is found by Leandro, who sets about repairing the broken head of his Carlos dummy like a skilled artisan, and then measures Lisa's body—as though in preparation for building a similar mannequin of her. Once all of her measurements have been taken, he awakens her. She is stunned by the sight of the Carlos dummy, his face cracked exactly where his death blow was struck. Leandro assures her that the dummy is just a dummy, built for a rehearsal of Carlos' funeral—but he adds, curiously, that Signor Carlos is dead. Leaving the room, Lisa discovers the Countess kneeling over the battered, bloody form of Sophia and flees into the arms of Maximillian. He asks her to help him leave the villa, to escape the jealousy of his mother. He tells her she is beautiful, comparing her to Elena, whom he then proceeds to introduce to her. As Max pulls back the drapes of the canopy, the bed-ridden Elena is revealed to be a skeletonized corpse in a wedding veil. As Lisa screams, Max chloroforms her. He then strips off her clothes, and his own, and mounts her, determined to reach the corpse of the woman lying beside her through the agency of Lisa's soft, warm flesh ("It will be different with you . . . I know it will!"). But as he struggles to consummate his passion, the imagined cacklings of Elena doom his efforts to failure.

The smell of death hangs heavily over Max, and in a last effort to become a man, he goes on a rampage, overturning the funereal trappings of the villa, cursing his mother and exclaiming, "I can't live like this, in your shrine of death!" The Countess responds to his cries and tries to comfort him, urging him to admit his love for her. As she moves to embrace him, the Countess is penetrated by a sharp lance, thrust by Max, killing her. In the wake of his matricide, Max has a vision of all his victims—all the people who tried to take Lisa (his second and last chance), away from him—seated at table in an obscene mockery of "The Last Supper," with the skeletal remains of Elena herself in the place of honor. The only one missing is the Countess, who appears and walks stiltedly toward Max until, in recoil, he plummets from the window to his death on the arrowheads of an iron gate. The Countess is revealed to be another of Leandro's dolls, carried by him.

Lisa awakens—as if from a strangely decadent, romantic dream—in the century-old ruins of the villa, her nude body covered with vines and fallen leaves. She dresses and escapes in the first rays of morning, stepping over a broken, adult-sized doll that resembles Maximillian. Emerging from the villa, she sees a group of children playing with a ball in the street. It rolls to her feet, but as she offers it back, the children withdraw in fear, saying, "She's a ghost—no one has lived in the castle for 100

years!" With the ball in hand, Lisa is able to find the keyhole-shaped archway that led her to the villa, and she passes through it, finding her way back to the town square in Toledo. Leandro watches her go, and is approached by the antiques shopkeeper, who carries a lifesize replica of Lisa. Leandro no longer has any need for it and lets her go, murmuring "It's all too late, my friend. All too late."

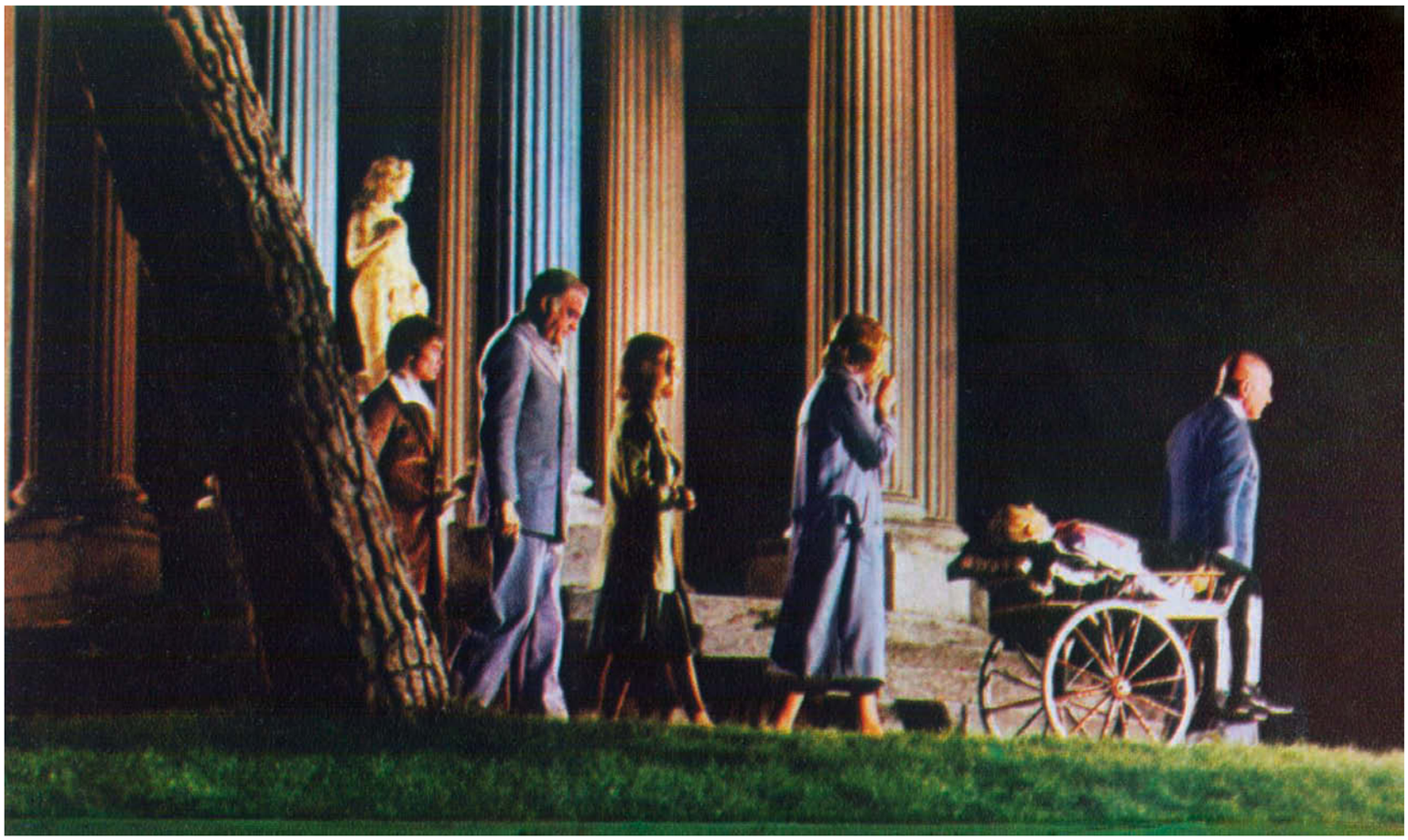
Lisa boards a 747 jet to return home, but shortly after takeoff, she realizes that she is the only passenger in her compartment. She walks toward the back of the plane, one empty section after another, until she finds herself in an area occupied by the same corpses previously present at "The Last Supper"—now with Maximillian among them, but with Elena missing. Screaming, Lisa bolts toward the front of the plane, but the seating areas repeat and repeat in an inescapable loop. Finally, she reaches the front of the plane and climbs the spiral staircase to the pilot's cabin, where she pounds at the door for help. The door opens, revealing Leandro at the controls. As he turns to face her, tipping his pilot's hat in greeting, Lisa collapses on the floor like a doll—like Elena—and the Devil spirits away the dead.

Background

The English version of *Lisa and the Devil* credits only Mario Bava and Alfredo Leone with the screenplay, while the Spanish release prints credit Roberto Natale, Giorgio Monlini [*sic*], and Mario Bava, as well as Leonardo Martín and José G. Maesso, the last two almost certainly for translation or quota purposes only. Roberto Natale was one of the screenwriters of *Operazione paura*, and he recalls that his writing partner on that earlier film, Romano Migliorini, was also involved in *Lisa*'s germination. The erroneously named "Giorgio Monlini" was in fact actor–writer Giorgio Maulini. Leone, who disavows any knowledge of these other contributors, remembers the source simply as "a story Bava had; I think he had it for awhile."

"I worked together with Romano Migliorini and, after *Operazione paura*, we wrote this other story for Mario," explains Roberto Natale. "I later heard that two different films had been released, *Lisa and the Devil*, the one by Mario, and *La casa dell'esorcismo*, the one by Mario together with Alfredo Leone. We wrote the script with Giorgio Maulini and his fiancee Chicca—unless I'm mistaken, she came up with the original idea, but didn't want any credit. It was titled *La casa del diavolo* ("The Devil's House"), and started with a fresco in a chapel, representing a demoniac scene, in front of which an American tourist was suddenly taken ill. It was surely Bava who conceived the idea of the fresco; I remember this clearly. In some prints of the film, neither I nor Migliorini are credited, and this astonishes me."

Learning that *Lisa and the Devil* grew out of an idea nearly ten years old helps to explain its ethereal character. Had it been filmed closer to the time of its original conception, it might have had a more rigid and discernible narrative, but it was in Bava's nature to relax such structures once they were in place, to subject them to spontaneous impulse through improvisation. He thus had many years in which to toy with this daydream project mentally and make it a catch-all for pet shocks and imagistic conceits he could apply nowhere else. "*Lisa and the Devil* had a wonderful setting and this was perhaps more interesting to



THE FUNEREAL *procession for George the chauffeur (Gabriele Tinti).*

my father than the script," allows Lamberto Bava. "As a screenplay, I think it had weaknesses, with gaps in the narrative. A complex story like that needed a good rewrite and some additional ideas; there were things that, in the end, were impossible to explain. From all that, it turned out to be a visually splendid film, which—let's be honest—was missing something."

In its final form, *Lisa* suggests a compendium of original and borrowed ideas that, somehow, adds up to an almost inscrutably personal statement—what French critic Pascal Martinet aptly described as *"une sorte de testament spirituel"* ("a sort of spiritual testament").[1] The film is like a core sample of Bava's own subconscious, in which a variety of unrelated pieces come together in a panorama of scenes from films he may have feared, at this autumnal stage of his career, he might never make.

We can identify some of these influences by retracing Bava's steps through the few interviews he granted. For example, Bava once mentioned to



THE BLIND *Contessa (Alida Valli) beside the open casket of her late husband Carlos (Espartaco Santoni).*

Ornella Volta his desire to direct a film about Viktor Ardisson (a necrophile profiled in Krafft-Ebing's famous book *Psychopathia Sexualis*), adding, "But how do you make a producer understand that this is a story full of romance and poetry?"[2] This rhetorical question comes very close to describing what *Lisa and the Devil* would become. The character of Maximillian is a romanticized version of Ardisson, in real life a disfigured, half-witted young man who dug up the unresisting cadavers of young women, to obsessively suck at their cold, unresisting breasts for some semblance of the affection his mother denied him.

In the same interview, Bava expressed his longing to someday adapt for the screen something by his favorite author, H. P. Lovecraft. In *Lisa*, there are images plucked from the pages of Lovecraft—particularly from his story "In the Vault," including overturned coffins, heads bashed in, and a creative way of fitting a tall man into a short man's second-hand coffin. The moment when Lisa gasps at the sight of Leandro breaking the long legs of a corpse by folding them backwards at the shin, refers directly to the startling final sentence of Lovecraft's tale.

The climactic scene in which Maximillian chloroforms Lisa and attempts to have sex with her beside the remains of the dead Elena was apparently inspired by a scene in a short story attributed to Gilles de Reys, which provided the basis of *Il terzo occhio* ("The Third Eye," 1966), starring Franco Nero and Erika Blanc, and directed by Mino Guerrini, who had co-scripted *La ragazza che sapeva troppo*. I have not read the story, but Guerrini's film contains a scene in which Nero pretends to seduce a young woman who is the twin of his dead wife, whose body he has preserved and kept behind a veil in the master bedroom. While romancing the woman in the bed, he suddenly pulls back the veil to reveal the woman's



LEANDRO *ponders how to make a tall man fit into a short casket.*

embalmed twin and—at the moment she registers shock—chloroforms her. This still-astonishing study in necrophilia—later remade by Joe D'Amato as *Buio omega/Beyond the Darkness* (1980)—could almost be mistaken for a Bava film, and it is possible, considering Bava's past connection with Guerrini, that the *Maestro* had some unofficial involvement in it . . . but this has not been possible to confirm.

In a 1971 interview with Luigi Cozzi, Bava mentioned another idea as his "latest project," giving it the title of *Era una foglia . . .* ("There Was a Leaf . . ."). "It's the story of several ghosts haunting a villa and trying to rehabilitate the last surviving member of their family, a decadent and perverted man, before it's too late. It's a comedy; I wrote the script myself." One doubts that Bava would have produced a finished script on his own; it would be more likely that he had jotted down some ideas and perhaps drawn some storyboards, at most. Giving an interview at a not particularly busy phase of his career, it was best to seem busy. While *Lisa and the Devil* is not a comedy, it does share some elements with *Era una foglia . . .* such as the villa full of ghosts and the decadent young man who, in this case, himself yearns to be free of his sins.

Other aspects of *Lisa and the Devil* suggest a bird's nest of subjective references, disparate elements that had personal meaning for Bava and craved a common repository. Bava's love for Russian literature is represented, according to Lamberto Bava, who has confessed that some of the film's dialogue was cribbed verbatim from *I diavoli*—the Italian translation of Fyodor Dostoevsky's classic 1871–72 novel *The Possessed* (currently in translation as *The Devils*). Incidentally, one of the major characters of Dostoevsky's novel is a beautiful young woman named Liza, who has been left scarred by a former romantic relationship with Stavrogin, the mentally disturbed son of a strong, domineering woman of great wealth, whose social isolation and sense of privilege enabled him to mature without any sense of right or wrong, or moral accountability. Reportedly, the author intended Stavrogin to be the novel's main character, but the account of his crimes was considered too obscene to publish at the time, requiring the author to select another character for its focal point. The omnipresence of statues in the film, and its depiction of the characters as mortal shells manipulated by the Devil, reinforces Dostoevsky's personal interpretation of evil and possession. It was the novelist's belief that none of God's creatures was inherently evil, though they could be seized by evil forces and caused to perform diabolical acts; it is one of the themes of his novel.

The name of the character played by Eduardo Fajardo—Francis Lehar—makes explicit reference to Hungarian composer Franz Lehar (1870–1948), who is best-remembered as the composer of the 1905 operetta *Die Lustige Witwe/The Merry Widow*. The wife of the real-life Lehar was named Sophie, or Sophia, as is Sylva Koscina's character in the film, which confirms that Bava was more than passingly familiar with their story. The Lehars were wed in 1921, after Sophie's divorce from her first husband, though she and Franz had been having an extramarital affair since 1906. Because of Sophie's Jewish background, and Hitler's enthusiasm for her husband's work, the Lehars spent most of World War II in lavish isolation in a richly appointed villa in Bad Ischi—while the composer's *Merry Widow* librettists, Fritz Grunbaum and Fritz Lohner, also Jewish, spent their final days in concentration camps. Perhaps Bava chose the name of Francis Lehar to make another of his veiled, ironic comments about the woes of married life (and the joys of widowhood), but by including Sophia in the metaphor, the evocation of these historical figures cuts deeper. Dostoevsky's *The Possessed* is a political novel, and it is considered "prophetic" for the way its story of young revolutionaries predicted the "demonic forces" that would begin to infest Russia in the 19th century. In a similar way, *Lisa and the Devil* uses the Lehars and its distinctly isolated, turn-of-the-century Italian *milieu*, to depict—as Visconti was doing at the same time—the self-interested, upper-class decadence that passively allowed the rise of Fascism in Europe.

In this context, Leandro becomes distinctly Mussolinian. The robust performance of Telly Savalas—loud and posturing, bald as a bust of marble, outwardly a servant to decadent aristocracy while inwardly a death merchant—could easily have been based, whether consciously or unconsciously, on the example of *il Duce.* His aloof, darkly amused, almost philosophical observance of the crimes of passion being committed all around him, in a dreamlike setting that bodes it has all happened before and will happen again, recalls Mussolini's statement, "Blood alone moves the wheels of history."

Another distinctly possible forebear of Leandro can be found in A. Merritt's classic novel of dark fantasy, *Seven Footprints to Satan* (1928). In that book's fourth chapter is the following description: "The voice was strangely resonant and musical, with a curious organ quality . . . [His] eyes were of the deepest sapphire blue and they were the *alivest* eyes I ever beheld. They were large, slightly oblique, and they sparkled as though the very spring of life was bubbling up behind them. Gem-like they were in color, and gem-like they were in their hardness . . .



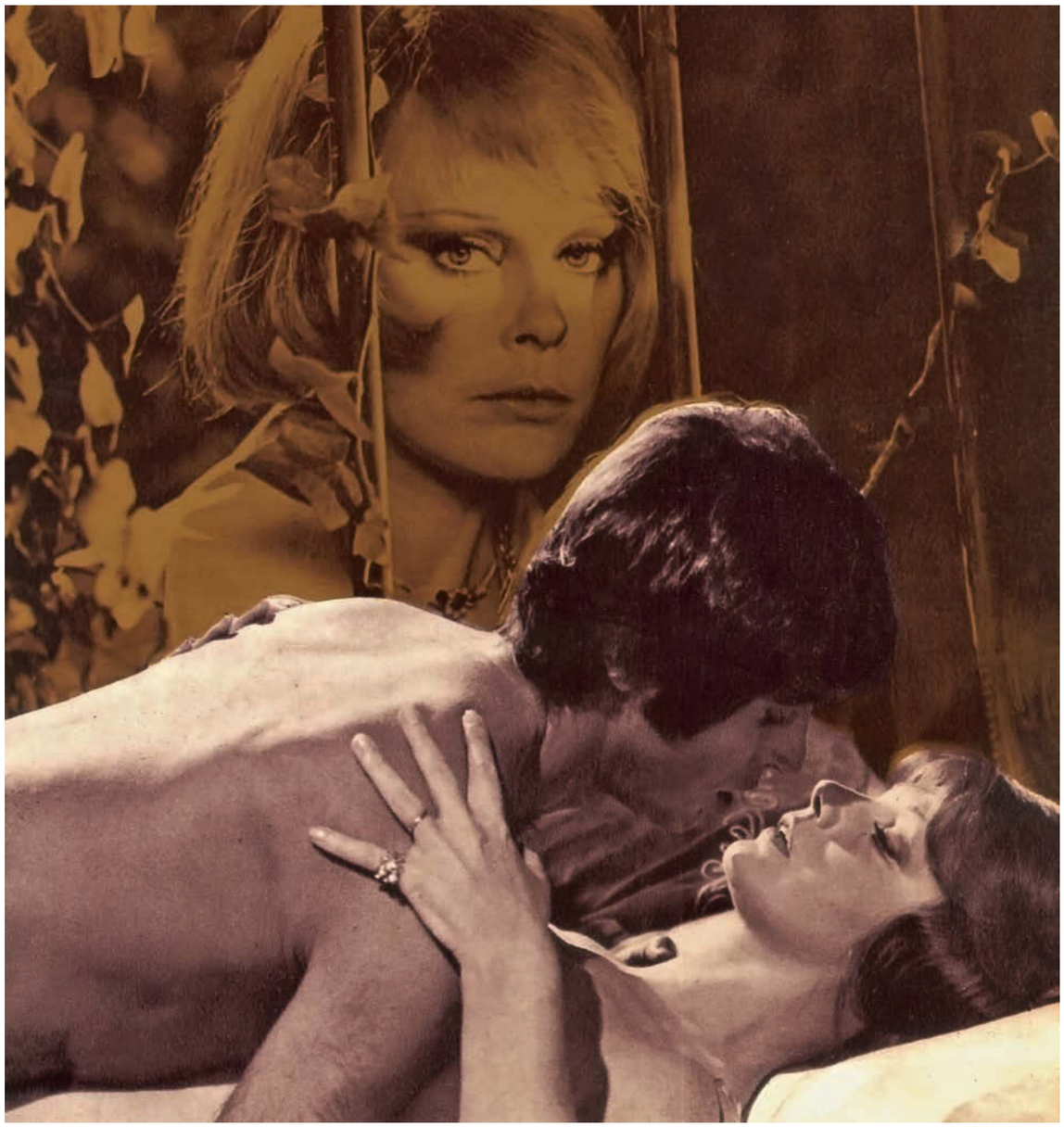
LISA *is astonished to learn that Carlos is neither alive nor dead, but a life-sized doll made by Leandro.*

1 Raoul Walsh, as quoted in Pascal Martinet, *Mario Bava* (Paris, France: Edilig, 1984), 17.

2 Ornella Volta, "Conversation avec Mario Bava," *Positif* 138, May 1972, 44–48.

The head above them was inordinately large, high and broad and totally bald. It was an astonishing hemisphere whose capacity must have been almost double that of the average. The ears were long and narrow and distinctly pointed at the tips. The nose was heavy and beaked, the chin round but massive. The lips were full, and as classically cut and immobile as of some antique Greek statue . . . His body, what I could see of it, was unusually large, the enormous barrel of a chest indicating tremendous vitality." The words offer a portrait of Merritt's Satan, but they also provide an ideal description of Telly Savalas, particularly in the role of Leandro.

It also piques one's curiosity that Bava would choose to identify his heroine with a name so closely approximating that of an actress with whom he worked at least twice in the 1950s. Lia Reiner (or Rainer; she is listed with both spellings in different references) played supporting roles in three Aldo Fabrizi comedies, including two which Bava photographed: *La famiglia Passaguai fa fortuna* (1952) and *Hanno rubato un tram* (1954). She also worked for director Mario Costa in *Pietà per chi cade* (1953), at a time when Bava was still intermittently serving Costa. Her filmography appears to extend to only a few more films, the last one being Giuseppe Fina's *Pelle viva/ Scorched Skin* (1962). Whether the character's name is sheer coincidence or a personal tribute, we may never know.



A COLLAGE *from the original promotional brochure: a portrait of Elke Sommer as Lisa and the passionate tryst between George and Sophia.*

Alfredo Leone doesn't claim to know everything that *Lisa and the Devil* is about, but he remembers that Bava was forthright about at least one of his intentions. "He wanted to make a film that would pay tribute to his father," Leone confirms. "His father was a sculptor and Bava used to tell me how he grew up surrounded by statues, and how they excited his imagination. He wanted to use the film to pay his respects."

"To pay his respects" is an appropriately sepulchral phrase. *Lisa and the Devil* has a distinctly funereal atmosphere, and it represents the culmination of a morbid strain that can be traced back to the sickly interiors of Villa Graps in *Operazione paura*, further back to the dead medium's rooms in *"La goccia d'acqua"* episode of *I tre volti della paura*, and even earlier to the bedroom of Aunt Ethel in *La ragazza che sapeva troppo*. One can relate part of this mood to Mario's feelings about his father, but only part of it. In Mario's childhood imagination, his father presided over the raw materials of stone, clay, and resin, from which he fashioned likenesses indistinguishable from the dead; he never forgot the day when, while his father was away, he entered his workshop and found a lifeless body in repose inside a long cabinet drawer. Just as Mario's fears and imagination were stimulated by such an environment, so were those of his grandchildren, who today harbor particularly strong memories of the period when *Lisa and the Devil* was in production.

"I first discovered that my father and grandfather made horror movies when they were making *Lisa and the Devil*," recalls Georgia Bava. "I must have been 5 or 6 years old . . . We shared a bedroom, my brother Roy and myself, and there was a small corridor outside and I had to cross the corridor to get to my father's room. And all along the corridor, there were four mannequins they used for special effects—but that, of course, I didn't know. One day when I woke up, I wanted to go to my father's room, and as I opened the door, I saw these

scary things! One of them had an eye popping out, another one had a scar and was very bloody, and I just screamed! I ran and jumped into my father's bed and said, 'What are those things out there?' He said, 'Never mind, they're like dolls.' I said, 'But *my* dolls don't look like that!' And he said, 'No, no—we're using them to make a film.' I said, 'What kind of films do you *make*?' And he said, 'Films where all the evils and the bad things come out.' I was amazed, because I had only seen films made for children. Then I saw one, and I realized what they were doing. It was fascinating; it was nice."

Georgia's younger brother Roy has similarly disturbed memories of living among those wax figures. "At the time, I think I was 4 years old. I was on the set of *Lisa and the Devil* and I remember the severed heads . . . dead bodies . . . It was quite a kind of scary thing. Even today, it would be scary. Lamberto liked these heads so much that he asked everybody, 'Do you want them, or shall I take them?' Mario said, 'Of course you can take them—what would I do at home with something like this?' I came home and saw Lamberto putting these two heads near the entrance of our house, on some columns. I was quite scared by them. They were made by Fabrizio Sforza, one of the leading special makeup effects people working in Italy today. He later worked with Lamberto on *Fantaghirò,* and he also worked on *The Last Emperor* and *Tai-Pan. Lisa and the Devil* was his first work ever in the movies. It was very bad for me, because to go from my bedroom to the bathroom at night, I had to pass by those heads—so, no way would I go to the bathroom! It became a kind of problem for me! Later, when I met Fabrizio, he was delighted when I told him how many sleepless nights he had given me as a kid!"

On a more personal level, Bava may have used *Lisa and the Devil* to vent some of his increasing concerns and frustrations over his wife Iole and the state of their marriage. Asked to describe her grandmother, Georgia Bava says, "She liked to stay at home. She was quite suspicious concerning people, and did not like to socialize at all. She never liked travelling, going to the theater, the cinema, to parties, or the opera or anything like that, but she loved to be at home with her family, cooking and chatting. She was a great person too, but in a completely different way to Mario."



MAXIMILLIAN *(Alessio Orano) chloroforms Lisa, whom he plans to use as a sexual annex to his dead love, Elena.*

Iole's absence from the world stage led to rampant speculation. "You never saw this person, so you couldn't help thinking that something must be incredibly weird," chuckles Andrea Piazzesi, a friend of the family. "It was impossible not to fantasize about her! You would wonder if she had a tail or something, but this wasn't the case. You never saw the wife, even if you were in her own house, because she stayed in another room. She was a very strange woman, always hiding herself. I finally met Mario's wife, after he died, because [her daughter] Elena convinced her to come out and say hello. I said hello and shook her hand. Later that night, I told Dario Argento, 'Today I met the wife of Mario!' and he said, 'You *met* her? You *must* tell me how she *looks!*' He was so curious. Everyone was so curious."

Iole's suspicion of people was only part of her problem. Her reticence to



AN IRONIC *recreation of Da Vinci's "The Last Supper" as Maximillian is confronted by the wreckage of his past deeds.*

leave the house, her increasingly sedentary life, and her love of sweets conspired to make her obese in her older years. Shy, reclusive, and embarrassed by her weight, Iole withdrew to a private room whenever Mario received guests at home, and her seclusion worsened to the point where she reportedly became a hypochondriac, an agoraphobe, and increasingly morbid.

"My grandmother was not at all thin," Georgia admits. "To me, she was always my grandmother, so I never even thought of her as a young woman. She had beautiful legs and beautiful blue eyes, but that was about all [the beauty] I could see. One day, when I was already a grown woman, I was helping her to move some boxes from one place to another and, suddenly, she showed me some photographs of her when she was young, maybe 25 or 30 years old. Believe me, she was absolutely beautiful! She even told me that, when she once went to visit Mario [on location] in Pola [Yugoslavia], [3] she got off the ship and all the people standing around started saying, 'Here's the actress—she has arrived!'"

"She loved sweets, so she was very fat and nervous, and always complaining about being sick," says Piazzesi. "She was always saying to Mario, 'I'm going to die! I'm going to die!' while Mario, who never complained, was the first to die. This woman never wanted to go anywhere with him, never go to any sort of party—which must have been a problem for him in terms of his career because, as a director, if you show up in certain circles where you can meet producers, your luck comes much easier than if you live privately."

Mario, whose professional skill involved making the most beautiful actresses in the world look even more glamorous, bitterly missed the shapely and beautiful woman that he married. During the making of *Lisa and the Devil*, Bava was heard by one colleague to chant "I want a skinny wife, I want a skinny wife!" in his frustration, so the matter of Iole's obesity certainly did oppress him. One does not have to look too deeply into the scene of Maximillian trying, unsuccessfully, to make love to the more fully fleshed Lisa while fantasizing about the skeleton lying beside her, to find a macabre and quite naked parallel to his anguish. Yet, from the day they were married to the day of his death, Mario remained committed to Iole and the home and the family they had created together. After thirty-five years of marriage, their relationship had become essentially platonic . . . yet something happened during the editing of *Lisa and the Devil* that inspired Mario to bring romance back into his marriage, and an offstage renaissance took place. To the surprise of everyone—not least of all her husband—Iole responded to Mario's renewed attentions by making a concerted effort to overcome her morbid ways and become more outgoingly supportive of him, even to the extent of leaving the house and joining Mario for dinner with Alfredo Leone and his wife, Madeline.

Leone remembers that Bava "used to bullshit about sex a lot, like any other guy. I remember there was a woman who worked in the editing room, a redhead who looked like Susan Hayward. She was a lesbian, very beautiful, and we were both crazy about her. We talked about her all the time . . . but it was all just talk. In all the time we worked together—and I think I knew Mario better than anyone—and I never knew him to be anything





VARIOUS *shots of Telly Savalas, Elke Sommer, Mario Bava, and Alfredo Leone enjoying each others' company at a pre-production party.*



other than an absolutely faithful husband. Maybe there was someone else before I met him, but I didn't know about that. His wife, when I finally met her, I found to be a very plain, unpretentious woman . . . not at all on the level of his intellect, but a good person. Our wives got along famously well—even though my wife did not speak Italian and his wife did not speak English! They were both jovial, jolly, good women—wives and homemakers—and shared many of the same habits. Mario called them 'The Twins.'"

So, while no one in *Lisa and the Devil* quite succeeds in escaping "the smell of death," Mario and Iole were more fortunate. Bava rededicated himself to making his marriage work and strengthening his family ties—coincidentally, at the same time his son Lamberto was experiencing increasing difficulties within his own marriage. This personal renaissance could not have happened at a more opportune time for Mario and Iole because, within the year, they would have children in their home once again.

Cast & Crew

For *Lisa and the Devil*, Alfredo Leone entered into a co-production deal with an accomplished Spanish producer, José Gutierrez Maesso. Born in Azuada, Badajoz, in 1920, Maesso started out as a screenwriter and director, making his first films in 1955. In the 1960s, most of his work was in the popular realm of Spaghetti Westerns; he was one of the credited writers of Sergio Corbucci's *Minnesota Clay* (1964, one of Bava's uncredited side projects) and *Django* (1966). Maesso became a producer in 1962, and at the time *Lisa and the Devil* was going into production, his most recent production was *Estratto dagli archivi segreti della polizia di una capitale europea/ Tragic Ceremony in Villa Alexander* (1972), directed by Riccardo Freda under the pseudonym "Willy Pareto."

Leone assembled another top-drawer cast for *Lisa and the Devil,* consisting of international stars and exceptional local talent from Italy and Spain. Because the film was made in late 1972, before the immense success of Telly Savalas' CBS-TV series *Kojak* (which premiered about a year later, in October 1973), top billing went to Elke Sommer. With her golden hair and doll-like beauty, Sommer is perfectly cast as Lisa/Elena, and she gives what is likely the performance of her career.

Entering fully into the romantic, literate spell of the picture was Greek-American actor Telly Savalas. Born Aristotle Savalas on January 21, 1924, in Garden City, Long Island, New York, his earliest jobs were as a casting assistant and senior news director at New York's WABC, In the late 1950s, Savalas turned to acting, giving one of his earliest on-camera performances (with hair) in "Murder and the Android," a live dramatization of an Alfred Bester short story which ran on the NBC series *Sunday Showcase.* He made his first feature film appearance for director John Frankenheimer: *The Young Savages* (1961), which led to his casting in *Birdman of Alcatraz* (1962), opposite Burt Lancaster, for which Savalas was recognized with a Best Supporting Actor nomination. After *Birdman,* the balding Savalas made the decision to shave his entire head, a distinction that helped him to stand out in subsequent, meaty roles in *The Greatest Story Ever Told* (1965, as Pontius Pilate), *Genghis Khan* (1965), *The Dirty Dozen* (1967), *Kelly's*



3 Perhaps for the filming of *Agi Murad, il diavolo bianco/The White Warrior* in 1958.



SYLVA KOSCINA *as Sophia Lehar, who has uses for George other than fixing the car.*





ALIDA VALLI *as the Contessa.*

Heroes (1970), and *On Her Majesty's Secret Service* (1969), in which he gave a definitive performance as James Bond's arch-enemy Ernst Stavro Blofeld.

Savalas made his first films in Italy in the mid-1960s, but found most of his work there as the '60s turned into the '70s, appearing in the Gina Lollobrigida comedy *Buona Sera, Mrs. Campbell* (1969), Sergio Sollima's outstanding crime picture *Città violenta/The Family* (1970, with Charles Bronson and Jill Ireland), Silvio Narizzano's *Senza ragione/Redneck* (1972), Tonino Valeri's *Una ragione per vivere e una per morire/Massacre at Fort Holman* (1972), and *Panico en el Transiberiano/Horror Express* (1972), an above-average, Spanish-produced fright vehicle for Christopher Lee and Peter Cushing. Weirdly, in a 1975 interview with *TV Guide,* Savalas claimed that Bava's film was based on a script he (Savalas) had written himself, which he wrote to "expose the greatest villain who ever lived: Sigmund Freud."[4]

At the time *Lisa and the Devil* went into production, Savalas—whose "tough guy" image had been limiting him to playing cops and gangsters in American films—enjoyed a tremendous ratings success as the star of a made-for-television police procedural, *The Marcus-Nelson Murders,* in which he starred as New York police lieutenant Theo Kojak . . . without sucking a single lollipop. "We gave Savalas his first lollipop," boasts Leone. "In the original script, Leandro was always popping gumdrops in his mouth. Savalas didn't like gumdrops, so he went to Bava and asked for something else. Mario said, 'What's the difference? You might as well use a lollipop!' When I saw Savalas on the set with this lollipop in his mouth, I said, 'What the hell's he doing, Bava?' Mario said, 'Humor me; it may work.'"

Savalas was trying to quit smoking at the time and liked the lollipops so much, he subsequently carried them over as a trademark prop on CBS' spin-off series *Kojak,* which ran from 1973–1978, and later won sports headlines as the owner of a champion race horse, which he dubbed "Telly's Pop." The stepfather of actress Nicolette Sheridan and godfather of actress Jennifer Aniston, Savalas died of prostate cancer on January 22, 1994—one day after his 70th birthday. After his death, it was discovered that Savalas had been a bigamist, married to more than one woman and the father of more than one family. Coincidentally, though he managed to conceal it in most of his onscreen appearances, Savalas had a short, misshapen index finger on his left hand, which accounts for the white gloves he wears in much of the film, and the odd, Germanic manner in which he holds his cigarette in *Lisa and the Devil.*

Of working with Savalas, Elke Sommer has little to say: "I have no good memories; I have no bad memories. The same with Joseph Cotten [on *Baron Blood*]: Cotten left me neither warm nor cold. Savalas left me neither warm nor cold. He did his job, performed well—more power to him! No friendship arose, not even *simpatia.* He had his people around him, his girlfriends and so on, and I had my friends—and that was that."

Leone agrees: "He was a total professional who came in, did his job, and moved on to the next. Years after we made the picture, I bumped into him at the airport, walking around with this big entourage, and he didn't recognize me! I told him, 'Telly! Don't you remember—it was me and Bava that gave you your first lollipop!' He finally remembered, but that's the kind of guy he was—he had his own circle, his own world. But he was a very creative guy, did his job beautifully. He made a great Devil for us, and I have absolutely no complaints."

As with *Baron Blood,* Leone set his sights high when casting the net for the film's supporting roles. He first approached Bette Davis for the part of the blind Countess, and at one point *Variety* reported that Anthony Perkins

would play the role of Maximillian ("We had hopes," Leone says), but both finally turned the project down. The role of the Countess went instead to Alida Valli, one of the great beauties—and one of the truly international stars—of the Italian cinema. Born Alida Maria Altenberger on May 31, 1921, in Pola, Italy, she made her first film in 1930, Her early films were made for such directors as Carmine Gallone, Mario Soldati, and Max Neufeld, who shaped her screen persona as a grand tragedian with glamorous, smoky looks and a penetrating gaze. Her triumphs included the title role in *Manon Lescaut* (1940), Enrichetta in *Le due orphanelle* (1942), Giulia in Giuseppe Fatigati's version of *I pagliacci* (1943), and the title role in Soldati's *Eugenia Grandet* (1946). In 1947, David O. Selznick cast her in her first American production, Alfred Hitchcock's *The Paradine Case* (1947), in which she was credited with the Garboesque soubriquet "Valli." The single name credit continued throughout memorable roles in Carol Reed's *The Third Man* (1948), Irving Pichel's *The Miracle of the Bells* (1948), and Robert Stevenson's *Walk Softly, Stranger* (1949, which recast her with *Third Man* co-star Joseph Cotten), but she reclaimed her full name upon returning to Rome. She played herself in the peculiar *Siamo donne* (1953), an omnibus film purporting to offer looks into the personal lives of five actresses, including Ingrid Bergman, Isa Miranda, and Anna Magnani. In 1954, she gave one of her signature performances as Countess Livia Serpieri in Luchino Visconti's *Senso*, after which she disappeared from films for several years, returning with Pier Paolo Pasolini's *Il grido/The Cry* (1957). Here, and in her subsequent career, Valli's choices of films show great powers of discernment, encompassing Georges Franju's *Les Yeux sans Visage/Eyes Without a Face* (1959), George Marshall's *The Happy Thieves* (1962), Claude Chabrol's *Ophélia* (1962), Pasolini's *Edipo re/Oedipus Rex* (1967), Bernardo Bertolucci's *La strategia del ragno/The Spider's Stratagem* (1970), and Mario Caiano's interesting *giallo, L'occhio nel labirinto/Blood* (1971). In later life, Valli became the recipient of two David di Donatello awards, one in 1982 for her supporting performance in Marco Tullio Giordana's *La caduta degli angeli ribelli* and another in 1991 in recognition of her entire filmography. Bringing her career full circle, she was also honored with a Golden Lion Award at the Venice Film Festival for her lifetime achievement—bookending a celebrity which had essentially begun with her 1941 winning of the Best Actress Golden Lion for her performance in Mario Soldati's *Piccolo mondo antico*. When she passed away on April 22, 2006, at the age of 84, Valli was granted the ultimate accolade of a public funeral in Rome's city hall, for which the entire city seemed to turn out in mourning.

Although they had been simultaneously active in the Italian cinema for over thirty years, Bava had never worked with Valli, and as one of Rome's most glamor-conscious cameraman, he must have yearned for such an opportunity. When Leone told Bava that he had cast Valli in the film, the two men became so giddy with nostalgic visions of the actress in her prime that they joked together like two hormone-driven teenagers.



PROMOTIONAL *image of Elke Sommer and Telly Savalas.*

Leone: "When I told Mario that I had cast Alida Valli, he couldn't believe it. He said, 'Valli! I've always *loved* Valli! How I'd love to . . . !' 'After me, Mario,' I said. That's the way we were, always bullshitting with each other. On the set, of course, Valli was treated with the utmost respect, and I believe she had a great appreciation for Bava."

Valli may have occurred to Leone as a result of working with Joseph Cotten in Austria on *Baron Blood*, but she was absolutely the perfect choice to play the nameless Countess. In her previous roles, Valli had been cast as a noblewoman (frequently), a murderess (real or accused), and as an incestuous mother. After *Lisa and the Devil*, Valli continued to go the route taken by such grand actresses as Bette Davis and Joan Crawford in America, trading on her hardening good looks to play evil, demented, older women in such horror pictures as Alberto De Martino's *L'Anticristo/The Tempter* (1974), Pierre Grunstein's *Tendre Dracula/Tender Dracula* (1975, with Peter Cushing), Giulio Berruti's *Suor omicidi/Killer Nun* (1978), Al Festa's *Fatal Frames* (1996), and of course, Dario Argento's *Suspiria* (1977) and *Inferno* (1980).

In the years since she had last worked with Mario Bava on *Le fatiche di Ercole* and *Ercole e la regina di Lidia*, Sylva Koscina (credited here as "Silva Koscina") worked in dozens of adventure and swashbucklers—the best being her brief turn as a circus aerialist in Georges Franju's fantasy *Judex* (1963)—before dedicating herself to becoming what was known in the 1960s as "an international sex star." Mino Guerrini's *Amore in quattro dimenzioni/Love in Four Dimensions* (1963) and *L'idea fissa* (1964) were turning points in this regard, as were her glamor roles in a number of spy pictures, including Ralph Thomas' *Hot Enough for June/Agent 8 ¾* (1964), Mario Mattoli's *Cadavere per signora* (1964), Carlo Lizzani's *Thrilling* (1965) and Maurice Clochet's *Baraka sur X-13/Agent X-77 Orders to Kill* (1965). In 1966, she made an enchanting appearance in Fellini's *Giulietta degli spiriti/Juliet of the Spirits*, which was followed by her bids for American stardom in *Three Bites of the Apple* (1967),

4 *TV Guide*, February 22, 1975.



The Secret War of Harry Frigg (1968, with Paul Newman), *A Lovely Way to Die* (1968), and a revealing pictorial in *Playboy* magazine. Koscina kept up with the times, baring her body in various sex comedies of the late '60s and 1970s, including *L'assoluto naturale/ He and She* (1969), *Homo eroticus/ Man of the Year* (1971), and *Rivelazioni di un maniaco sessuale al capo della squadra mobile/The Slasher is the Sex Maniac* (1972), a *giallo* thriller that was later supplemented with hardcore sex footage in America and reissued as *Penetration.* In the wake of *Lisa and the Devil*—and the stronger sex footage from the filming which was later added to *The House of Exorcism* (1975)—Koscina continued to appear in fairly explicit, if otherwise insubstantial roles in Lucio Fulci's horror comedy *Il Cav. Costante Nicosia demoniaco ovvero Dracula in brianza/ Dracula in the Provinces* (1975, in which a vampire feeds on her bare bottom), and Franz Antel's *Casanova & Company/Some Like It Cool* (1976, opposite Tony Curtis). In the 1980s, though in her 50s, the actress was still playing scenes in the nude on the Roman stage. "My body is still okay," she told an interviewer, "so why cover it up?" Sylva Koscina, one of the Italian cinema's great beauties, died of a heart ailment on December 26, 1994, at the age of 61.

Cast as the husband of Koscina's character was Spanish actor Eduardo Fajardo. Born on August 24, 1918, in Mostiero, Ponteverda, the 54-year-old Fajardo was already the veteran of more than 100 films. He began acting in 1947 and made his first Italian picture—Mario Caiano's *Erik il vichingo/ Erik the Viking*—in 1965, which was followed closely by his greatest role, as the cold-blooded villain Maj. Jackson in Sergio Corbucci's *Django* (1966). After *Django*, Fajardo was featured in literally dozens of Italian Westerns, including Corbucci's *Il mercenario/The Mercenary* (1968), Tulio Demichelli's *Arriva Sabata!/*

A FASCINATING *overhead shot of the filming of the dining room scene. At the bottom end of the table stand Mario (at left) and Lamberto Bava (gesticulating, at right), while director of photography Cecilio Paniagua stands beside the camera.*

Sabata the Killer (1970), and a rare horror turn in the curiously titled *I due volti della paura/The Two Faces of Fear* (1972), also directed by Demichelli. After *Lisa and the Devil,* Fajardo stayed busy, appearing in several films per year, including John Gilling's *La Cruz del Diablo/The Devil's Cross* (1975), Umberto Lenzi's enjoyably silly zombie picture *Incubo sulla città contaminata/City of the Walking Dead* (1980), and a pair of films with Jess Franco, *La tumba de los muertos vivientes/Oasis of the Zombies* (1982) and *Bangkok, cita con la muerte* (1985).

Gabriele Tinti was recommended for the role of George, the chauffeur, by actor Ivan Rassimov—the brother of Rada Rassimov, and a veteran of *Terrore nello spazio*—who, after winning the role decided that he didn't want to play it. Tinti had also worked with Bava before, when he played the supporting role of Samuel in *Esther and the King*. Prior to *Lisa*, he had been a very busy actor, working in Edgar G. Ulmer's *L'Atlantide/Journey Beneath the Desert* (1961), Robert Aldrich's *Sodom and Gomorrah* (1962), Riccardo Freda's *Trappola per un assassino/Roger La Honte* (1966), and the early *mondo* film *L'occhio selvaggio/The Wild Eye* (1967). A hopeful trip to America in 1968 landed him roles in Aldrich's *The Legend of Lylah Claire* and an episode of the CBS series *Mayberry R.F.D.* (unquestionably, his strangest credit). The ex-husband of *Terrore nello spazio* star Norma Bengell, Tinti later became increasingly active in erotic films, including *The Sexorcist* (1974). In 1975, he and his second wife—Eurasian actress Laura Gemser—formed a professional liaison with director–cinematographer Aristide Massaccesi (a.k.a. "Joe D'Amato") that lasted for nearly a decade. Beginning with *Emanuelle nera/Black Emanuelle* (1975), Gemser became the international sex star of all of the "Black Emanuelle" films, ending with *Blade Violent/Emanuelle Escapes from Hell* (1983). Tinti continued to work in films, sometimes under aliases like "Peter Gabriel," until he was felled by a heart attack on November 12, 1991.

Alfredo Leone remembers Espartaco Santoni as "a gambling buddy of Savalas, who asked me to give him a part as a personal favor." However, the debonair Spaniard came to the role of Carlos with credentials that were not unimpressive. In addition to his previous roles in nearly twenty films—including Javier Seto's *The Castilian* (1965), José Maria Elorrieta's *Las Amantes del Diablo/Feast for the Devil* (1971), and Jorge Grau's *Ceremonia Sangrienta/The Legend of Blood Castle* (1973) and *Pena de Muerte/Night Fiend* (1973)—Santoni had produced several pictures between 1961 and 1971, including León Klimovsky's Sartana Western *Su le Mani Cadavere, Sei in Arresto,* and Rafael Moreno Alba's *Las Melancólicas* (both 1971)—the second of which, like *Lisa and the Devil,* was subsequently recut and reissued in America after the success of *The Exorcist,* under the title *Exorcism's Daughter* in 1975. He was also briefly married, at one time, to *Diabolik* star Marisa Mell.

Production

Lisa and the Devil was shot on a six-week schedule and, Alfredo Leone remembers, ran slightly over. It began with interiors shot at the Villa Frascati near Rome, included some location shots filmed in Toledo, and concluded with exterior photography in Barcelona, with some additional interiors shot in Madrid.

For the first time in his experience, Bava was contractually required to use a Spanish cinematographer, to satisfy a co-production agreement with co-producer José Maesso. The job went to Cecilio Paniagua, a distinguished cameraman whose career reached back to 1935 and included service on a number of major international co-productions, such as *The Fall of the Roman Empire* (1964), Mel Welles' intriguing horror picture *La Isla de la Muerte/Island of the Doomed/Maneater of Hydra* (1966), *Custer of the West* (1967), *100 Rifles* (1969), *Patton* (1970), *The Hunting Party* (1971), *The Light at the End of the World* (1971), and the Orson Welles version of *Treasure Island* (1972).

Alfredo Leone: "Mario insisted that, if he had to use a Spanish D.P., he was going to use Paniagua, whose work he much admired. After we got him, we discovered that Paniagua was very, very slow. He used old-fashioned lighting systems, the brutes and what-not, taking up to an hour to light a single shot, whereas Mario knew how to do the same set-ups in maybe 10 minutes! But there's no question that Paniagua was brilliant—certainly among Spain's top craftsmen. His approaches took longer and slowed us down, but we still came out pretty much on time."

Left in the lurch by the hiring of Paniagua was Antonio Rinaldi, Bava's credited cameraman since 1965's *Terrore nello spazio*. Rinaldi quarrelled with Bava and it appears that the two never worked together again. Emilio Varriano, the second camera assistant on *Baron Blood* (in charge of pulling focus and loading the camera), filled the breach as camera operator.

Though the production was obliged to leave the direction of the camera team to Paniagua, the Spaniard had nothing to do with the storyboarding or lighting of individual shots. "It was always Mario," Leone stresses, insisting that Bava was still the *de facto* architect of the film's final look. Bava's decisive control over the content of each shot is evident from the number of set-ups which open in the sky, or in the treetops, before descending to the action, which contrast timeless art



BAVA *camping it up with Elke Sommer between takes.*



BURT LANCASTER *pays a surprise visit to the Lisa set.*

with small-minded intrigues, or quote from Bava's own earlier work—for example, the shot of Carlos peering through the window at the startled Lisa, which recalls Melissa Graps appearing at Nadine's window in *Operazione paura*.

The proverbial icing on the cake was delivered by art director Nedo Azzini, whose talent makes *Lisa and the Devil*, like *Baron Blood*, one of Bava's most ornate and sumptuous-looking films. Azzini first worked in films as a set decorator for Camillo Mastrocinque's comedy *Totò, lascia o radoppia?* (1956, which featured *Lisa*'s Gabriele Tinti), which was followed by stints on such pictures as Nunnally Johnson's *The Angel Wore Red* (1960) and Luigi Zampa's *Anni ruggenti/The Roaring Years* (1962). Advancing to the position of art director in 1963, he brought luster to Luciano Salce's *Le ore dell'amore/The Hours of Love* (1963, with Barbara Steele), Paolo Heusch's Totò comedy *Il comandante* (1963), Massimo Pupillo's *Bill il taciturno . . . Django uccide/Django Kills Softly* (1967), and Lucio Fulci's *Una sull'altra/One On Top of the Other* (1969, with Marisa Mell) and *Una lucertola con la pelle di donna/Lizard in a Woman's Skin* (1971). Beginning that same year, Azzini took a simultaneous step backwards and forwards, becoming the assistant art director–set dresser to the renowned production designer Ferdinando Scarfiotti on three major motion pictures: Bertolucci's *Il conformista/The Conformist* (1970), Visconti's *Morte a Venezia/Death in Venice* (1971), and Billy Wilder's *Avanti!* (1972). After making *Lisa and the Devil*, Azzini designed the production of Liliana Cavani's *Il portiere di notte/The Night Porter* (1975) and *Al di là dei del bene e del male/Beyond Good and Evil* (1977). Remarkably, some of the furnishings collected by Azzini make reference to Bava's own past body of work—the rocking chair seen in Carlos' study is the same one that briefly seats the medium's ghost in *I tre volti della paura*'s *"La goccia d'acqua"* and the bed's headboard seen in Leandro's workshop—which also frames Telly Savalas' smiling face during the film's main titles—is the familiar one from *I vampiri, Le meraviglie di Aladino, I tre volti della paura*'s *"Il telefono,"* and *Il rosso segno della follia*.

Another crew member—a silent associate, as his name appears nowhere on the picture—was Giuseppe "Joe" De Blasio, who had previously worked with Bava during the preproduction stages of the ill-fated *Cry Nightmare*. Although Bava had abandoned that production after a dispute with Lawrence Woolner, he was evidently still on good terms with De Blasio. "He was an old-timer who had worked on *Cleopatra* [1963], and was well-known and respected within the industry," Leone explains. "I was always in and out of town, flying back and forth between Italy and New York and leaving the Rome office unattended, so Mario recommended that I hire De Blasio as our general manager. But he turned out to be a total deadweight; he did absolutely nothing. When we were working on *Lisa and the Devil*, he introduced me to another production assistant, Fausto Luppi, who did everything Joe should have done on that production. Joe just sat in the production office every day and looked at the numbers in his telephone book." Leone's remarks may seem gratuitous, but they are important in setting up events still to come in this story.

At one point early in the filming, De Blasio arranged for one of his old friends to visit the set—Burt Lancaster, whom he had first met during the filming of *The Crimson Pirate* (1952), while still a young executive at Warner Bros. Initially hopeful of securing a role in the film for his daughter, Lancaster was complimentary about what he saw happening on the *Lisa* set, which encouraged Leone to offer him the role of Carlos, at this point still uncast. (Leone's first choice for the role, Louis Jourdan, had turned the film down.) Lancaster quickly fell in with Leone's and Bava's fondness for bawdy humor, and pulled Leone's leg by suggesting that he might be persuaded to appear in his picture—if certain favors were rendered.

"I went to Bava and told him, 'Lancaster says he'll do the picture if Elke gives him a blow job,'" Leone chuckles. "Mario's eyes lit up and he said, 'If Lancaster will do the picture, *I'll* give him a blow job!' I said, 'Me, too!' So, as a gag gift, the three of us posed for a Polaroid, Elke, Mario, and me—with our mouths open! Lancaster loved it!"

Sommer, surprised by Leone's willingness to share this off-color story, remembers in turn that Bava and Leone were still harping on the joke long after Lancaster's departure. "They would walk around the set, like little boys, talking with their mouths open, saying, *'Have you theen Burt Lancathter? Where ith Burt Lancathter?'*"

As these stories illustrate, while the film's tenor was somber and funereal, the atmosphere on-set was actually happy, ribald, and lighthearted.





It is one of the prevailing legends of cinema history that movies made about the Devil are typically plagued with misfortune. *Lisa and the Devil* was no exception to the rule.

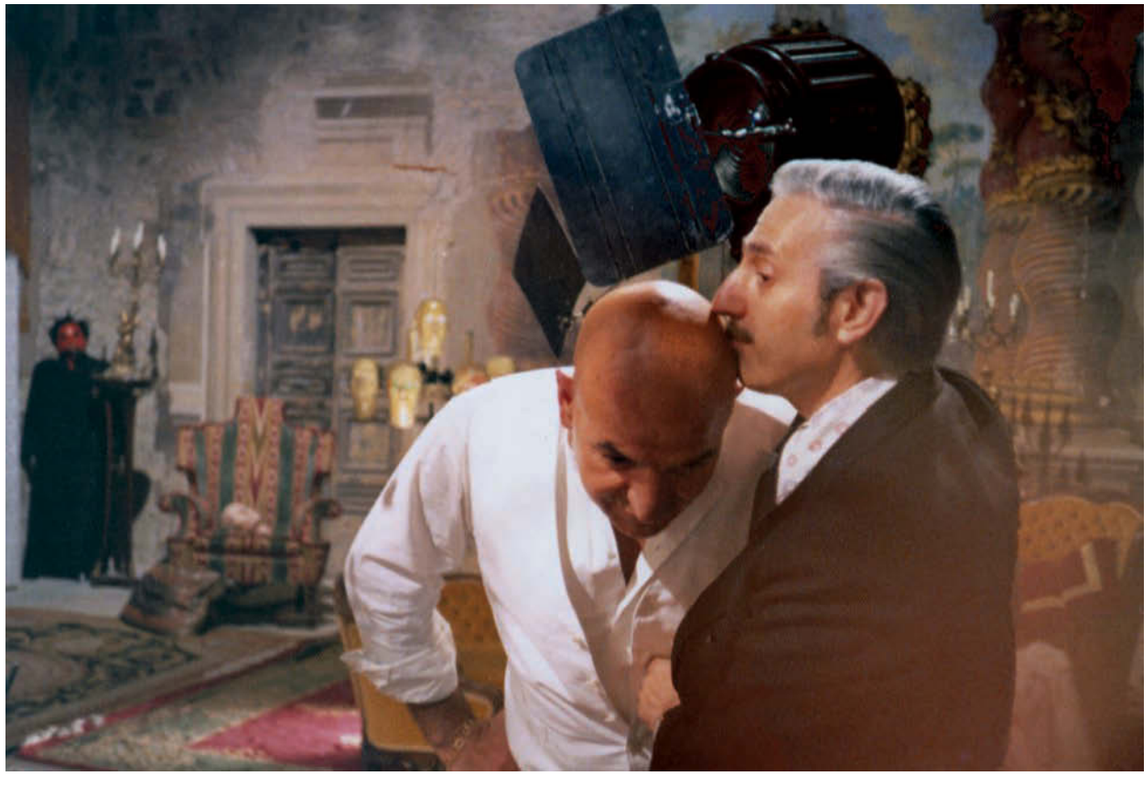
"The very first shot we did was of Elke running into a room," Leone recalls. "She slid as she turned the corner and fell right on her fanny, hurting herself. Bava turned to me at once and said, 'We will have difficulties on this picture.' A few days later, when Alida Valli showed up on the set wearing a purple gown, Bava took one look at it and said, 'Now I *know* we will have difficulties on this picture!' The color purple, for him, was unlucky. Sure enough, we had problems throughout the film."

"I believe there *is* a demonic force, and none of us got out of there unscathed," reckons Elke Sommer, whose personal ordeals continued after the shoot relocated to Madrid for villa exteriors (and some interiors). A case in point is the day when the film company travelled from Madrid to the airport in Barcelona, where Leone had arranged a day's shooting aboard a TWA 747 jet airliner. It was in this unlikely setting that the film's surreal finale was filmed.

"The ending was my conception," Leone points out. "Mario had suggested something to me; I forget exactly what he said, but it gave me the idea. I told him about it and he said, 'You're crazy, Leone.' Then, a minute later, he turned around and said, 'You know . . . *I like it!*'" It is a peculiar ending, which sits not entirely comfortably within the story, but it allowed Bava once again to explore and exploit his own fear of flying.

Leone had negotiated with TWA for the use of a 747, which he obtained for six hours on the condition that he shoot the scene two ways—once so that the TWA logo could be seen, and again so that would not be seen. "That jet was actually on call," Leone adds, "so if any 747 had broken down

TWO POLAROIDS *taken during the filming of Sophia's mourning scene. Below: Alfredo Leone kisses Telly Savalas' bald head for good luck as the film enters production.*





GEORGE'S *body is prepared for his funeral procession.*



LEANDRO *must repair a bad break in Carlos' head after Maximillian brains him in a violent act of jealousy.*

anywhere in the area, it would have been taken away from us, so we never knew how long we were going to have it. It was a gamble that I took." As it happened, the jet was not taken away, but an anticipated six-hour shoot dragged on, through technical misadventure, into ten, twelve, fourteen hours. Elke Sommer's then-husband, writer Joe Hyams, could see her exhaustion and began to loudly complain about how such overwork was forbidden by the Screen Actors Guild and other Hollywood unions.

"I finally told him to 'go off,' not to say something else," Sommer recalls, with a sly smile. "He wasn't helping. I think unions are pretty horrendous, quite honestly. Of course, I could have said, 'No more' after twelve hours. I *was* exhausted—and a little concerned about how I was going to look on camera in the morning with dark circles under my eyes, and there was very little room to move around inside that 747—but I was just so damned impressed that Leone got it! Mario was incredibly understanding. He said, 'Do you want to lie down?' I said, 'No, no.' However, I was very tired, and I fell over backwards on this battery box in the plane and one of the very sharp edges went into my spine. It broke a vertebrae. This is not very dangerous or life-threatening, but it was very painful."

As bad as these physical mishaps were for the film's lead actress, worst of all was the near-miss. While the crew was shooting at the airport, Madrid was hit by heavy rains—so heavy that the roof of the villa in which they had been filming collapsed, demolishing the rooms just below. "Our dressing rooms, wardrobe rooms, and makeup rooms were all right there," Leone says. "If we hadn't gone to shoot that scene on the jet, the entire cast and crew could have been killed!"

The production continued in Madrid despite the damages, everyone grateful to be alive. As the filming found its stride, the atmosphere of bad luck seemed to wear off and the participants began to get excited about the movie they were making. Elke Sommer entered into her character as though falling under a spell.

"The amazing thing is, Mario would never direct me," she reveals. "He would say, at the most, 'Do it as you always do it, Elke—do it as you *feel* it.' Technically, he was a genius with the lighting, with creating the environment. The morbidity of the environment was enough to induce your performance, even without direction. To me, it was a dream. And I continue to have these dreams, even though they are completely unrelated to my daily life. You know, I play golf, I have five dogs, I cook dinner for my husband, I clean the house, I plant flowers in my garden. I am a totally physical, outdoor person; I am not a morbid person, but *I have something morbid in me.*"

With this statement, Elke Sommer offers a remarkably astute and comprehensive explanation of Bava's directorial approach, as it concerned actors. Whereas a number of Bava's actors felt "left alone" by his attention to the camera and the time he lavished on the provision of atmosphere, his most spiritually attuned actresses—Barbara Steele, Daliah Lavi, Laura Betti, Daria Nicolodi (and I can make this call, having interviewed each of them)—have all remarked that their performances for Bava were summoned forth in response to a palpable "feeling" created on the set. Whereas Steele admits to being frightened by the "vibrations" she intuited while lying in her crypt, the others—Sommer included—were delighted by the dramatic situations they faced, approaching their roles with a sense of adventure, accepting this odd realm of experience as a necessary part of life. Given Sommer's testimony, it seems that Bava's unverbalized approach to direction was more subtle, more intuitive, than merely picking the right people, or faces, and leaving them to it. The environment, the atmosphere provided by Bava, was intended to serve as an almost supernatural inducement of the performance he required. Just as he declared himself to be most fascinated "by the fear of a single person alone in a room," he presided over his films as a conductor of morbid atmospheres. Rather than impose a wholly preconceived performance on an actor who might ring false to them, and therefore look wrong onscreen, he preferred to extract performances through the more elemental catalysts of environment and instinct.

Bava did not see *Lisa and the Devil* as an opportunity to stage the kinds of gratuitous sex and violence he had presented in *Ecologia del delitto*; he intended it as an exercise in classical restraint. This led to some disagreements with Leone, who felt it was important that the film be contemporary in every possible way. Whereas Bava wanted to view the tryst between George and Sophia through a chandelier, or reflected on the silver lid of an opened cigarette case (shared cigarettes once again serving as Bava's favorite symbol of adultery), or to view the climactic act of pseudo-necrophilia through the mottled haze of a dark

veil enclosing the canopied bed, Leone wanted to show some skin. He was so insistent about it that, while he allowed Bava to shoot the first coupling his way, he took over as director long enough to get some uncovered "coverage" in the can. This footage, which actually got released as a supplement on Elite Entertainment's "double feature" LaserDisc release of *Baron Blood* and *Lisa and the Devil,* and on Image Entertainment's "double feature" DVD of *Lisa and the Devil* and *The House of Exorcism,* shows Sylva Koscina and Gabriele Tinti, engaged in the bare-assed scrabble of fevered foreplay. Leone remembers: "Sylva Koscina had an abortion about a week or two before, and when the time came to shoot that scene, she was hot to trot. Bava refused to have anything to do with it; he set up the shot, called 'Action!' and left the room." In Bava's cut of *Lisa and the Devil,* the scene unreels without any noticeable nudity.

The most striking eroticism in the film occurs in the moments immediately preceding Sophia's murder, after she witnesses a spectral re-enactment of Carlos' murder. As Carlos is bludgeoned, a startling effusion of blood squirts across the screen, a trick made possible by projecting a blood flow onto a piece of glass positioned before the camera. When Sophia screams, the camera zooms in to her, and there is a reverse shot of the murderer cloaked in cardinal red, striking his final blow, which chromatically restates the outburst of blood. Sophia runs away to a disused room, bluish and peeling, where a panel of the wall suddenly juts open with a sharp creak, revealed as a secret passage. She screams again, as a man's hand, sleeved in red, creeps around the edge. The shot that follows shows Sylva Koscina, her back against the wall, screaming as the camera reveals her dress, its straps having slipped off her shoulders, hanging precariously low to bare more than just cleavage, without quite baring her breasts. Indeed, her dress appears to be entirely held up by the icy terror stiffening her nipples. Revealing without being explicit, it is the most erotic image in the movie and a most convincing case for Bava's argument that less is often

MARIO BAVA *confers with crew members in preparation for the dummy repair scene.*





LEANDRO *witnesses Sophia's hit-and-run murder of her husband in this beautifully baroque frame enlargement.*

more. According to Lamberto Bava, his father allowed him to direct this scene using his (Mario's) storyboards.

In regard to the climactic, semi-necrophilic scene played by Alessio Orano and Elke Sommer, the actress remembers that Bava approached it quite gamely. "I talked a long time about the nude scene with Mario, and he was not opposed [to it] at all. I live in a secluded house, so when I do my gardening or my painting, I don't wear much, so I am totally cool with that. My personal feeling about this is: I see absolutely nothing wrong with nudity onscreen, as long as it doesn't move. I think it's tremendously wrong to do a nude scene where you move; you flap around and jiggle and it becomes vulgar somehow. But I felt totally pure during that scene."

Bava's cut of this sequence eschews any obvious nudity, cutting away before Sommer's unbuttoned blouse is opened, and showing her breasts only from a distance, her nipples always obscured by the placement of her necklace—just as Helena Ronée was filmed during her tryst with Howard Ross/Renato Rossini in *5 bambole per la luna d'agosto*. Bava appeased Leone by shooting some nude coverage, and he also shot the scene of Sommer's disrobement through the black veil and, once again, without it. The nudity and the unobscured view of the scene were not used until the film's later reincarnation as *The House of Exorcism*.

Alfredo Leone admits to taking charge of the direction briefly when he and Bava had a disagreement about how explicitly the scene should be shot. Bava filmed the scene the way it appears in the final cut, but Leone shot additional footage of Orano feigning attempted copulation with Sommer. "Orano surprised me," Leone recalls. "He didn't understand the concept of impotence! He would be thrusting away at Elke like a champion, and I'd shout, 'No, Alessio—Maximillian is *impotent*. He can't make love to this woman!' He said, 'How can I not make love to this woman? She is beautiful!' I said, 'It's not that you don't want to make love to her—*you do*—but your body won't cooperate.' I couldn't make him understand it, so I finally said, 'Haven't you ever been unable to do something you wanted to do?' And we finally got through the scene that way." The additional Leone footage was eventually used in *The House of Exorcism*.

Bava was similarly disinclined to extend the film's violence into vulgarity. George's murder, for example, occurs offscreen; the last time we see him, he is peering under the hood of the Packard, his face near the whirring blades of the car's fan belt. On second viewing, knowing that his death is imminent, one may wonder why his murder was never filmed. Leone blames the omission of this key scene on another of the mysterious, diabolical instances of "bad luck" that plagued the production. "Some of the film's footage we couldn't use because, as Technicolor reported to us in a series of telegrams, there were unexplainable flashes—like fire—running through the shots," he says. "The ruined footage included various shots we had done in Madrid, revolving around the murder of the chauffeur."

However, the murder itself was never shot. "No, it was never shown," Leone confirms. "As Tinti is tinkering with the motor, I wanted a hand to come up behind him, forcing his face into the blades of the fan belt. When I suggested this to Mario, he said, 'Leone, you don't realize what's involved. First of all, we'd have to dismantle the radiator, then we'd have to made special blades made out of rubber . . .' so we decided the time and expense would be too great. We did without. It wasn't necessary to show the murder, since we had the element of surprise by having him tumble out the door of the car when Koscina falls against it."

Even without filming the actual collision of man and machine, one imagines that an extension of George's last shot—with the red-cloaked figure creeping up behind him, grabbing him at the base of the neck, and pressing his face closer and closer to the fan—would have paid higher dividends than simply having George tumble dead out of the car, a *fait accompli*, followed by the gratuitously misleading cutaway shot to the Countess fondling a pair of bloodied scissors (the evident murder weapon).

Although an exceedingly brutal scene, Sophia's murder of her husband—hitting him with the Packard, and running over his body several times, in drive and in reverse—manages to pack a punch without shedding too much blood. The extremely convincing physical effect, sold to a great extent by Fajardo's performance (and a simple blood capsule, bit at just the right moment), was achieved by placing the actor in a shallow ditch, his midsection positioned slightly lower than his head and feet, and having some crew members roll a lightweight, wheeled platform over his body.

With Bava not in complete control of the camera, *Lisa and the Devil* did not provide him with a wealth of opportunities for in-camera effects, but there are a couple. Mario used his "water glass" to insert a subjective shot, of Maximillian from Lisa's perspective as she loses consciousness. For the scene of Lisa emerging from the ruins of the villa, Bava executed a magnificent glass matte painting.

"There's a shot where she exits the villa and its totally destroyed, a hundred years later," says Leone, setting the stage. "Bava created that ruin on a sheet of glass. He sent the still photographer to take a shot of the villa, had a large black-and-white print made, and then asked to be left alone for two days. What he did was cut-out the photo of the villa, scissor out areas to make it look destroyed, and paste it onto the plate glass, and then he painted a second glass plate to give the first a sense of dimension. Elke Sommer stood on a platform in the distance behind them, with a marker



BAVA'S *uncanny matte painting of Lisa's emergence from the villa. Elke Sommer was standing in the middle of nothing on a square of cardboard to mark her place in the composition.*

to show her exactly where to stand, and when. On the screen, it looks like she's stepping out of an ancient ruin. It's a brilliant piece of work."

In every way, the production appeared to be a triumph. Alfredo Leone confesses to having had daydreams of Oscar night, the cast were pleased with their work, and Mario Bava was openly proud of what he had achieved for one of the few times in his career. Little did anyone suspect the future path the film would take, or that with only four more directorial assignments left to add to Mario Bava's filmography, *Lisa and the Devil* would be the last film he would complete as a director entirely on his own.

Music

The memorable score for *Lisa and the Devil* was composed and conducted by Carlo Savina. Born August 2, 1919, in Turin, Savina scored his first film—the comedy *Totò cerca pace*—in 1954, but spent most of his early years in the film business as a conductor of scores by other composers. Among his early conducting assignments were *Mio figlio Nerone* (1956) and *Le meraviglie di Aladino* (1961) for Angelo Francesco Lavagnino, and *Le fatiche di Ercole* (1958) and *Ercole e la regina di Lidia* (1959) for Enzo Masetti—all Bava-related pictures. As a composer, Savina was experienced at *pepla*, Spaghetti Westerns, and horror pictures throughout the 1960s and '70s—some of the most notable being Camillo Mastrocinque's *La cripta e l'incubo/Terror in the Crypt* (1964), Amando de Ossorio's *Malenka/Fangs of the Living Dead* (1967), and several for Antonio Margheriti, including *Contronatura/The Unnaturals* (1967), the Bava-related *Nude . . . si muore* (1968), and *. . . E Dio disse a Caino/ . . . And God Said to Cain* (1970). He was also the musical director of such important films as Antonioni's *Desierto rosso/Red Desert* (1964), Fellini's *Giulietta degli spiriti/Juliet of the Spirits* (1965), and De Sica's *Il giardino dei Finzi Contini/The Garden of the Finzi-Continis* (1970), and the conductor of Franco Zeffirelli's *The Taming of the Shrew* (1967), Francis Ford Coppola's *The Godfather* (1972), Fellini's *Amarcord* (1974), and Roman Polanski's *The Tenant* (1976) and *Tess* (1979). Savina died on June 23, 2002, at the age of 83.

Savina's conducting assignments were inarguably more prestigious than his composer credits, but his work, whether he is writing or conducting, is always characterized by a certain silvery sheen—a romantic sweep—that is unmistakably his own. This sound is ideally suited to the lush, decadent imagery of *Lisa and the Devil*, to which Savina responded with a misty masterpiece of his own.

The main theme, heard under the opening titles, reflects the story's dislocated timeframe by wedding the instrumentation of a pop group and a classical orchestra. Electric bass and a drum kit provide a subtle but propulsive rhythm, under a background wash of strings, while the main theme is stated by a female vocalist (Edda dell'Orso, best-known for her work with Morricone on Sergio Leone's *C'era una volta il West/Once Upon a Time in the West*) who sings a lilting melisma—that is, a melodic line without words. The melisma is underlined by lush strings and stabs of electric piano and harpsichord-treated keyboard, which ultimately responds to the melody with fluttering, flamenco-like patterns that prophesy the guitar lines of the Rodrigo piece heard later. This piece recurs later in the film, with the bass and drums more accentuated in the mix, during a flashback to Elena cavorting with Carlos on the grounds outside the villa,

This cue was originally recorded with a music box theme introduction, played on celeste, which was removed and incorporated into the narrative as the accompaniment to the



SPANISH *one-sheet poster, art by Francisco Fernandez Zarza Jano. Unfortunately, the only poster campaign ever created for the film.*

carousel-like music box that lures Lisa away from the fresco in Toledo. The piece can be heard in its original form on Savina's easy listening album *Summer Dreams,* where it appeared under the title "Theme for You"—and as a bonus track on Digitmovies' dual soundtrack release of *I vampiri* and *Caltiki il mostro immortale*.

The music in *Lisa*, when given a close listen on its own terms, sounds re-edited in many instances, making it difficult to judge the cues on their independent musical merits as a whole. That said, some individual cues lend immeasurable character and atmosphere to the proceedings—for example, the short but evocative cue that opens with willowy woodwinds, whose avian call is answered by a string section whose part seems to twist and ascend with each reply. Equally striking is a more lengthy piece commencing with a three-note pattern that screeches from a bold, medieval sounding viola, which segues into an electric piano restatement of the main theme. Elsewhere in the film, there is another cue—seemingly a continuation of the viola piece—in which the viola returns to play a two-note ostinato over churning, ascending strings and a discordant but strangely complementary keyboard pattern; this, in turn, melds into the reprise of the music box celeste, heard over a subtle backwash of strings that seems to rise, like excited breathing, with volume, truth, and lyricism. During the scene in which Lisa is startled by the apparition of Carlos at the window, Savina contributes a somewhat incongruous piece of chase music, with spy film overtones, distinguished by the use of vibraphone percussion.

The most inspired of Savina's musical contributions are those which can be easily mistaken for a collaboration of music and dubbing. The first of these is heard as Maximillian approaches his secret shrine, where a soft, sighing orchestral treatment of the music box theme is heard under the distant, almost spectral sound of a woman's weeping. It was not until I recorded a copy of the film's soundtrack for isolated study that I realized that the weeping was actually a musical component, a lachrymose melisma performed (again, by Edda dell'Orso) in time with the accompaniment—one of the great vocalist's most unusual performances. Similarly effective, but more likely a collaboration between the music and sound departments, is the vastly melancholy theme, pregnant with regret, that is heard as Lisa awakens in the ruins of the villa. This piece consists of orchestral strings playing a five-note pattern in a manner that rises and falls, joined by tenderly played piano providing a tender, articulate response between the sighs of violins. As Lisa moves among the ruins, the music is joined by the velvet voice of Maximillian, beseeching Lisa not to go, which is spoken in time with the music in such a way as to effect a lyric accompaniment.

As fine a score as this is, its true *appassionata* is derived from a borrowed component, a Phillips recording of Joaquín Rodrigo's "*Concierto de Aranjuez*" performed by French composer/conductor Paul Mauriat (best-known for his international hit of 1968, "*L'Amour est Bleu*/Love Is Blue"). Rodrigo was born in 1909, and this, his most famous composition, was first performed in Barcelona in 1940—around the time Bava had graduated from being an apprentice to becoming a cameraman in his own right. The "*Concierto de Aranjuez*" was no stranger to modernist interpretation; Miles Davis and Gil Evans made it the centerpiece of their seminal 1959 jazz album *Sketches of Spain.* Whereas that rendition is alternately grand and melancholy, the Mauriat recording is full of tenderness, vulnerability, passion, and bravado. It's lushly orchestrated, but never tasteless; a pop rendition, but a faithful and moving one.

The Mauriat recording was Bava's own discovery. Not only did he impress a copy of the record on Savina, who quoted it in the composition of his music box melody, but he took the unprecedented step (for him) of bringing the music to the set and using it to inspire the actors' performances and to give Cecilio Paniagua's cinematography indications of the elegiac mood he wanted onscreen.

"When we were making *Lisa and the Devil,* Bava kept playing the *'Concierto de Aranjuez'* throughout the shooting, from beginning to end," Leone remembers. "Everyone was fascinated; it was hypnotic for them."

Though Rodrigo's composition seems to permeate *Lisa and the Devil*, it is actually heard only twice in the film—for the first time, as the blind Countess runs her fingers over Lisa's face and asks Leandro to describe her.

COUNTESS
The eyes, Leandro . . . What color are the eyes?

LEANDRO
Changeable, milady, but by candlelight—blue.

COUNTESS
And the hair, Leandro? Tell me of it. Tell me of the hair.

LEANDRO
Light, milady, and gently flowing.

COUNTESS
Golden? Like a field of wheat?

LEANDRO
No, milady—brighter still, and haloing an equally beautiful countenance. Oh, she's a very lovely creature, milady.

Again, the dialogue (which may well be among the film's literary borrowings, given its exceptional quality) works in concert with the musical accompaniment, like a dramatic reading. The piece is reprised at the moment of Maximillian's failure to achieve a sexual climax with Lisa's inert body, and when we take these two applications into account, one feels that Bava may have been making a statement about the inability of the artist to achieve, or be worthy of, the true perfection found in nature.

My correspondent Henrik Hemlin wrote me something interesting about the background of this piece of music: "For a long time, Rodrigo told the story that the second movement relates to the wind in the trees at the summer palace of Aranjuez. (I also read it relates to an annual religious procession in Seville.) There is certainly an element of aristocratic dreaming and 'the poetry of the garden'



MAXIMILLIAN *introduces Lisa to the lady who likes her cake with chocolate sprinkles.*

in this beautiful, melancholy piece of music. But, apparently, Rodrigo kept secret for a long time what the slow movement really represents. The Aranjuez was written at the worst time of the composer's life. He and his wife, Turkish pianist Victoria Kamhi, had just lost their first baby. The second movement is a conversation with God. The repetitious guitar chords signifies the pulse of life. The melody, going through the various instruments of the orchestra, is all the emotions felt by Rodrigo: his love for the baby, his love for his wife, his entreaty to God not to take her. When the guitar comes back at the end, it's the acceptance of God's will, the feeling of peace, and the movement ends with the ascension of the soul of the baby . . . Anyway, be it gardens, religious processions, death and the ascension (or *de*scension, in this case) of the soul . . . it kind of suits the movie, doesn't it?" [5]

Though Rodrigo was alive at the time of filming (he died in 1999), there is no record of his reaction to his signature composition being used as an accompaniment to *Lisa and the Devil*. Of course, Bava never spoke of his own relationship to the piece, leaving it as one of many personal, unexplained, perhaps unknowable touches that lend a particular fascination to this film, whose fluid and virtually unconscious narrative nominates it as the most musical of all his works.

A NEW LIFE *. . . or death? Lisa awakens from her adventures as if from a frightening romantic dream, naked as the day she was born.*

Commentary

After experiencing *Lisa and the Devil,* one realizes that Mario Bava's yearning to have "*carte blanche*" on a film had nothing to do with money and everything to do with ideas. The film has a lavish appearance, but realistically speaking, it looks no more lavish than *Baron Blood* or any of Bava's most important works of the early 1960s; Alfredo Leone used to tally the film's budget at $1,000,000 (remember, this is when $1,000,000 was a lot of money . . .), but he admits today that it actually cost quite a bit less to make, that it was Bava's ability to stretch a dollar onscreen which made it *look* like a million. What Bava craved, and had evidently not previously experienced in his career as a filmmaker. was a supportive framework that would offer him the absolute freedom to pursue his Muse. *Lisa and the Devil* was that once-in-a-lifetime opportunity.

In the history of horror films, there have been many classic movies that blend terror and poetry—Jacques Tourneur's *Cat People* (1942) and *I Walked With a Zombie* (1943), Georges Franju's *Les Yeux sans Visage/Eyes Without a Face* (1959), and Jack Clayton's *The Innocents* (1961), to name a few. A far more select number have dared to push the envelope to such unusual



extremes that they resemble a kind of waking dream—Carl Dreyer's *Vampyr* (1932), John Parker's *Dementia/Daughter of Horror* (1955), and Robert Altman's *Three Women* (1977) come to mind. *Lisa and the Devil* fits well into both categories, and yet, while the titles representing the first group deign to stagger their poetry with passages of mundane reality, *Lisa* does not. Likewise, the titles in the second group may appear to be function on a subconscious or unconscious level at times, but nevertheless make some concession to logic or the elucidation of character psychology; again, *Lisa* does not.

Here, the normal compass points of time and place and character come unfixed, as though the hands of the clock have broken and crossed. The film eventually reveals its central timeframe as sometime in the 1870s, yet while Lisa inhabits that past, that alternate reality bends to accommodate her 1970s manner of fashion, modern conveniences like gaffer's tape, and even 20th century confections like the lollipop (invented circa 1908). Furthermore, Lisa's memories of her past life as Elena, which come to her while she inhabits this peculiar plane of existence, should be placed even further in the past but seem to take place in an inverted past where her clothing looks vaguely futuristic, if not the clothes one wears only in fantasy. This world knows what she knows, consciously, subconsciously, unconsciously, and in lives already lived. Each scene seems to melt and recede into the next, as we attend this beautiful, doll-like heroine on her metaphysical odyssey through the capital concerns of art, sex, death, and identity.

If we must apply a logical interpretation of the film's events, there are at least a couple worth pursuing. One is that, with this film, as with *La ragazza che sapeva troppo* in 1963, Mario Bava may have anticipated Dario Argento by depicting a character in the grip of what has become known as "the Stendhal Syndrome." In his travel memoir *Rome, Naples et Florence in 1817,* the French writer Marie-Henri Beyle (1783–1842), publishing for the first time under his *nom de plume* "Stendhal," described the experience of feeling overpowered, dislocated from himself, even to the point of losing consciousness, when exposed for the first time to the direct impact of great works of art while visiting the museums in these regions. This phenomena is common enough, apparently, for the Uffizi Gallery in Florence to maintain a room of cots where visitors can recover themselves, and for a psychologist to have written a book about contemporary sufferers of the malady, which Stendhal, in his less enlightened age, ascribed to his overly romantic nature. The moment that Lisa steps outside herself is the moment when she first sets eyes on the medieval fresco of the Devil and the dead, and the image of the Devil resonates with her throughout the rest of the narrative, appearing in the antiques shop, in the labyrinthine plaza outside the shop, in the villa of the Countess, and finally in the cockpit of the 747. Argento explored his own ideas on the subject in *La sindrome di Stendhal/The Stendhal Syndrome* (1996), but aspects of this phenomenon appear in Bava's work as early as *La maschera del demonio,* in which Princess Katia admits to a lifelong disturbance under the gaze of her ancestor's portrait—and the malevolent gaze of a family portrait recurs in *Evil Eye* (Bava's cameo as the lecherous uncle's photo), *Operazione paura,* and also *Baron Blood.* In most cases, the portraits in Bava's films symbolize a truth—Katia's fateful resemblance to Asa, Monika's identity as Melissa's sister, the true face of Otto von Kleist. The truth communicated by the fresco in *Lisa and the Devil* may be a feeling of *déjà vu,* that Lisa has been in Toledo before.

As the above synopsis shows, the film has a storyline, but the story is not what the movie is about, just as a painting is not always "about" the sunset or the nude arranged within the frame, but about the movement of the brush, the color values of the paint, and the energy of the overall piece, In a way, *Lisa and the Devil* is about the process of watching *Lisa and the Devil*—not in the sense of being a *mise-en-abîme* or having a self-referential, Chinese box construction, but in the sense of encouraging its viewers to drift along inside its rococo architecture at their own pace, to waft like ghosts at the side of its protagonist, to "get lost" with her and react as she does to its unbidden mysteries, with head-to-foot flushes of fear and pleasure. It is less a movie than a reverie, an original experience that somehow feels re-experienced on the first pass. Thus, it is a film that stubbornly resists being inhabited except by its own *dramatis personæ.* Not even the characters themselves seem to presently inhabit the story, wherein they all speak and act from displaced perspectives; Maximillian yearns to recapture the love in which he believed before Elena betrayed him; the Countess speaks to her adult son as



DAGMAR LASSANDER *as she appears in the 1968 German film ANDREA—WIE EIN BLATT AUF NACKTER HAUT/THE NYMPHO . . . an inspiration for Lisa's awakening?*

5 Henrik Hemlin, email to the author, April 24, 2003.

though he were still a child; Carlos seems unable to accept the fact of his own death and pleads with Lisa to run away with him, as if this lost fulfillment could put breath back into his lungs; the Lehars comport themselves like a contented *bourgeois* couple, while their private behavior indicates a desire to be rid of each other; and much as Princess Katia is unnerved by the portrait of her evil, twin ancestor in *La maschera del demonio*, the villa awakens the possibility, otherwise dormant in Lisa, that she may, or may not, be the reincarnation of Elena. Every character is comparable to a dead and damned soul, puppets condemned to re-enact their past sins throughout eternity, until they learn from these mistakes, and thus gain the wisdom necessary to move forward.

In the penultimate scene, Lisa—who truly is the reincarnation of Elena, if we are to trust the memory awakened by the music box—is seemingly spared the Hell of dying once again in Maximillian's bed . . . but is she? Her subsequent awakening in the ruins of the villa, nude in a garden, suggests a rebirth and the possibility that the sincerity of her love for Maximillian, this time around, has finally loosened the Devil's grip on her soul. According to Alfredo Leone, the film—as Bava conceived it—was originally supposed to end with this scene. However, the final scene—Leone's own contribution to the script—takes Lisa aboard another of Leone's 747 jets. Just as we think we've finally found our bearings, the setting changes, but the metaphor remains constant—the dead are being carried away. But if the dead are being carried up into the heavens, as this metaphor suggests, who is the pilot? What saves the final fade-out from seeming like a cheap, ironic effect



MARIO BAVA *offers Elke Sommer a half-hearted rescue from the Devil's clutches, as Alfredo Leone looks on in delight.*

is the possibility it raises that God and the Devil may have the same face, be two sides of the same coin. Wherever they may take us, we're still clay in their hands. We're still dead.

When asked for her own interpretation of Lisa's plight, Elke Sommer responds firmly. "I don't think she is reviewing her previous life," she says, refuting the most common critical interpretation of the story. "To me, [the film] is a dream, with the possibility that something like this happens when you pass away. I have a strong belief—a strong *hope*, let us say—that when I pass away, everything I have learned in my life will not be for nothing. The good things, the fine things I have inside me—and the shitty things, as well. When I was playing Lisa, I approached her story totally as a dream." Sommer's interpretation is consistent with my own Stendhal Syndrome theory; the film could be a dream, a reverie, a glimpse of the past, provoked by exposure to a work of art that speaks directly to Lisa.

But *Lisa and the Devil* is also about the relationship between art and death, and perhaps the triumph of art over death. The film is a veritable minefield of metaphors for death. Lisa's adventure begins when she wanders away from her tour group. The music box whose melody lures her into the antiques shop displays a procession of figures based on the 14th century morality poem "The Dance of Death," in which individuals of various social stations, beginning with the highest—the Pope—enter into dialogue with the Devil. Attentive viewers will notice that many of the figures present among the carvings on the music box also appear as full-sized mannequins in Leandro's studio, including the Pope, identified by the crimson mantle that Maximillian dons prior to committing his murders. The six figures are also echoed by the presence of a circular, columned gazebo on the villa property.

The first words Leandro addresses to Lisa (in the antiques shop) are "Do you think black is too severe, Miss?" which at once refers to the outfit worn by the dummy of Carlos, but also seems to question the traditional color of mourning and our society's generally humorless view of death. Lisa's immediate disorientation upon leaving the shop—indeed, finding the exit she used only a minute earlier suddenly sealed—is disturbing because it cuts off her return to places she has known, while the labyrinthine landscape and the recurring presence of Leandro and the dummy effectively places her within the ancient fresco she saw earlier. Her discovery of the broken-down Packard is introduced with the radiant emanation from its headlights (as she runs toward it, we see her "going into the light"), and the way it carries her and the Lehars to a common destination, recalls a redressed ferry ride with other dead souls across the River Styx. As Lisa and the Lehars are escorted by Leandro to the cottage, they are shown traversing a bridge ("crossing over"), and so on. In the Countess' villa, we see many semblances of the dead, in the forms of sculptures, statues, even photographs, while their models are either entirely absent, present in ghostly form, or skeletonizing in seclusion.

The film's oneiric texture is sustained by its leisurely pace, which was decided to some degree by its use of Rodrigo's "*Concierto de Aranjuez,*" and perhaps to another degree by the casting of Alida Valli. If one looks for antecedents to *Lisa and the Devil,* one great, inevitable comparison would be to Luchino Visconti's *Senso* (1954), set in 19th century Venice, in which Valli played another Countess, Livia Serpieri, whose unwise love for a handsome young officer in the Austrian army (Farley Granger) mirrors the Countess' romantic betrayal by Carlos in Bava's film. Both films are operatic tragedies, opulently staged in authentic period villas, made all the more striking by their deliberate pacing and the subtle relationship between their camera movements and musical accompaniment. Further *hommage* was paid to Valli in the way Elke Sommer played Lisa's death scene aboard the 747. If one compares the two scenes side-by-side, it becomes apparent that Sommer was copying exactly the way in which Valli played her death scene in Franju's *Les Yeux sans Visage*.

One of the film's most impressive sequences from the standpoint of design is the funeral procession for George, in which Leandro is shown pulling the dinner cart-*cum*-bier, followed by the Lehars, Lisa, and Maximillian, who pass into silhouette behind an opaque stained glass panel—again echoing the carousel figures, and thus seeming to pass from the realm of life into art; then the camera lowers, surprisingly, to reveal a candelabra in the foreground, holding as many candles as there are figures in the procession, each one melting down or extinguished, each one a metaphor for the short wick of life. Another is the shot of Leandro observing Sophia Lehar's murder of her husband—a low-angle shot that sandwiches him between an art nouveau window and a rococo ceiling, a combination of styles to which Savalas adds a swirling plume of exhaled cigarette smoke. ("Where there's smoke, there's fire," as he comments elsewhere.) The complex, layered beauty of this shot is particularly effective as poetic counterpoint to a scene of violence.

An important cinematographic touch that is lost in current video transfers of the film is Leandro's skin tone, which was intended to be a hot orange tone, marking him as the Devil he is. A special makeup base was applied to Savalas' own tanned complexion each day to complete the effect, but when most telecine operators see this pronounced redness, they adjust the color levels to make it look normal, compromising not only this important visual detail but generally devaluing the potent color richness of the overall work. To see *Lisa and the Devil* on video is to be pleasantly intrigued and mystified, but to see it on the big screen in a proper Technicolor print, with its color scheme intact, is to be thoroughly entranced.

Throughout his career as a director, Mario Bava insisted that he was a technician rather than an artist, that he had no respect for directors pretentious enough to express themselves through their films. *Lisa and the Devil* appears to contradict those statements, which certainly were an imposture to some extent; more to the point, it depicts a filmmaker who was maturing, as an artist and as a man, beyond frontiers he had previously claimed for himself. *Baron Blood* had been a commercial and technical success, but to Bava, it offered few opportunities to solve new problems or to break new ground. Considering the strength of Bava's opinions on the above, it is unlikely that he approached *Lisa* consciously as a platform for his own self-expression; no film this obliquely stated can be regarded as ego-driven. It is much more likely that he felt, especially after *Baron Blood,* a need to force an evolutionary change in horror—if the genre was to survive and give him the status and longevity he hoped to achieve as a director. The irony of this is that, without knowing it, he had already made the film that would dictate the future course of the horror genre for the next thirty years: *Ecologia del delitto. Lisa*'s only mistake, as far as the rest of the world would be concerned, was in trying to raise the genre out of a perceived gutter, to use horror and the macabre as the basis of what is difficult to regard as anything but an art film.

Premiere

Lisa and the Devil premiered on May 9, 1973, at the Cannes Film Festival's Market, where producer Alfredo Leone hosted three screenings at the Paris Theatre. "While we were making the film, we thought we had Academy Award material going for us," he recalls, "and we had a tremendous turn-out for the first screening. No one left the theater. We had additional screenings, also to packed houses—but there were no buyers. The best offer I had at the time was $6,000 for the Far East—for the entire Far East, can you imagine?"

Despite its failure to attract serious distribution interest at Cannes, *Lisa and the Devil* might have had a happier ending had Alfredo Leone not tried to bluff his way through the poker game of distribution. According to Leone, Samuel Z. Arkoff offered him $250,000 for *Lisa*, sight unseen—twice what he had accepted for *Baron Blood*—but Leone, bowled over by the film Bava had given him and convinced that it had the quality to vault him into the Big Leagues, stubbornly held out for $300,000. Arkoff was so eager to continue his association with Bava and Leone that he flew to Rome to meet with Leone personally at the Hotel Excelsior. There, over breakfast, he took a check for $250,000 from his pocket and handed it to Leone. The producer

handed it back, insisting on $300,000. Arkoff, drawing back, replied that he could not offer that kind of money without the approval of American International's board of directors.

"C'mon, Sam," Leone bickered. "You *are* AIP."

"But I have investors to answer to," Arkoff countered, "and $300,000 is a hell of a lot of money. So is *this*," he pointed out, waving the check.

"Not enough," Leone said, firmly. ("I was a fool," Leone admits today. "I should have taken it.")

Remember, this offer was made *sight unseen*. Arkoff bristled at having his ante upped and told Leone, "Well, for that kind of money, I'd have to see the picture." Leone set up an immediate screening, his pride in the film not allowing for the possibility that Arkoff would withdraw his offer—which is exactly what happened. Emerging from the screening room, the rotund, cigar-chomping executive took the opportunity to let Leone have it. He lambasted *Lisa and the Devil* from all directions, itemizing the many changes he would doubtless have imposed on the picture anyway, had money actually traded hands. Among his complaints: the film was too talky, too arty-farty, and he hated the necrophilia scene almost as much as he hated Telly Savalas' lollipops, which he felt needlessly trivialized the film's most menacing figure.

"Al, you've got to understand," Arkoff lectured, "the horror fans take these films very seriously; they don't go for camp." This from a man whose biggest pictures at the moment were *Blacula* and *The Thing With Two Heads*.

Arkoff walked away from the picture. It was the end of Leone's brief association with American International.

Variant

In the meantime, thanks to the efforts of co-producer José Maesso, *Lisa and the Devil* was given a Spanish release in a variant cut entitled *El Diablo se Lleva los Muertos*—literally, "The Devil Transports the Dead." This version, which arrived in Barcelona theaters on November 25, 1974, runs approximately 4 minutes shorter than the official cut and contains some notable differences. The Spanish main titles are longer and more detailed; the producer is listed as José G. Maesso, and the screenplay is credited to a longer list of Spanish names, as well as Bava. Alfredo Leone's name appears nowhere on the picture. Made at the time Generalissimo Francisco Franco was still in power, and maintaining a wholesome standard for his national cinema, all of the sex scenes and nudity are missing from the picture. Curiously, the bludgeoning death of Sophia is intact, as it no longer is in the domestic release (for reasons that will be detailed at the close of the *House of Exorcism* chapter). Perhaps the most curious omission is the scene of Lisa exiting the villa, frightening the children playing in the street, and walking away as Leandro and his antiquarian friend look on. The Spanish version also features a slightly different editing in the climactic 747 sequence, omitting the slow track up to the pilot (here, the shot begins as the pilot turns around, revealed as the inescapable Leandro) and also the later shot of Lisa collapsing to the floor like a pallid corpse.

According to Leone, *Lisa and the Devil* was also released in Portugal, most likely in the version sanctioned by Maesso. Mario Bava would go to his grave thinking that his masterpiece had permanently joined the ghostly ranks of lost films. It was not until the early 1980s that it resurfaced, first in incomplete form on television, and then in the late 1990s, 99% intact, on videotape and LaserDisc. But before it could be reborn as itself, *Lisa and the Devil* would share the fate of its own protagonist, and be reincarnated into a form no one could have predicted.

The Shadow Guest . . . and Other Guests

The making of *Lisa and the Devil* had framed a period of rejuvenation in Mario Bava's professional and personal lives. However, the period immediately following its production—as the film failed to secure distribution in all but one market—was a time of disappointments, personal upheavals, and creative distress.

In late 1972, Bava was approached by Fulvio Lucisano to direct a film based on an American novel he had optioned, *The Shadow Guest* by Hillary Waugh. Waugh—no relation to the great British novelist Evelyn Waugh—was born in New England in 1920 and began his career with well-received police procedurals such as *Last Seen Wearing* (1952). In the 1960s, he turned to Gothic mysteries in the style of Daphne Du Maurier, such as *The Late Mrs. D* and *The Eleventh Mrs. Bluebeard*; *The Shadow Guest* was one of these.

It isn't known whether Bava actually read the novel, but he agreed to direct the film on the basis of a screenplay written by *Ecologia del delitto* scribe Dardano Sacchetti. It was evidently a liberal adaptation, as *Variety* soon announced the film's title as *Al 33 di via Orologio fa sempre freddo* ("It's Always Cold at 33 Via Orologio")—"Via Orologio" meaning "Clock Street." As Alfredo Leone busied himself with trying to sell *Lisa and the Devil*, Bava spent most of 1973 in preproduction on this project. Though she doesn't remember the title of the film (which was always changing), the expatriate American actress Mimsy Farmer recalls auditioning for the lead in the autumn of 1973, when she appeared in two screen tests under Bava's direction. Later in the year, *Variety* announced that the cumbersome title had been changed to *La casa 8* ("House Number 8") and that Sylva Koscina would star. The picture was never made, but Bava's and Sacchetti's ideas for the film would nevertheless continue to evolve, and mutate into another, separate project before Bava's career reached its end.

Then came 1974, which—in personal and professional terms—was almost certainly the most tempestuous of Bava's postwar life. It was then, after years of marital discord, that Mario's son and assistant Lamberto Bava filed for divorce from his wife Fiamma. The legal proceedings would drag on, gruelingly, for a full year, during which time Lamberto's children—Georgia (age 9) and Fabrizio, called "Roy" (age 7)—resided with their *nonno e nonna* in their house in the Northern part of Rome, at Via Valgardena 3.

As someone who had remained resolutely committed to his own wife, despite an often stifling and tempestuous marriage, Bava must have felt conflicted by his son's decision to divorce. But to have children in his house once again was a great source of joy, and their arrival came at a time when Mario was in need of the special brand of distraction they could provide.

Georgia describes the setting: "My grandparents lived in an upper middle-class residential area. Their house was quite big and there was wood everywhere—even wooden floors, parquet. My grandmother loved flowers, and I remember their big balcony with plenty of flowers. We lived there for a year."

Both grandchildren have vivid memories of their *nonno*'s personal library. "He had many, many books—loads and loads of books!" Georgia marvels. Roy, who would later inherit Mario's personal library, is more specific: "His favorite reading was Russian literature like Gogol and Turgenev, but also French writers like Guy de Maupassant, and generally, literature of a fantastical bent, like Poe and Lovecraft. He loved science fiction. In Italy there is a publisher [Edizione Mondadori] who used to publish a weekly collection—now it's every fifteen days—of science fiction stories [*Urania*], and he had them all. He also had books by Arthur C. Clarke, Robert Heinlein—everybody, really. The same publisher used to publish thriller collections—*gialli*—every two weeks, and he had them all. In Italy, science fiction used to be regarded as a minor form of literature, and my grandfather was very insistent that it wasn't minor at all. Every time a new collection was published, he would sit down with it at night and read it straight through in three hours. He would be up at three or four o'clock in the morning, reading—and he would still get up early. He would watch television at night with us, but only for a little while. When he was working, he would come back late at night and we would usually see him only on the weekends."

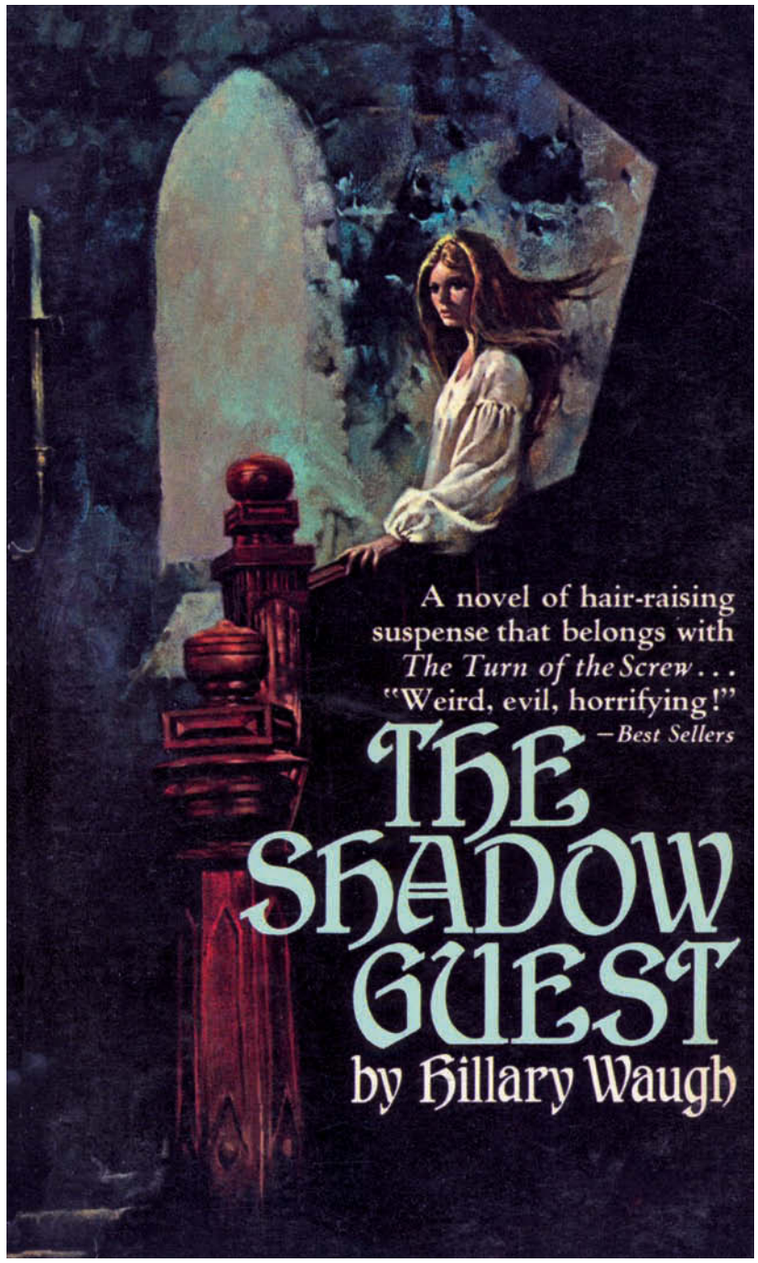
Sometimes, with Roy, Mario adopted the role of a paternal sage. "He once told me that there were three rules to finding happiness in life. First: *Don't ever get married.* Second: *Never own a dog.* And third: *Do not work in*

the movie business! So he was preaching something, but also going against his own preaching!"[6]

As the homemaker, Iole Bava naturally bore the brunt of caring for the children, but whenever he wasn't working—and sometimes when he was—Mario took pleasure in keeping them amused. As Roy recalls, "My grandfather was the kind of person who liked to play a lot with younger people. He was always trying to challenge me in a certain way to create interests in me, like having me read a lot of books, and going around with him. He would take me and my sister along with him, whenever he could. He would play ping pong with me, and he also loved to play cards. The nice thing was, when we used to play together, he would let me win. We were playing with money, you know, so he used to let me win so that I would feel like I was earning my money. He didn't often go to the movies, only when he was taking me and my sister. So he would be seeing Disney, Spaghetti Westerns, or science fiction—this kind of movie. I remember going with him to see *THX 1138* by George Lucas."

At the time, Mario and Iole's daughter Elena resided in the same area, as did Lamberto, who lived on the Via Imperatore, in the center of town. According to Georgia, Mario "was the center of our family. I loved him a lot because, every time I was invited to a party by my friends, he *wanted* me to go. My grandmother, on the other hand, was very strict and *didn't* want me to go. He was very liberal; he let us do whatever we wanted to do. He was like a big friend. We were close to him, and we could talk to him about everything."

Roy agrees. "I remember him as a very *positive* person. He used to pick me up at school and take me shopping. He spent a lot of time playing with me, and he liked to get me involved in his games—meaning, his work. Sometimes he would give me things after he was finished using them; for instance—something I no longer have, unfortunately—the miniature of Diabolik that was used for a shot in a parachute. Sometimes he would ask me and my sister to draw something, in the hope that he would find in our work something that might inspire him, because he was always interested in drawing and painting. "



Mario's grandchildren were also able to observe his relationship with Iole at first hand. Georgia describes the marriage as "very strained; I don't think they were all that happy, quite honestly. If my grandfather had married another woman, he would have been happier, and vice versa. They were quite different to one another in every way. He liked reading and the work he was doing, but when he was around her, he tried to hide [his interests]. She didn't understand his kind of movie. She liked romantic films; she didn't care how a special effect was made. You know how it is; when you hear about nothing else all day, you get tired of it. My grandfather lived mainly for the cinema, and my grandmother didn't understand this. She was very proud of having a husband who was a director, but that was it."

Since becoming a director, Bava had acquired a number of homes away from home, as he enjoyed an occasional change of scene. Until the late 1960s, he kept a *pièd à terre* apartment near the Piazza del Popolo, where he could meet with associates from the film business without disturbing Iole's need for privacy. He also had a small house in Velletri, near the Frascati wine country. "It was just like a country house," Roy remembers, "but we seldom went there. We would go sometimes on the weekends, but we wouldn't sleep there."

The grandchildren were particularly fond of Mario's summer house in Tuscany—a three-hour drive from Rome—which was located in a little village called Abadia San Salvatore, on Monte Amiata. Each summer, before and after the period when Georgia and Roy lived with their grandparents, Lamberto and his youngsters would drive out to Tuscany to spend a vacation of 15–20 days with Mario and Iole.

Roy describes the family's Tuscan retreat: "It was a big building that was erected in the center of this village. It was twelve stories tall in the middle of a place where nothing was taller than three floors. He had a very big terrace overlooking the whole area. I don't know how long they had it, because when I was only 1 year old [1968], they already had it. The interior was more rustic than it was at their place in Rome. My grandfather was very fond of English antiques, and he had a collection of miniature trains. He also had a small collection of ancient Roman smoking pipes, just a few."

For Iole, the Tuscan climate was calming to her heart palpitations. For Mario and Georgia, Monte Aniata was a good place to hunt for mushrooms—but inevitably, the easygoing life began to chafe at Mario and he would grow depressed.

"Sometimes in the mountains," Roy observes, "he would have liked to be in the middle of some different action; the vacations were too relaxing for him. It probably wasn't very intellectually stimulating—you know, a village in the mountains . . ."

6 Roy Bava, *Mario Bava Maestro of the Macabre* interview transcript, 2000.





FATHER MICHAEL *(Robert Alda) must rid the hospitalized Lisa Reiner (Elke Sommer) of Satanic influence in THE HOUSE OF EXORCISM.*

The House of Exorcism

AN ENTIRE YEAR passed without takers for *Lisa and the Devil*. With allegedly more than $1,000,000 of his own money sunk into this accursed, *carte blanche* white elephant, Alfredo Leone decided that something had to be done to lend it some boxoffice gunpowder. The course of least resistance was obvious: Leone had in his hands a very high-quality picture involving the Devil at a time when the hottest film in the world was about demonic possession: William Friedkin's *The Exorcist* (1973). In fact, the William Peter Blatty novel upon which the Friedkin film was based had been dogging Leone peripherally for some time. During the filming of *Lisa and the Devil*, Elke Sommer's husband Joe Hyams happened to mention it.



LISA *suffers a sudden violent seizure after visiting an antiques shop in Toledo, Spain.*

Leone: "Hyams said, 'Al, there's a book out called *The Exorcist*—it's your kind of story.' I said, 'Joe, I've got my hands full with this thing; I'm not looking to buy another book.'" And later, a waiter friend of mine in New York. who always wanted to be in show biz and wanted to invest with me, said to me one day, 'Why don't you forget that picture of yours and do something with *The Exorcist*?' That's how the idea for *House of Exorcism* was born." [1]

Alfredo Leone's instincts about how to salvage his investment cannot be faulted, as several other Italian producers were thinking along similar lines at the same time. Within a year of *The Exorcist*'s nationwide release on December 26, 1973, the international film market was glutted with *Exorcist* imitations from Italy, Spain, Belgium. Ovidio Assonitis' *Chi sei?/Beyond the Door*, Alberto De Martino's *L'Anticristo/The Tempter*, Amando de Ossorio's *La Endemoniada/Demon Witch Child*, and Mario Gariazzo's *L'ossessa/The Sexorcist* were all in theaters before the end of 1974. "Exorcist Fever" ran so high at the American boxoffice, in particular, that a number of unscrupulous, low-end film distributors seized the opportunity to repackage some older, unprofitable imports with new monikers like *The Devil's Nightmare*, *The Long Night of Exorcism*, and *Voodoo Black Exorcist*.

Friedkin's film had not yet been released in Italy, and it was Leone's idea to quickly produce an imitation work that could be distributed in Italy and other European countries in reasonable advance of the original. If half or more of the existing *Lisa* footage was used, the majority of the picture would already be in the can.

Bava was not happy about the idea of painting a mustache on his masterpiece—much less having it vomit a frog—but he felt an obligation to Leone to help him recoup the money he had lavished on his dream project. Since it wasn't possible to see *The Exorcist* in Italy, Leone persuaded Bava to make his first and only trip to Great Britain. In the company of production managers Bruno Frascà and Frederick "Fritz" Muller, Bava flew into London, went straight to the theater where he caught an afternoon screening of *The Exorcist*, taxied directly to the airport, and flew right back home again.

With *The Exorcist* fresh in his mind, Bava screened *Lisa and the Devil* several times, looking for places where existing scenes could be rewritten or new ones might be inserted. Leone remembers Bava phoning and pleading with him to reconsider: "It's too beautiful, Leone! We are *not* going to touch it!"

Leone was upset as well. "Mario," he told him, "we *are* going to touch it, because the way it is, I can't sell it and I sure as hell can't eat it!"

"We had no alternative," Leone says defensively. "Of course, Mario wasn't happy about making the changes, but being a man of compassion and understanding, he said, 'Whatever it takes to regenerate the investment' and that he would be available."

A Hollywood screenwriter residing in Rome, H. A. L. Craig (1925–78, best-known for *Waterloo* and *Airport 1975*), was paid $35,000 by Leone to prepare a new script based on the existing footage, but his work was deemed "absolutely embarrassing" by the producer and thrown out. Leone subsequently caught a showing

The House of Exorcism

Reshoots filmed in Barcelona and Rome
April 2–18, 1974
First released: April 2, 1975
Technicolor, 1.85:1, 92 minutes

Credits same as *Lisa and the Devil*, with these exceptions: Director: Mickey Lion [Mario Bava and Alfredo Leone]. Screenplay: Alberto Cittini, Alfredo Leone. Additional photography: Mario Bava (uncredited). Production managers: Frederick "Fritz" Muller. Bruno Frascà. Additional music: "The Rites of Spring" by Igor Stravinski.

Cast additions: Robert Alda (Father Michael), Carmen Silva (Temptress).

Canada: *The House of Exorcism*, International Film Distributors, 1976
France: *La Maison de l'Exorcisme*, Selection C.A.A., 9/28/77, 90m. Video: *La Maison de l'Exorcisme: Le Vengeance de Satan*
Germany: *Der Teuflische*, 1975, 86m
Italy: *La casa dell'esorcismo*, Transeuropea Film S.p.a., "Technicolor and CinemaScope," 4/2/75
Mexico: *La Casa del Exorcismo*, 1977
Poland: *Bom eqzoi'cyzmow*, "The Home of Exorcism," Filmservice opal
Spain: *La Casa del Exorcismo*, 1975
UK: *House of Exorcism*, Scotia-Barber Distributors, 2/77, 93m 5s, Certificate "X, " passed with cuts
US: *The House of Exorcism*, Peppercorn-Wormser Releasing, Color by Movielab, 7/9/76, 92m. Video: *The Devil in the House of Exorcism*

of *The Exorcist* himself, at the Paramount Theater in Manhattan's Columbus Circle, and returned to Rome, where he presided over a series of script meetings with Italian screenwriter Alberto Cittini, *Lisa*'s art director Nedo Azzini, and Bava, with the intention of hashing-out a new storyline. As Leone admits of these sessions, "We had many, many misunderstandings and disagreements." Bava repeatedly threatened to wash his hands of the project, but was ultimately compelled to see it through, fearful of entrusting his *Lisa* footage to the hands of some uncaring hack. As the meetings continued, dominated by Leone and Cittini (who share credit for the final screenplay, which was written first in Italian, then translated into English), Bava oscillated between anger and a passive-aggressive gloom.

Roy Bava, who was residing with his grandfather during this period, remembers *The House of Exorcism* period very well. "He was coming home very pissed off, all during the period of that movie," he laughs, with a bit of a shudder. "I never saw him that angry about anything before!"

As *The House of Exorcism* drew closer to production, Leone decided to cut the going price of *Lisa and the Devil* in half. Bryanston Films—who had successfully released the Carlo Ponti productions *Andy Warhol's Frankenstein* and *Andy Warhol's Dracula*—expressed an interest in the film to the tune of $150,000. Leone was tempted, but sensing that the company was "on shaky ground," he resisted.[2] A reward for his patience soon materialized in the form of a $200,000 offer from Allied Artists—whose ground would ultimately prove just as shaky, though Leone didn't notice. To his ever-lasting regret, he sold the North American rights to *Lisa and the Devil* to Allied Artists, using the income as seed money for his *Exorcist* knock-off, which would ultimately cost somewhere in the neighborhood of $300,000.

1 Alfredo Leone, *Mario Bava Maestro of the Macabre* interview transcript, 2000.

2 Leone's suspicions turned out to be well-founded. The company went under in 1975.

Synopsis

Lisa Reiner and her friend Kathy are part of a tour bus group visiting Toledo, Spain. As their tour guide lectures to them about a medieval fresco depicting the Devil carrying away the dead, Lisa is charmed away by the melody of a distant music box. She follows the music to an antiques shop, where she sees a bald man—identical to the Devil in the painting—carrying a life-size dummy of a man. She admires the music box and asks the price, but the shopkeeper explains that it belongs to the other customer. When she leaves, the shopkeeper comments on Lisa's resemblance to someone else and extracts a dusty bust of her twin, which the bald man slaps on the forehead. Outside in the street, as if struck on the head, Lisa is knocked down and suffers a violent seizure. A priest, Father Michael, emerges from the crowd and accompanies Lisa and Kathy to the hospital.

As the ambulance speeds away, Lisa laughs demonically—while another Lisa, the inner Lisa, wanders lost through a city of the soul. In an empty square, she encounters Leandro—the bald man from the antiques shop—and his dummy. She asks for directions back to the fresco of the Devil and the dead, but his instructions lead her instead to a keyhole-shaped passage, on the other side of which she is approached by the exact, living twin of the dummy carted around by Leandro, He seems to know her, but addresses her as "Elena." Frightened, she repels his urgent familiarity, accidentally knocking him down a flight of stairs. She then hurries away, thinking she has killed him. A pocket watch spills out of his vest, its broken hands crossed.

At the hospital, Lisa demonstrates a formidable strength and uses obscene language in a beastly, guttural voice. Kathy expresses concern to Father Michael, who advises her to rejoin her tour group, or she'll miss her flight back to America. Father Michael hears Lisa chortling "It's her turn now! Finally a body, a living body! She will suffer now and not I! It's her turn!" When he questions her by name, she answers, "I'm not Lisa, and I never was Lisa!"

Meanwhile, the inner Lisa encounters a middle-aged married couple, Francis and Sophia Lehar, and their chauffeur George, who is trying to get their deluxe Packard working. She begs a ride from them, but the car breaks down again outside a resplendent villa, where the door is answered by the resident majordomo: Leandro. The lady of the house, the Countess, wants the visitors to be sent away, but after seeing Lisa, her son Maximillian pleads with her to let them stay. She agrees, but "not in here—show them to the cottage."



RESISTING *Father Michael's help, Lisa becomes violent and verbally abusive.*

The doctors can find no physical cause for Lisa's problem, causing the priest to speculate that it must be rooted not in her physiology, but in her soul.

As Leandro escorts the guests to the cottage, he speaks confidentially to Lisa, reminding her of their earlier encounters. Once settled in, Lisa bathes and Sophia sneaks away to a sexual assignation with George, which is witnessed by a shadow at their window.

The doctors examine X-rays of Lisa's skull but can find no physiological causes for her behavior. Their attempts at diagnosis are disturbed by a violent ruckus in her room, where they find her performing unreal gymnastics. Dangling upside down, she bites the crotch of one of the interns struggling to subdue her. She is restrained and wheeled away, cackling, "Dinner is served!"

Dinner is served at the villa by Leandro. After the main courses, he unveils a chocolate cake and Maximillian takes the first slice to someone elsewhere on the property—a woman named Elena, who is kept in a darkly veiled canopy bed in a secret room behind a mirrored wall. He addresses her scornfully, saying, "He's come back . . . but you'll never leave this room. Never!" After dinner, the Countess asks Leandro to describe Lisa to her, revealing to everyone that she is actually blind. As he voices his description, Maximillian opens a dusty book in the secret room to reveal an antique photograph of Elena, who looks exactly like Lisa.

At the hospital, Lisa—possessed by the Devil, and by the damned soul of Elena—rants: "Impotent! Maximillian was impotent and that's why I had to fuck Carlos! Do you know how horny a virgin gets?" She tells Father Michael that she, Elena, married Maximillian as a young virgin, but he was rendered impotent through hatred of his stepfather, Carlos, and incestuous jealousy of his mother. Unable to be satisfied by her husband, Elena succumbed to the charms of Carlos, and when the two fell in love and decided to run away together, they were murdered. "There's nothing you can do," she says. "It's already happened, and it's going to happen again."

Francis discovers Sophia outside, looking for George, who is found dead inside the Packard, his face torn as though pushed into the car's fan belt. Leandro supervises as the body is taken inside, and he suggests that they leave the disposal of the body to him. The Packard is now working again, but Sophia does not wish to leave George; Francis insists, but she rebels by getting behind the wheel herself and running over her husband until he is dead. As if relating this story, the hospitalized Lisa/Elena asks Father Michael, "Can that white host of yours erase the darkness of crime?"



ITALIAN *manifesto.*

Upset by this turn of events, Lisa—in her room at the cottage—knocks over a pocket watch and its broken hands cross, as they did during her first encounter with Carlos. Within moments, she sees Carlos peering at her through a window. She runs back to the main house, and sees Leandro furtively carrying a man's body behind closed doors. She peers through a window and watches him preparing the body for burial—snapping its legs back at the shin to fit it inside a too-short coffin. Shocked to discover that the corpse is that of Carlos, she bolts for help inside the villa, where she finds herself in a room stocked with mannequins. When Carlos—alive—steps forward from among them, she faints.

Lisa/Elena, her mouth matted with dried vomit, begs Father Michael for a drink of water. As he pours it for her, the cup tumbles onto the floor and rolls away, accompanied by the sound of screeching tires and crashing metal. The priest flashes back on an incident from his past, before he was a man of the cloth, when his careless driving resulted in the death of his beloved, Anna. Lisa/Elena assumes the form of Anna, naked and alluring, to seduce the priest, but he resists.

Meanwhile, Carlos romances the inert Lisa on a fur rug in the mannequin room, calling her "Elena." He is so intent upon his lovemaking that he fails to hear another person, cloaked in scarlet, enter the room. The intruder clubs Carlos to death, the blood splattering on Lisa's blouse, The murder is witnessed by Sophia, who is pursued to a closet-like space where she, too, is bludgeoned to death. Lisa is found by Leandro, who sets about repairing the broken head of his Carlos dummy like a skilled artisan, and then measures Lisa's body in order to make an accurate facsimile of her. When all her measurements have been taken, he awakens Lisa, who is stunned to see the dummy of Carlos, who, Leandro assures her, is dead. Leaving the room, Lisa discovers the Countess leaning over the battered, bloody form of Sophia, and flees into the arms of Maximillian. He asks her to help him leave the villa, to escape the jealousy of his mother. He tells her she is beautiful, comparing her to Elena, whom he then proceeds to introduce to her. Elena is a skeletonized corpse in a wedding veil, kept in this bed for many years. As Lisa screams, Max chloroforms her and strips off her clothes, and his own, determined to reclaim his potency with the help of her warm flesh—"It will be different with you . . . I know it will!"—but as he tries to consummate his passion, the imagined cacklings of Elena doom his efforts to failure.

Angrily, Max goes on a rampage, overturning the funereal trappings of the villa, cursing his mother and exclaiming, "I can't live like this, in your shrine of death!" The Countess comforts him, urging him to admit his love for her. As she walks toward his embrace, the Countess is penetrated by a sharp lance, thrust by Max, killing her. He then discovers a macabre shrine of all his victims—the people who tried to take Lisa, his second chance, away from him—seated at a table in an obscene mockery of "The Last Supper."



MEXICAN *lobby card. The topless woman at bottom center is Carmen Silva.*

The only one missing is the Countess, who appears and pursues Max until, recoiling, he topples from the window to his death on the arrowheads of an iron gate. The Countess is revealed to be another of Leandro's dolls, carried by him.

Her story told, Lisa/Elena confesses to Father Michael that all these events happened fifty years ago in a villa he knows well. She directs him to it, and he prays for her as she lies strapped to her bed, weeping and vomiting toads in a torrent of green bile.

As if freed from her possession, Lisa is shown escaping the villa in the first rays of morning, stepping over the broken doll of Maximillian. Leandro watches her go, and is approached by the antiques shopkeeper, who carries a lifesize replica of Lisa. Leandro decides to let her go, murmuring, "It's all too late, my friend. It's all too late."

Father Michael finds the villa and commences his exorcism of the long-vacant property. Elena's bed appears out of the dust of the floorboards, her skeleton hurling snakes at him. Although the valiant priest perishes in the attempt, the exorcism is ultimately successful.

Production

The process of revising *Lisa and the Devil* for the commercial market was clearly traumatic for Mario Bava. After the temporary upswing of *Baron Blood*, his directorial career was once again in dire straits. Just as he had found himself working again in low-budget horror one year after directing *Diabolik*, the biggest movie of his career, he now found himself celebrating the completion of his productive work by debasing it. Under the circumstances, it is a testament to his personal character and their personal relationship that Bava was able to control his temper and cooperate with Alfredo Leone for as long as he did.

The House of Exorcism was shot over a 3½-week period in late 1974. The new location shots were lensed entirely in Barcelona, while the hospital interiors were filmed in a sanatorium on the outskirts of Rome. The climactic exorcism sequence was not filmed at the original interior location—which had since been repaired and

modified into a foreign embassy building—but at Villa Frascati, where the Villa Graps interiors of *Operazione paura* were filmed almost a decade earlier.

The reshoots required the presence of only two of the original cast members: Elke Sommer and Leone's daughter Kathy, a recurring ornament of Leone International productions. Both were eminently available and affordable: they worked for free. "When I am making a movie, I become like one of the crew," declares Sommer. "I am not an actor–actor, who keeps their distance; I feel like part of the crew, and I am happy to do whatever it takes. If I am doing a play and riding the bus to the theater in the next town, and the bus breaks down ten miles from town, then I am damn well going to walk those ten miles to town, carrying wardrobe and scenery if I have to, and be on the stage when the curtain goes up—and this has happened in my life not once, but many times. This film I did out of friendship for Alfredo Leone and Mario Bava, because I felt damned good in their company."

Cast in the role of Father Michael[3] was Robert Alda. Born Alfonso Giuseppe Roberto D'Abbruzzo in New York City in 1914, Alda had previously worked with Bava on Robert Z. Leonard's *La donna più bella del mondo* in 1955, but Bava was unimpressed with the actor's abilities. "Bava threw a fit when I hired Robert Alda," Leone confesses. "'*But he can't act, Leone!*' he would tell me. But we needed a name for the picture, and I thought he would be perfect in the role of the priest. In fact, I think Bava got Alda's best performance ever out of him—and his son, Alan Alda, agrees." Although their names have not been recorded, Alfredo Leone further remembers that the ambulance attendant was played by a young actor brought to his attention by Antonio Cantáfora, and that the doctor presiding over Lisa's case was an American amateur, hired more for his facility with languages than for his acting ability.

Lisa cinematographer Cecilio Paniagua is credited as *The House of Exorcism*'s director of photography, primarily to fulfill the earlier cut's coproduction quota arrangements; in fact, he had nothing to do with the Barcelona reshoots. Bava himself acted as the D.P. for most of the filming, with the camera being operated by Emilio Varriano.

The film's direction is credited to "Mickey Lion."[4] Some published sources have reported that the pseudonym was used because Leone was the sole director of the reshoots, but this is incorrect. In fact, Bava agreed to direct the material for Leone on the condition that his name would not appear anywhere on the finished product, as he did not wish to endorse it. Bava approached *The House of Exorcism* with the distaste one feels for an unpleasant task that must be done, for better or worse; he had so little personal interest in this version that he allowed Leone more creative input than was usual. It was, after all, going to be *his* film.

"Bava and I 'co-directed,' you might say," Leone offers. "I never interfered, but he was a very open-minded man. He wasn't the typical director who doesn't like advice or suggestions. Frequently, in the middle of a shot, or in the setting-up of a shot, I'd get his ear and say, 'You know, Mario . . .' He'd never get upset; he would take my advice and expand on it, take it from there and make it useful."

Leone describes his own particular value as a co-director: "Whatever Bava did, he gave it 100%, but he was primarily a technician, you see. That was his genius, moreso than as a director of actors; he could not get a maximum performance out of an actor. I'll give you an example from *House of Exorcism:* You know the scene where Robert Alda is exorcising the house and he has to sweep the snakes away? When Bava was directing that, it came to light that Alda had a terrible fear of snakes. He dipped his hand down very rapidly and then pulled it back up; it looked cowardly. I stepped in and said, 'Look, Alda, you're the priest and it's important that you show absolute conviction, absolutely no fear whatsoever.' I had to step in and illustrate—little things like that. Other than that, Bava did most of it."

According to Leone, the exorcism sequence was built around materials brought to the production by H. A. L. Craig, though his screenplay was not used. "Craig got us a tape of an authentic exorcism and a photograph of the possessed person's face, which provided the model of the image blasted onto the wall at the end of the film. Mario and I listened to that thing a dozen times to prepare for *House of Exorcism.*"

As the reshoots proceeded, Bava's collaboration with Leone again grew strained when it came to filming scenes involving blunt, lascivious language or nudity. "There was a combination of hospital scenes involving Elke Sommer that Bava refused to shoot," Leone explains. "It was very difficult to get him to agree to these changes to begin with, but at certain points during the filming, he would absolutely refuse to go any further, particularly where foul language was concerned. Bava would take Elke aside and plead with her not to say those words, the profanity and whatnot. At these points, I



ITALIAN *fotobusta.*

had to take over. What else could I do?"

Sommer: "Mario talked to me about his sister, who was a Mother Superior, and it was one of many things we had in common, in a way, because my father was a Lutheran minister. He probably would have looked upon my doing these devilish things—not in an upset way, but in an interested way, because you either have it, the belief—the *real* belief—or you don't have it. I don't believe in the Virgin Mary, because she doesn't make sense to me, but I do believe in God. And I believe in the Devil. I don't mind using a four-letter word, when I'm on the golf course and something goes wrong; I'm like one of the boys. Leone wanted me to do these things because they were fashionable, and at first I didn't understand—I had not seen *The Exorcist* when I made this movie—but then I realized that Leone was right. If a woman was possessed by the Devil, she might do anything, be totally different that she ever was herself, to curse, even to defecate! So I had no problem. But Mario, at the beginning, was against it [the cursing]. I said to him, 'Mario, excuse me, but if all this green *shit* comes out of your mouth, you are *going* to curse—and I don't feel in any way belittled or humiliated by this.'"



FATHER MICHAEL *fights back against a torrent of bile and obscenity.*

Still, Bava resisted. When these scenes had to be shot, he would leave the scene in Leone's hands and smoke a Marlboro in the outer corridor. "He would turn his back and sulk," Leone says. "Please understand: at no time did I replace Bava on the set. It was just that, on occasion, he [refused] to do certain scenes because of his religious beliefs, superstitions, or whatever. So that responsibility fell to me."

Considering Bava's own personal enjoyment of profanity and the torrent of obscenity heard in his next film, *Cani arrabbiati/Rabid Dogs*, one doubts that strong language was the real issue here. Perhaps most disturbing to Bava was the script's sadistic abuse of its Catholic priest hero. When Father Michael dons his purple stole, for example, and begins to read "The Lord's Prayer" over the possessed Lisa, she projects vomit all over him and scoffs, "There's your daily bread! Eat it! Eat it like you did those whores' cunts before you became a priest!" This sort of thing was beyond the pale, of course, and Bava was no doubt particularly sensitive in that these words were ostensibly being put into Lisa's mouth by the damned soul of a woman named Elena—whose name was shared by his daughter and sister, the Mother Superior.

"Other stuff—the nudity, the girl [Carmen Silva] who gets out of bed—that's not Bava, that's me," Leone confirms. "He wouldn't have any part of that, yet occasionally his respect and love for film was so strong that he'd go against his own will, against his own grain." Meaning that Bava made the effort to remain professional under these circumstances, and filmed more than he would have liked to do morally, but when confronted with certain offensive material, his personal inhibitions won out.

The way Sommer remembers it, Bava was eventually won over by the results captured on film. "When he saw the performance I gave [in the dailies], he came to me and said, "*Grazie, eravate bella. Andiamo a pranzo.*" ["Thank you, you were beautiful. Now let's go eat."]

In all fairness, it must be noted that Lamberto Bava remembers the circumstances of filming *The House of Exorcism* somewhat differently than has been described here. According to him, "There was a big love-hate relationship between my father and Alfredo Leone. Around the time we were finishing the movie, *The Exorcist* had a big successful world release, so Leone went to my father and told him, "Why don't we add a nice exorcism?" along with another three or four ideas. My father didn't know what to say and, on the spot, replied: 'I'm not interested in this procedure. If you want to do it for the States, I have no problem about that; I can ask Lamberto to help you.' And he sent me to assist Leone, to keep himself well removed from all the bullshit. Then, when my father saw what had been done, he got very angry and there were serious litigations, with letters exchanged by their lawyers. Some things in *The House of Exorcism* were directed by Leone, and from a technical perspective, I told him how to realize them."[5]

Lamberto's remarks make it sound like Mario never got anywhere near the set during the reshoots, and was surprised by the direction Leone took, but we have Elke Sommer's testimony, as well as Leone's, that Mario Bava was there. Unhappy, not always

3 This character was named in honor of Alfredo Leone's son Michael, credited in some sources as a second assistant on the picture, who passed away in the early 1990s.

4 The "Mickey" of Mickey Lion was another tribute to Michael Leone.

5 Manlio Gomarasca and Davide Pulici, "Il Talento di Mr. Bava," *Nocturno Dossier* 24, July 2004, 6–32.

cooperative, but there . . . until some line was crossed that made Bava's continued presence on the set no longer tenable.

While interviewing Alfredo Leone for this book, persistent questioning paid off in an important victory over memory. During our initial talks, Leone remembered Bava abandoning *The House of Exorcism* in protest over the scenes he did not wish to shoot. However, in time, it became clearer that Bava's departure had nothing to do with *The House of Exorcism*—as supported by Sommer's recollections of his gameness—but rather the sudden presentation of what seemed, at the time, a better offer. Bava's leave-taking had less to do with his own anger than with Leone's.



LISA *adopts the nubile form of a woman (Carmen Silva) from Father Michael's past to weaken his religious armor.*

To better understand the dissolution of this important partnership, we must backtrack to the period of optimism following the completion of *Lisa and the Devil,* as Mario Bava and Alfredo Leone were looking forward to its world premiere at the 1973 Cannes Film Festival. *Lisa* had been an exhilarating film for Bava, and for Leone as well. The producer was determined to continue his professional alliance with Bava, who was that rare director not only affordable at his level, but capable of delivering films that looked like they cost millions of dollars when the actual outlay was closer to the mid-to-low six-figure range. Leone had every expectation that the picture would be his ticket from the international exploitation market to The Big Time. What he did not yet know was that with the Bava touch came the Bava luck.

As Cannes loomed, Leone turned his thoughts to possible future collaborations with Bava and *Lisa*'s Spanish co-producer, José Maesso, with whom they had both felt in good association. Against the strong objections of his general manager Joe De Blasio, Leone entered into a three-picture deal with Maesso, and they decided that their next collaboration would be a script in Leone's backlog with the unprepossessing title of *Henry and Janet.*

"It wasn't much of a story," Leone describes, "the usual old-miser-with-greedy-relatives-out-to-get-his-gold story. But it was a period piece set in the horse-and-carriage days, just the kind of picture Mario could have brought to life. The opening scene showed a beautiful girl jumping on stage at the Crazy Horse Saloon and doing a striptease, from which we cut to a Maserati speeding through the streets of Paris. A guy screeches to a halt, gets out, grabs the girl right off the stage, and throws her into the car. This is her lover, who also happened to be the chauffeur of the old miser. He takes her home and the Old Man [Leone envisioned this role played by John Marley] is watching from the window, sees his chauffeur wooing her and drawing her into an embrace. When she comes in, he slaps her and calls her a slut and, in the process, has a heart attack . . . I changed the title to *Last Will and Testament* . . . it had a lot of plot twists, similar to *Ten Little Indians*."

As we will remember from the making of *5 bambole per la luna d'agosto,* Bava was no fan of *Ten Little Indians,* and the scenario described by Leone bears an additional similarity to the romantic triangle provided in *Lisa and the Devil* by Francis Lehar, his wife, and their chauffeur. It should come as no surprise that "Mario didn't want to do it," as Leone admits.

It was during the filming of *The House of Exorcism* that Bava discovered, in the course of his nightly reading, a short story that he felt had the makings of a great movie—the kind of movie that could be cheaply made, yet have the power to turn his career around.

During this period of the early 1970s, the stories published in Mondadori's monthly *giallo* magazines had begun to move away from traditional murder-mystery fiction toward more hard-edged crime stories. It was from his steady diet of such reading that Bava had discovered a short story by the Ukrainian-born Italian novelist Giorgio Scerbanenco entitled "*L'uomo che non voleva morire*" ("The Man Who Didn't Want to Die"). Bava was enthusiastic about the story and had hoped to film it in 1972. In this story, a wealthy art collector finances a heist of paintings from another private collection, including Pierre-Auguste Renoir's 1888 masterpiece "*After the Bath.*" During the heist, Giovanni, the youngest of the thieves, becomes exhilarated to the point of personal greed, cutting the Renoir from its frame for himself, and returning to the crime scene to rape a buxom housekeeper. During the rape, another bound captive succeeds in kicking Giovanni, shattering his skull. Found by his fellow thieves, the incapacitated Giovanni is rolled up in a carpet and abandoned in the woods, but he is found the next morning and taken to hospital. His partners, learning of his survival and his theft of the Renoir, attempt to kill him in his hospital bed, but get the wrong man. Giovanni survives and, with the help of his girlfriend, avenges himself. In the end, however, all the thieves end up violently killed, and the Renoir finds its way to the covetous collector, whose



THIS ITALIAN *fotobusta offers a collage of images from LISA AND THE DEVIL.*

own hands were never dirtied by violence. Bava succeeded in developing a script with Rafael Azcona (a frequent collaborator of Marco Ferreri) and Alessandro Parenzo, in which Marussig Productions showed interest—but the project was set aside indefinitely as Bava began to concentrate exclusively on the filming of *Lisa and the Devil* in 1973. Fifteen years later, Lamberto Bava directed this abandoned project as a TV-movie, and it became one of his finest works.

In retrospect, Mario Bava's resignation of *L'uomo che non voleva morire* was a strategic disaster, not only because of what became of *Lisa and the Devil*, but because the story—showing how the aesthetic appreciation and desire for something beautiful, like a work of art, can arouse the worst, most bestial behavior in people—would have been the perfect follow-up to *Ecologia del delitto*, and the ideal overture to his next film, the extraordinary crime thriller *Cani arrabbiati/ Rabid Dogs*.

Lamberto Bava recounts the origins of this next project: "My father discovered the story . . . in a back issue of a *Giallo Mondadori*, which he always bought, though he never read the novels. Instead, *Papà* loved to read the short stories that came at the end of every issue, under the byline of Ellery Queen. The basis for *Cani arrabbiati* was found precisely this way, when he read one of those short stories. In one of the back issues was an American story entitled '*L'uomo e il bambino*,' if I remember correctly."[6]

"*L'uomo e il bambino*" ("Man and Boy") was the Italian translation of a story by Ellery Queen [the *nom de plume* of writing partners Frederic Dannay and Manfred B. Lee], and not a recent one. It originally appeared under the title "Kidnapped!" in the July 8, 1951 issue of *This Week*. It was later reprinted under the title "Child Missing" in the August 1958 Australian edition *The Ellery Queen Mystery Magazine*. Bava fell in love with the story and took it directly to Alfredo Leone, pitching it as something they should make together.

"Mario became very obsessive when he read something that he liked," Leone relates. "I wanted so much to continue our association that I worked very hard to acquire the rights to this story. I even had a verbal commitment from the copyright owner or his lawyer; I was in Rome, but would be coming back to the States in ten days, so we agreed there was no need to mail any legal documents back and forth; I would be in his office before the check could get there. We had a deal, in my view, and I told Mario that we would do *Last Will and Testament* first, with Maesso, and then follow it immediately with [what we called] *Man and Boy*."

Leone continues: "Joe De Blasio had pleaded with me not to enter into the three-picture deal with Maesso, telling me that, 'as my general manager,' he was advising me it was a bad move. Even though there was no economic reason for me to not honor that agreement, he finally persuaded me. It turned out to be a real disaster, too, because it broke my very good relationship with [Maesso] and slowed my company down. De Blasio, it turned out, had an ulterior motive. Mario came to me one day and said, 'You told me that you had the rights to *'Man and Boy,'* but De Blasio has them!' I explained to Mario that I had a verbal deal, that the rights were mine, and I would close the deal as soon as I got back to the States. He told me that I was too late, that De Blasio had arranged for an American distributor, Bryanston Pictures, to acquire the rights for him. He said he hoped that I would understand that he had to make this picture."

Leone believes that De Blasio, who was in his office at the time of his phone call to the author's agent, eavesdropped on the conversation and recognized what is now known as "a window of opportunity." He evidently shared the overheard information with Vince Parisi, who ran the Italian office of Bryanston Films. For years, Bryanston had specialized in rough-and-ready exploitation fare, but in 1974, the company's profile took an upward swing with the releases of Tobe Hooper's *The Texas Chain Saw Massacre,* John Carpenter's *Dark Star,* and Paul Morrissey's Italian-made *Flesh for Frankenstein* and *Blood for Dracula* (retitled *Andy Warhol's Frankenstein* and *Andy Warhol's Dracula* for arthouse cachet), all of which received serious critical attention. The company had been impressed with the classy horror of *Lisa and the Devil* and made Leone a respectable offer for the US distribution rights. Feeling wary of the personalities involved, Leone turned them down. ("The people behind the company were the same people who were involved with *Deep Throat*, so that should give you an idea of where they were coming from," he explains.) It would appear that Bryanston was determined to establish a partnership with Leone or Bava, one way or another.

Joe De Blasio is now deceased, so his side of the story cannot be told. What is known for certain is that Leone

6 Lamberto Bava interview, "Mario Bava, Mio Padre" in Luigi Cozzi, *Il Cinema Gotico e Fantastico Italiano Vol 1—Mario Bava, I Mille Volti Della Paura* (Rome, Italy: Mondo Ignoto/Profondo Rosso, 2001), 149–56.



VENTURING *into the derelict villa where Lisa's adventure took place, Father Michael is assailed by its unclean spirits.*

reacted so strongly to De Blasio's subterfuge and to Mario's seeming lack of loyalty, that his already sorely tested relationship with Bava finally snapped—and Bava walked.

"When Bava decided to go with De Blasio to do *Man and Boy*, I felt betrayed," Leone admits. "I was furious. We argued, and in the end, he walked away from [*The House of Exorcism*] entirely. I had to complete it myself. Consequently, Bava had nothing to do with the editing or the final assembly of the film."

Post-production

In Bava's absence, Alfredo Leone took creative control of *The House of Exorcism*, fine-tuning the rough cut with Carlo Reali, who had been editing Bava's work since *Ecologia del delitto*. Leone beefed up the picture with as much exploitative material as was on hand, incorporating the stronger versions of the two erotic sequences filmed for *Lisa*, which included more nudity of Sylva Koscina and Elke Sommer and more graphic coupling. Unknown to Leone at the time, Reali was in constant, covert touch with Bava to keep him abreast of what was happening to his movie in the editing room.

Incredibly, *The House of Exorcism* had commenced production without any firm notion of how the new footage would be integrated with the existing narrative of *Lisa*. Leone claims that the solution to this dilemma was purely serendipitous: "Reali and I were watching the footage on an interlock, with the sound passing in advance of the picture, and the doctor's voice was commenting on something in the previous scene, which also seemed to apply to something we were seeing in the next scene. And I said, 'That's it! We'll have the dialogue overlap these cuts!' And we began to look for images that related to images from *Lisa*, places where we could cut from one scene to another, like the spilled wine that cuts to the puddle of vomit, and so on. I became very excited, and we reshot some scenes and added some others to make these transitions easier, like the shot where Elke's being wheeled down the hospital corridor shouting 'Dinner is served!' I didn't know this at the time, but Reali was telling Bava about what we were doing, like some kind of double agent! And I think Mario was becoming interested."

As a visual thinker, Bava would certainly have responded favorably to this creative method of reconstruction. Throughout the film, the new footage cuts to the *Lisa* material on the cue of rhyming images: the zoom into the broken, crossed hands of Carlos' fallen pocket watch cuts to a doctor's wristwatch; the doctor turns off the light of Lisa's hospital room, cutting to a night exterior of a brightening street lamp; Leandro's locking of the villa's gates is matched to an X-ray of Lisa's ribcage, a shot of a marble bust of a smiling child cuts to an X-ray of Lisa's grinning skull, and so on. This inspired approach is wholly consistent with the sense of *déjà vu* that tugs at Lisa throughout *Lisa and the Devil*, beginning with the fresco's resemblance to Leandro, and continuing through a series of images (like the broken hands of the pocket watch) whose significance is eventually explained by the fact of their recurrence. Such transitional methods were also used within the reshot material, as when Lisa is knocked down in response to Leandro slapping the bust of Elena, or when the overturned cup rolls across the floor accompanied by the sound of screeching tires, signalling the flashback of the car accident from Father Michael's past. Other transitions were evidently considered, but ultimately not included—a good case in point is the shot of Lisa being wheeled down the hospital corridor on a gurney, shrieking "Dinner is served, dinner is served!" which cuts to Leandro talking amiably to "Mr. Rabbit" (a stuffed hare) while preparing the dinner cart—not, as one might expect, while he is actually wheeling the cart around the table, as he does a few moments later. The visual connection is too explicit to have been overlooked, but it was apparently sacrificed in order to preserve the charming ad libs of Savalas.

When the *House* filming wrapped, Elke Sommer experienced what she believes was one last demonic punishment for participating in this exposé of the Devil. "The movie was finished, and my then-husband Joe and I decided to drive from Barcelona to Germany, We wanted to make it a really nice ride—it was a Jaguar X-KE, and I'm a very fast driver. We got as far as the border of France, somewhere in the armpit of the world in the south of France, and I looked over at Joe and saw that he was looking extremely bad. I gave him a Kleenex from my pocket and told him to cough into it, and then I saw that he was spitting up blood into it. We stopped and he coughed blood, urinated blood—and there was no pharmacy open in France at 9:00 in the morning! We had a thermometer and he had

a temperature of 104° Fahrenheit. He nearly didn't make it, but we found a hospital and I pulled a doctor out of an ear operation, saying, 'Please, my husband is dying!' It's a long story, but he made it. It turned out to be a sickness which had not occurred in Germany for over forty years, something called *Morbus Weil* [or *Leptospirose*], which means that the water in the ice cubes he had been drinking had been contaminated with rats' urine, which probably came from Toledo. The microbes could have eaten up everything—his intestines, everything."

Distribution

Even for the newly commercialized *The House of Exorcism*, the road to distribution was not without obstacles. There was immediate interest in the picture from Dear Film, an Italian distribution company that had a long-standing relationship with Warner Bros. which ended just as *The Exorcist* was becoming available. "They had a falling-out with Warners [and lost *The Exorcist*], so they wanted *House of Exorcism,"* Leone recalls. "They offered me a tremendous deal, but they wouldn't give me any money up front. I was stuck for a lot of money at this point, and I was looking for dollars to bail out. They offered me 200 million *lire* [slightly more than $124,000]—again, nothing up front—but they would handle all the prints and advertising, and that was unheard-of for an Italian distribution company. I said, 'No way," and that was a big mistake."[7]

Allied Artists' investment in the picture guaranteed them the right to first refusal for America, which they exercised in the negative. "They were flabbergasted by the picture," Leone says, "but, for some reason, they wouldn't take it. I couldn't understand why. Paramount was in the same building, so I invited them down to see the picture—and they wanted it. Universal heard about it and asked me to fly out, which I did on Labor Day weekend. They were telling me that they did such a great job with *Jaws*, they should have this picture, and they sold me on the idea of them having it . . . but it never took place. At the last minute, all the deals fell through. I discovered later that Allied Artists was calling them all and saying 'You can't have this picture—we have first refusal rights and we haven't refused it yet.'"

With few other options available to him, Leone swallowed his pride and took the picture to Sam Arkoff at AIP. "When Sam saw it, he called me up and said, 'Al, I don't know what you did, or how you did it, but *it's brilliant!*' He said, 'I *want* that picture!' But again, the deal was never consummated."[8] Leone eventually filed suit against Allied Artists' alleged obstruction of his efforts, a case that remains in legal limbo to this day.

Had Arkoff followed through, *The House of Exorcism* would have become one of the last films ever distributed by American International. The following year, 1978, AIP merged with Filmways (minus Arkoff), and after several unsuccessful stabs at mainstream success, the new company filed for bankruptcy in 1981, at which point their holdings were taken over by Orion Pictures. In the meantime, Arkoff set up his own production outfit, Arkoff International Pictures, under which banner he announced a full roster of forthcoming movies (including remakes of some "classic" AIP titles), none of which ever came to fruition. Over the next ten years, Arkoff was billed as producer or executive producer on less than a dozen films—some profitable, like *The Amityville Horror* (1979) and *Dressed To Kill* (1980), but most of them forgettable failures. As a series of in-title-only AIP remakes, produced by his son Lou, were being prepared for cable broadcast, Samuel Z. Arkoff died of natural causes on September 16, 2001, at the age of 83—within months of the death of his wife, Hilda.

The American distribution rights to *The House of Exorcism* were eventually sold to Peppercorn-Wormser, a New York-based company active since the late 1960s, when they distributed Orson Welles' *Falstaff/Chimes at Midnight* (1965) and various other spicy foreign pick-ups. At the time of their acquisition of Leone's film, their recent releases (all imports) included *Love and Anarchy*, *Bamboo House of Dolls*, *The Sensual Man*, and *Le Sex Shop*. Released in the Summer of 1976, nearly three years after the initial impact of *The Exorcist, The House of Exorcism* was not exactly in the vanguard of the exorcism trend, but neither did it carry its train. The "rip-off" phase of the cycle finally culminated with the Independent-International release of Elo Panaccio's *Un urlo dalle tenebre/Naked Exorcism* and Al Adamson's *Nurse Sherri* (1977), though the publication of various *Exorcist*-inspired best sellers subsequently led to a fresh spate of film adaptations on the "possession" theme which flourished into the 1980s, including Stuart Rosenberg's *The Amityville Horror* (1979), Sidney J. Furie's *The Entity* (1981, released 1983), and Damiano Damiani's *Amityville II: The Possession* (1982).



7 Leone.

8 Ibid.



A 91-minute version of the film eventually opened in Great Britain, where it was advertised with art depicting a frog leaping from a woman's mouth. It was greeted in kind by *Monthly Film Bulletin*'s Richard Combs, who called it "a fair old witch's brew from a pseudonymous Mario Bava, which would require the services of a powerful exorcist to drive out all its clatteringly crude and incoherent script ideas. Not that it matters . . . as his tongue is planted so firmly in cheek that it is in danger of coming out the other side. The humour for the most part is signalled by . . . Telly Savalas . . . humming ironically to himself and popping lollipops as if he had just dropped in from rehearsals on another show."[9]

Mario Bava and Alfredo Leone did not put their past disputes behind them until life—or rather, death—intervened. Shortly after the Peppercorn-Wormser deal was made, Alfredo Leone's father died. Considering that Leone had bankrolled the film Bava had intended as a tribute to his own father, it was the sort of loss that could not be overlooked in good conscience.

"Mario came by the house to pay his condolences," Leone recalls. "He brought a fruitcake, I remember, which is an Italian custom—something to sweeten your period of mourning. Anyway, we talked about various things and then, after a quiet moment, he said to me, 'You know, Alfredo, if you want to put my name back on the film, it's okay with me.'

"I said, 'Mario, if you want your name back on the film, ask me to do it and I'll do it, but I can only do it for Europe now, because it's too late for America.'"

Bava agreed, and the story is verified by the fact that Bava's name appears as director on the film's European prints and advertising materials. *The House of Exorcism* was sold all over the world—even in Germany, where *Baron Blood* had failed to secure distribution—and became the biggest commercial success of Leone's career.

ITALIAN *due-foglia.*

Commentary

"*La casa dell'esorcismo* isn't my film, although it carries my name," Mario Bava said in a 1976 interview. "It's a story too complicated to explain, similar to that of the cuckold who discovers that the child who bears his name isn't his own. There's nothing to be done about it." [10]

Bava's name appeared on the Italian release because he had mended his fences with Leone, and though he had objected strongly to the film's most blasphemous and prurient aspects while it was in progress, his comments suggest that he came to regard this career episode more philosophically as time passed.

Critics, especially those specializing in the horror genre, would not be so forgiving or forgetting. As Leone laments: "I've been criticized, in the history books and throughout the motion picture industry, for 'butchering'—as they call it—a beautiful film. Well, I never thought I butchered it. I thought the work we did should have been complimented . . . not because I did it, but because it was a good piece of work. However, I understand where the critics are coming from; they're speaking of art and culture, and there was no art or culture in *House of Exorcism.* True. True. It was done for commercial purposes . . . but I think it was done well." [11]

Leone does not overstate his case. Of course, viewed side-by-side with *Lisa and the Devil*, *The House of Exorcism* cannot help but compare miserably. It must be remembered that, at the time it was first released, such a comparison was not possible because *House* literally replaced *Lisa* in circulation for quite a few years, and this fact became inseparable from its stigma. Now that nearly three decades have passed, and *Lisa and the Devil* has survived to find an audience and be recognized as the special achievement it is, the time has come to admit that *The House of Exorcism* is far from the worst that could have happened.



UK *quad poster, which just about says it all.*

When *House* was first released, *Lisa* had not been seen except for its screenings at the 1973 Cannes Film Festival; therefore, *House* offered to the general public its first glimpses of this important work. Leone was careful to leave *Lisa*'s most beautiful scenes essentially intact, but they were left to float in a bilious broth of ugly, commercial hard-sell. Those of us who saw *House* during its initial run, with no knowledge of the earlier film, could tell that we were in the presence of a compromised, schizophrenic work, but this could be defended as an inventive approach to a movie that was about the internal struggle—the schizophrenia—of demonic possession. But once it became public knowledge that the most striking material in the picture were remnants of a suppressed film, possibly a masterpiece, the new footage became an even greater offense. Until Leone gave his first interview on the subject to this author in 1984, it was also assumed that Mario Bava had no active involvement in the creation of *The House of Exorcism.* It seemed fitting that, in Woody Allen's *Annie Hall* (1977), a Los Angeles movie theater marquee advertising *The House of Exorcism* was included in a humorous montage of sights illustrative of the decline and fall of Western civilization.

Unlike most movies that take a commercial route, *The House of Exorcism* is, in some ways, even more complex than the difficult film from which it was made. For all its oneiric qualities, *Lisa* follows a single character on a singular journey, while *House* splits its tormented protagonist, early on, into two characters: one strapped to a hospital bed, and another who walks freely through the circles of Hell that comprise the hospital patient's disordered soul. The moments of macabre beauty in *The House of Exorcism* are by no means limited to the excerpts from *Lisa and the Devil;* the climactic moments of the film, in which Father Michael is momentarily thwarted in his exorcism of the villa by the sudden appearance of Elena's rematerializing bed (a Bava trick shot of the bed collapsing, filmed in reverse, with a subtle glass matte foreground to hide the fallen frame from view), is as elegantly shot as anything in the former picture. And though it is not the same bed, or even the same villa, Bava was able to present the available setting in such a way that it appears consistent with what was shown before.

The House of Exorcism doesn't entirely hang together as well as it should, and the writing in the new scenes is often execrable (Father Michael: "Where do you come from?" Lisa: "From a cunt, you jerk!"). And yet, regardless of its faults, it is also cleverly edited, well-produced, sometimes visually arresting, and more ambitious than much of its kind.

9 Richard Combs, "La Casa dell'Escorcismo (The House of Exorcism)" review, *Monthly Film Bulletin*, 1977.

10 Giuseppe Lippi and Lorenzo Codelli, *Fant'italia* (Trieste, Italy: XIV Festival Internazionale del Film di Fantascienza, 1976), 152–54.

11 Leone.

Aftermath

Beginning with *Rosemary's Baby* and continuing through *The Exorcist* and beyond, it became a common practice for publicists of motion pictures about demonic possession to connect the accidents and deaths of various participants to a "curse" overhanging the production. In the case of *The House of Exorcism*, the maleficiary of all the bad luck was *Lisa and the Devil*.

During the post-production of *The House of Exorcism*, Leone sent *Lisa*'s original color negative to Technicolor, to be dismantled and integrated with the *House* inserts, to prepare an original negative of the new film. When the negative was not returned after a reasonable period of time, Leone approached Technicolor and learned that his company contact had died and that the negative of *Lisa and the Devil* had gone missing. It was never recovered.

At this point, the best surviving material on *Lisa and the Devil* was the CRI [color reversal internegative] which Leone had left with Allied Artists. Upon contacting them, Leone learned that Allied had played the film for one week in one theater to qualify for a tax shelter deal;[12] then they dropped their plans for a theatrical release, distributing it directly to television. As the film was being edited for television, some scenes were snipped out entirely, while others—particularly violent scenes—were cheaply censored by optically freeze-framing the image, in an irritating stop/start fashion, while the soundtrack continued to play.

Upset with this arrangement, Leone sued Allied Artists for fraud, and in a court settlement, he agreed to return his $200,000 payment in exchange for the return of *Lisa*'s North American rights. The deal was done, but the footage removed from Allied's TV print—the bludgeoning death of Sophia, for example—was now missing from the CRI returned to Leone, a fact that went unnoticed until years after Allied Artists' dissolution. As a result, the slow zoom into Sophia's bloodied, battered, mannequin-like head that ends in a dissolve now appears in *Lisa and the Devil* only from the point of the dissolve, though the entire shot appears intact in *The House of Exorcism*. When Image Entertainment was preparing a joint DVD release of the two films in 2000, attempts were made to transplant the footage from *House* back into *Lisa*, but because the two films were scored differently, the results were considered too distracting and unsatisfactory, so *Lisa* was left in its incomplete state.



US *one-sheet poster.*

The colors of the CRI are also more muted than the bold Technicolor hues Bava intended. The difference between the currently available video editions of *Lisa and the Devil* and *The House of Exorcism* is the difference between real life color and three-strip Technicolor. In *House,* Savalas' skin tone has the desired "hot" look, while in *Lisa,* he sports a duller, more natural color that obscures an important detail that was deliberately worked into his on-set makeup. According to disc producer Don May Jr., when Alfredo Leone saw the final transfer of Elite Entertainment's LaserDisc release of *Lisa* (later reused for Image Entertainment's DVD release), he was furious—though the degradation of the image was due entirely to the improper storage of the original elements. Before his death in 1995, Carlos Sylva prepared a single 35 mm restoration print, in which the color was finally perfected, although Sylva Koscina's death scene remained abbreviated. This print was shown at the 1993 Mario Bava retrospectives in Los Angeles and New York City, before being shipped back to France. Its current whereabouts are unknown.

When Mario Bava died in 1980, he was under the impression that *Lisa and the Devil*—his most personal film, the film in which he had invested and confessed so much of himself, in essence the film in which he finally admitted to being an artist—would never be shown again. Fortunately, in 1983, *Lisa and the Devil* mysteriously surfaced on American television, in syndication through Allied Artists, and from that moment, its reputation began to grow.

The *House of Exorcism* had served its commercial purpose, becoming one of the top-grossing grindhouse and drive-in releases of the summer of 1976. But it was *Lisa and the Devil* that would stand the test of time.

L'Ospite dalle due

In July 1974, about a month after his break with Alfredo Leone, RAI-TV extended an invitation to Mario Bava to be interviewed on afternoon television, in advance of the first repeat broadcast of the *Odissea* miniseries since 1968. To deflect attention from himself as much as possible, he brought along Carlo Rambaldi and an arsenal of his mechanized special effects props to the television studio and proceeded to give his second, longest, and last television interview on the program *L'Ospite dalle due* ("The Guests At 2:00"), hosted by Luciano Rispoli. Joining Bava and Rambaldi on the daïs were actress Silvia Monelli and the young filmmaker and critic Gianfranco Angelucci, who for many years worked as a personal assistant to Federico Fellini.

The black-and-white videotaped program found Rambaldi demonstrating a series of robotic props, including a crocodile, a large spider, a flapping bird, and a copy of the mask of Polyphemus from *Odissea*. Silvia Monelli also modelled a latex mask likeness of actress Paola Pitagora, presumably made by Bava, which had been worn by a stuntman during a dangerous scene in one of her (unnamed) pictures. For his part, Bava demonstrated how *I vampiri*'s trick lighting transformation effect was achieved (with the help of Monelli), explained some other effects secrets in brief, but mostly squirmed under the scrutiny of the television cameras in a sportcoat and turtleneck sweater.

Bava was exceedingly reluctant to expose the secrets of his craft to the general viewing public, often fending



AN UNCOMFORTABLE *guest on afternoon television, Mario Bava squirms under the studio lights on RAI-TRE's L'OSPITE DALLE DUE.*

off the host's queries with unconvincing demurrals like "It would take much too long to explain." At the same time, he is known to have been exceedingly generous when it came to explaining his effects to other technicians, so it was not for proprietary reasons that he was evasive. He seriously wanted to preserve the magic of the completed work for audiences to enjoy.

Today, the people who go to movies are much more sophisticated and tend to be familiar with at least some of the technical words and phrases pertaining to special effects, but things were different then. Bava was not being as disingenuous as he may seem when he found difficulty explaining the minutiae of his work. Rispoli's comments showed that even he, the host of a national television program, was generally mystified by the subject, and his closing remarks suggested there may have been a popular view that special effects were some kind of supernatural alchemy. At any rate, Bava came away from the experience disappointed in his own performance.

"Trick shots are very difficult to explain, and they wanted me to do this on television," he later complained. "I'm afraid I made a rather poor showing on *L'Ospite dalle due*. The worst of it is that they stick you in an uncomfortable armchair and you're always seeing your own nose on the screen in front of you. Explaining trick shots is a no-win situation as well, because if you notice them, it means they didn't work and, if you *don't* notice them, then nobody knows it's a trick! To understand them, it's necessary to watch as somebody does them. I well remember the amazement on the faces of people who stood around while we were making movies." [13]

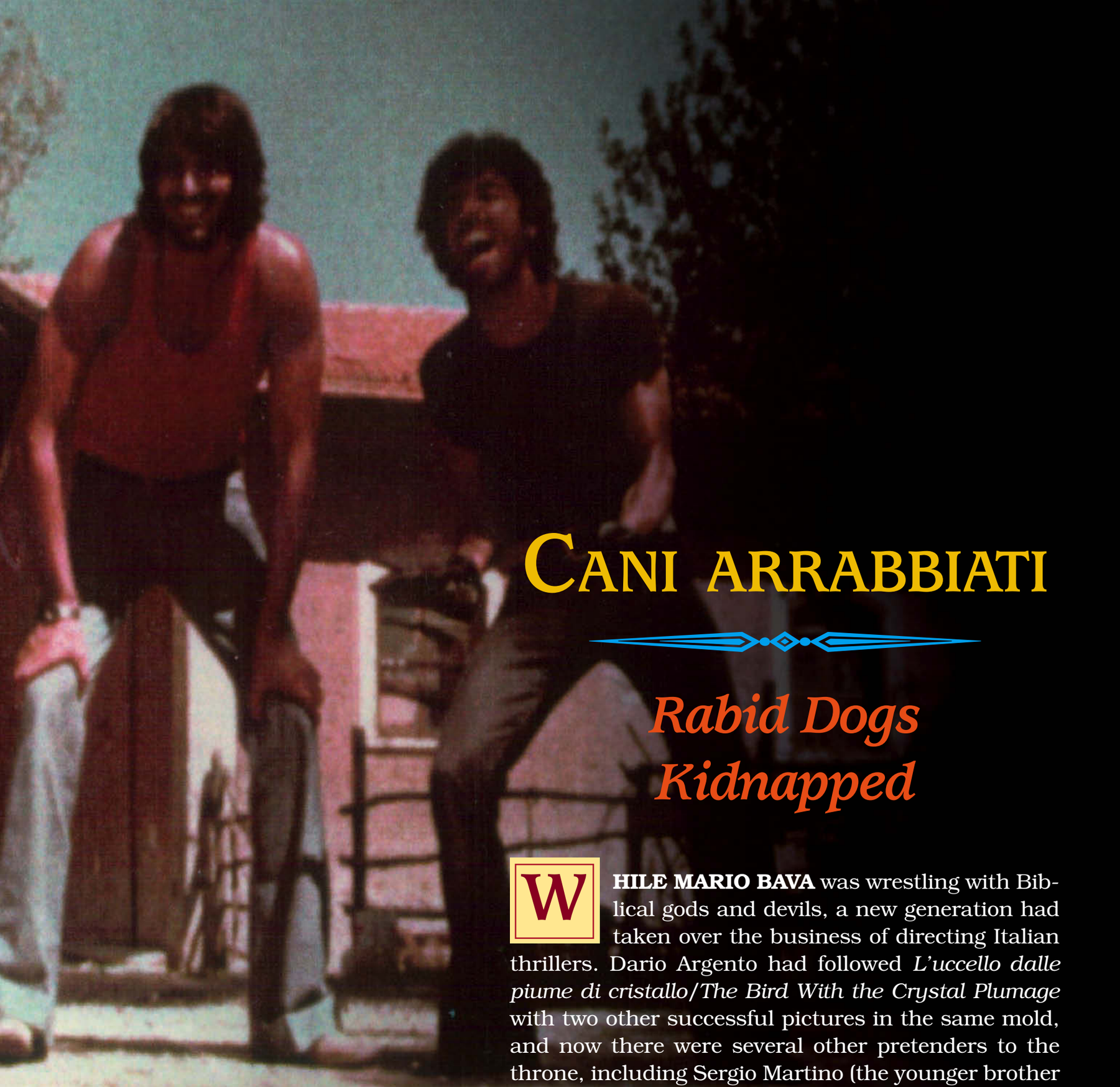
However discouraged Bava may have been by the broadcast, the appearance made a favorable impression on the academic community. It was in the wake of *L'Ospite dalle due* that Bava received a letter from a new university for the performing arts in Bologna, inviting him to teach in their cinema department. Bava replied with a letter explaining that he could not accept the job, in all good conscience, since he would undoubtedly learn much more from the students than he could possibly teach them. [14]

12 This single exhibition most likely took place in Toronto, as the Ontario Censor Board lists a submission for the picture of October 28, 1976. The author has also heard rumors of a brief, unheralded run in New York City in the late 1970s.

13 Alberto Abruzzese, et al., *La città del cinema—produzione e lavoro nel cinema italiano 1930–70* (Rome, Italy: Napoleone, 1979), 83–89.

14 Roy Bava, *Mario Bava Maestro of the Macabre* interview transcript, 2000.





TRENTEDUE *(Luigi Montefiori) and Bisturi (Aldo Caponi a.k.a. Don Backy) force Maria (Lea Lander) to urinate for their amusement in* CANI ARRABBIATI.

CANI ARRABBIATI

Rabid Dogs Kidnapped

WHILE MARIO BAVA was wrestling with Biblical gods and devils, a new generation had taken over the business of directing Italian thrillers. Dario Argento had followed *L'uccello dalle piume di cristallo/The Bird With the Crystal Plumage* with two other successful pictures in the same mold, and now there were several other pretenders to the throne, including Sergio Martino (the younger brother of producer Luciano Martino) and Aristide Massaccesi (a.k.a. "Joe D'Amato"), both of whom had worked as second unit directors under Bava in the early 1960s.

Bava must have watched their ascent from the sidelines with mounting frustration. His own recent track record, after all, was not nearly as respectable as Argento's, or even those of his former assistants. Between 1970 and 1975, Sergio Martino had directed fifteen films; in the past ten years, Bava had directed only a half-dozen pictures, which had occupied him for approximately 18–20 months out of 120. That body of work consisted almost entirely of Italian boxoffice failures, some TV commercials, a film that failed to secure distribution anywhere in the world, and now *The House of Exorcism,* his most visible picture in many years and the one of which he was least proud. Bava's career difficulties were compounded by the fact that he was now in his 60s and associated with more classical forms of horror at a time when the genre was becoming more synonymous with rough-and-tumble independent efforts like Tobe Hooper's *The Texas Chain Saw Massacre* (1974). He had made some recent pictures that, from today's 21st century perspective, may look fresh and full of youthful vitality—*Diabolik* and *5 bambole per la luna d'agosto,* for example—but at the time, these films looked off-puttingly artificial to young audiences, who were then seeking greater realism and greater truth in cinema. As for the profoundly influential *Ecologia del delitto*, it was not a commercial success in Italy, and subsequently went by so many different titles that even industry insiders could not tell that the film hadn't simply vanished down the sinkhole of the earth.

Bava had enjoyed a significant alliance with Alfredo Leone, but in the midst of the upsetting compromise of *The House of Exorcism,* and with the uninspired *Henry and Janet/Last Will and Testament* staring him down from the horizon, Bava can be forgiven for assuming that their association had seen its best days and was already deteriorating into an extended apology for the one film he knew they had done right. After reading *"L'uomo e il bambino"*—a translation of the 1951 Ellery Queen story "Kidnapped!" in the back pages of a *Mondadori* giallo magazine, Bava experienced the eureka of an altogether different view of his future. The story presented him with an opportunity to make exactly the kind of thriller that contemporary audiences wanted: violent, realistic, relentless, transgressive, shocking. He saw it as an opportunity to reinvent himself and give his dwindling career a new lease on life.

Lamberto Bava witnessed his father's excitement: "My father fell in love with that story and transformed it into a scenario, a somewhat singular script in the way all of its vicissitudes were carried out in real time; that is, the film's events took place in the same amount of time that it took to run the film. It told what happened during a holdup and afterwards, in the course of the criminals' escape." [1]

The challenge posed by filming a story in "real time" is one that has engaged the imaginations of many filmmakers over the years. In a sense, the earliest documentary films ever made by Lumière and Pathé Frères were representative of "real time," but to stage a dramatic story in a manner that chronicles its events in the length of time they are meant to occur is very difficult. In 1932, the British novelist Edgar Wallace, while working in Los Angeles as a screenwriter on *King Kong* (1933), conceived a project he called *Eighty Minutes*, which he did not live to pursue. Other films that unfold in "real time" are Alfred Hitchcock's *Rope* (1948), *High Noon* (1952, for the most part), *12 Angry Men* (1957), *Cash on Demand* (1961), *Nick of Time* (1995) and *Running Time* (1997), while other films contain sequences of authentic chronology, notably *Thirty Seconds Over Tokyo* (1944). At the time *Cani arrabbiati* was made, such examples were globally rare, and unheard-of in terms of Italian cinema.

Cesare Frugoni, one of the screenwriters who worked with Bava on the adaptation, recalls that all but the essence of the Ellery Queen story was discarded: "The original plot wasn't used. The only thing that came from the story was the idea that the perceived victim of the bad guys is actually the real culprit. The story ended with the man getting out of the car, making a call and saying: 'Dear Sir, if you want your son back alive, we have to make a deal . . .' I remember very well when I went to Parenzo's [the home of co-screenwriter Alessandro Parenzo] to work on the script, that Bava gave me notes, especially at the beginning. It was obvious that we had to invent everything before the film could be made, since it was based on a story that was three pages long. Bava always had ideas, always kept things under strict control; he was a collaborative and thinking director. You could say that this was a screenplay written by three people. It's true that this was quite a different film to the ones Bava had made before, but he was willing to be flexible."

Once he had secured the rights to the short story and confirmed Bava's attachment as director, Joe De Blasio—who already had a distribution agreement with Bryanston

Cani arrabbiati

Working title: *L'uomo e il bambino,* "Man and Boy"
Filmed on location near Rome
August 1974

First public screening: as *Semaforo Rosso,* "Red Traffic Light," Brussels, 1995 (14th Festival of Fantastic Film, Science Fiction and Thriller)
Technicolor, 1.85:1, 97 minutes.

Production: Loyola Films (Rome). Producer: Roberto Loyola. Director: Mario Bava. Assistant director: Lamberto Bava. Screenplay: Alessandro Parenzo and Cesare Frugoni (uncredited), inspired by the story "Kidnapped!" by Ellery Queen [Frederic Dannay and Manfred B. Lee] (uncredited). Dialogue coach (English): Dawne Alstrom. Continuity: Antonella Ballasio. Director of photography: Mario Bava. Camera operator: Emilio Varriano. Camera assistant: Gianni Modica. Special effects: Sergio Chiusi. Wardrobe: Wayne Finkelman. Wardrobe assistant: Maura Zuccherofino. Makeup: Angelo Roncaioli. Production director: Lucio Orlandini. Production secretaries: Naldo Nibbi, Cesare Coromaldi. Production administrator: Carlo Farris. Key grip: Franco Tocci. Machinists: Cosimo Barbera, Vittorio Monterosso, Quinto Proietti. Electricians: Toto Rinaldi, Massimo Rinaldi, Flaminio Tabbarini. Editor: Carlo Reali. Music: Stelvio Cipriani. Sound: Roberto Albrigdini. Stills: Giuliana De Rossi. Unreleased.

Riccardo Cucciolla (Riccardo), Aldo Caponi [Bisturi/Blade—*Rabid Dogs*/Stiletto—*Kidnapped*], Luigi Montefiori (Trentadue/"32" Altoviti), Maurice Poli (Dottore/Doc), Lea Lander (Maria), Marisa Fabbri (Maria Sbravati, the hitchhiker), Erika Dario (Marisa), Luigi Antonio Guerra (employee), Francesco Ferrini [Gustavo De Nardo] (gas station attendant), Emilio Benucci (taxi driver), Pino Manzari (tollbooth collector), Ettore Manni (bank director), Mario Bava (man in parking lot, uncredited).

Italian dubbing cast: Riccardo Cucciolla (Riccardo), Renato Cecchetto (Dottore), Gabriele Durina (Trentadue), Riccardo Rovatti (Bisturi), Miriam Spera (Maria).

Additional 1997 DVD credits: Producer/director (main titles only): Peter Blumenstock. Associate producer: Dieter Bosch. Director of photography (main titles only): Juergen Haller. Editing/digital post-production: Peter Blumenstock, Michael Frense. Subtitles: Tim Lucas (English), Peter Blumenstock (German), Sukri Mehemet (translation). Digital audio remastering: Fir Suidema. Nina Gueltzow ("Mother of Tears").

Additional credits for *Kidnapped*: 95m. Completed with the collaboration of Lamberto Bava, Mauro Bonanni, Roy Bava, and Walter Diotallevi. Production: International Media Corporation, Kismet Entertainment Group. Producer: Alfredo Leone. Directors: Mario Bava, Lamberto Bava. Executive producers: David Allen, Harmon Kaslow.Story and screenplay: Alessandro Parenzo. Second assistant director: Mario Carriba. Continuity: Vanda Tucci, Antonella Ballasio. Camera assistant: Giuseppe Alberti. Wardrobe: Maura Zuccherofino. Costumes: Ferroni. Hairdresser: Marisa Marconi. Administrator: Carlo Fabbris. Production inspector: Ugo Valenti. Production secretaries: Nando Nibbi, Cesare Coromandi. Key grip: Vittorio Biseo. Music (2001): Stelvio Cipriani. "Hold On to Me," words by Myriann D'Antime, music by Stelvio Cipriani, sung by Simona Petitucci. Sound: Mario Bramonti. Sound effects: Sound Track. Sound mixing: Franco Coratella (Dolby Stereo 2.1). Boom: Giuseppe Muratori. Post-synch: Fono Roma Film Recording. English subtitles: Titra. Development and printing: Crest National. Transportation: Romana Trasporti. Permissions: Franco Ponzo. Additional cast: Fabrizia Sacchi (Signora Gionotto).

First public screening: May 29, 2002 (American Cinematheque "Haunted World of Mario Bava" retrospective), Director's Guild of America Theater, Los Angeles CA.

Films in America—entered into a partnership with producer Roberto Loyola, with whom Bava had been in preproduction talks about *Al 33 di via Orologio fa sempre freddo*, the adaptation of Hillary Waugh's *The Shadow Guest*. Around this time, *Variety* jumped the gun by reporting: "Roberto Loyola emerging again after a year or more of financial straits, during which he produced [a number of films, including] Mario Bava's chiller *Wild Dogs*, all under the banner of Roberto Loyola Productions. Meanwhile, producer talks of fresh financing and production schedule to start with another thriller by Mario Bava, *It's Always Cold at Number 33, Street of Clocks*, for Leopard Films." [2]

Loyola's previous films included Siro Marcellini's *La legge dei gangsters/Gangster's Law* (1969, starring Klaus Kinski, Maurice Poli, and Susy Andersen), Sergio Corbucci's *J&S—storia criminale del far west/Sonny & Jed* (1972, starring Tomas Milian and Susan George), and Joe D'Amato's erotic *Canterbury no. 2 nuove storie d'amore del '300* (1973, with Bava alumni Rik Battaglia and Federico Boido). Lamberto Bava remembers Loyola as "a strange but very likeable guy who didn't have much money, but against all odds, somehow managed to use what little money he had to keep everything moving forward."

Additional funding was provided by an unidentified elderly gentleman who had made his fortune as the owner of a chain of cinemas in Turin. His support came with one string attached: his girlfriend, German actress Lea Lander, whom he wished to play the lead female role. This was acceptable to Bava, who had worked with Lander once before, when she—under the name Lea Krugher—had portrayed Greta, the fifth victim of 1964's *Sei donne per l'assassino*. Bava's screen story was developed into a finished screenplay by Alessandro "Sandro" Parenzo (a former art director who had written a couple of Laura Antonelli vehicles, *Peccato veniale* and *Malizia*) and newcomer Cesare Frugoni, who later wrote *La montagna del dio cannibale/Slave of the Cannibal God* (1978) and *L'isola degli uomini pesce/Screamers* (1979) for Sergio Martino.



MARIO BAVA, *conspicuously grayer since filming LISA AND THE DEVIL, poses with Luigi Montefiori and Aldo Caponi.*

Synopsis

As $70,000 in cash is being transferred to the Boldrini Pharmaceutical Bank to pay the weekly wages of its staff, a group of thieves known as the Ajaccio Street Gang—Dottore (the leader), Bisturi, Trentadue (32) and Fagio—attack the security guards and abscond with the payroll. After shooting four men, they flee the scene in a waiting getaway car. Bullets fired from behind puncture the gas tank and kill Fagio, the driver. Dottore takes the wheel, but the car quickly runs out of fuel. The gang look for another vehicle in a nearby parking garage, where they are cornered by police. Bisturi and Trentadue seize two women as hostages, one of whom is accidentally knifed in the throat by the overzealous Bisturi. Taking the other woman (Maria) with them, the gang shoots their way to freedom and commandeer a car waiting at a red traffic light. The driver, a meek-looking man named Riccardo, explains that he is driving his son Agostino—sweating in heavy blankets—to the hospital for emergency surgery. No matter: Held at gunpoint, Riccardo has no alternative but to drive where he is told.

Dottore orders him to get onto the autostrada, where it will be easier to lose any other cars that may be in pursuit. The ride is gruelling: it is the height of summer, but Dottore insists that Riccardo keep all the car windows rolled up. The rising temperature inside the car, combined with the gang's shock over the loss of Fagio and their exhilaration at their new wealth, brings out the worst in Trentadue and Bisturi. The unconscious child is placed in the back seat with these two, who taunt Riccardo and Maria by threatening to castrate the child and present his testicles to Maria (whom they call "Greta Garbo") as earrings. At one point, Bisturi pretends to stab the child, a shock that helps Riccardo to find the courage to announce that, if the boy dies, he will deliberately crash the car and kill them all. In the midst of all these threats, Maria cringes, eventually announcing that she needs to stop. She relates her need delicately, but Trentadue forces the issue into blunt expression: "Do you need to take a piss or a shit?"

Let out on the edge of a cornfield, Maria spies a house in the distance and, as the others are momentarily distracted by a passing truck, bolts into the field. Bisturi and Trentadue race after her, but she eludes them in an empty, shadowy barn. When she

1 All Lamberto Bava quotes in this chapter are from "Mario Bava, Mio Padre" an article appearing in Luigi Cozzi, *Il Cinema Gotico e Fantastico Italiano Vol 1—Mario Bava, I Mille Volti Della Paura* (Rome, Italy: Mondo Ignoto/Profondo Rosso, 2001), 149–56.

2 *Variety*, May 8, 1974. In fact, *Cani arrabbiati* did not begin filming until August 1974.



senses the time is right, she runs to the rear of the farmhouse and bangs on the door, pleading for sanctuary, but no one answers—except Bisturi and Trentadue, who laugh cruelly at her predicament. Together, they force her to remove her panties and urinate in front of them. Cowed and humiliated, she returns to the car with her captors.

Now seated between the two maniacs in the back seat, with the child in front between Riccardo and Dottore, Maria is mauled by Trentadue, who explains his nickname by exposing himself to her. A radio bulletin identifies the Ajaccio Street Gang as the perpetrators of the morning heist. After passing successfully through a roadblock, Riccardo notices the boy stirring and says that he must have water to administer another pill to him. They pause at the next rest stop, where Riccardo is unexpectedly confronted by a co-worker, Marisa Altoveti, who notes that he was supposed to be somewhere else this afternoon and coyly accuses him of having an affair. Riccardo insists that this is not the case, and introduces her to Trentadue ("He is not a woman, as you can plainly see . . ."), who is very impressed by Marisa's bosom and nearly invites her to join them.

Back in the car, still aroused by the memory of Marisa's breasts and fuelled by a bottle of J&B scotch, Trentadue proceeds to maul and rape Maria. This attracts the attention of other vehicles on the road, who honk and berate Riccardo for running "a motel on wheels." Dottore orders Trentadue to stop, and when he refuses with violent anger, the leader senses that he must exert authority or lose control of his men. He takes advantage of a road tunnel to shoot Trentadue. He is left not quite dead, but catatonic ("Nothing will kill him—he'll never die!"), and Bisturi is left emotionally shattered by the violence directed against his friend.

The car is now low on gas, forcing a stop at a service station. The attendant is having his siesta and refuses to open, until Maria is recruited to plead the child's urgent need of hospital care. As

BISTURI *accidentally murders a hostage in the car park, to the horror of Dottore (Maurice Poli) and Maria.*



DOTTORE *and Bisturi hijack Riccardo's car while it is paused at a red traffic light.*

the tank is being filled, a woman—also named Maria—appears, begging for a lift. Even though the car is already crowded, she can't be discouraged. She also proves to be a most annoying, talkative passenger, and while trying to get everyone to sing along with a radio broadcast of "It's a Long Way to Tipperary," she discovers that the sleeping passenger is actually a gunshot victim and Bisturi silences her by stabbing her in the neck.

With two (or one-and-a-half) corpses aboard, Dottore soon declares it is time to dispose of them. At a secluded spot, Trentadue and the hitchhiker are carried downhill into a quiet valley with tall grass, where Bisturi puts a bullet through the forehead of his incredulously staring best friend. As they drive away, Bisturi feels sick and orders Riccardo to pull over at a vineyard just ahead. After vomiting, he rinses his mouth with some white grapes and finds himself face-to-face with the owner of the field, who calls him a thief. Bisturi apologizes and shoves a wad of stolen cash into the astonished farmer's hand.

From there, it is just a short distance to the secluded place where Dottore has left another car of a different make in waiting. Riccardo realizes that Dottore plans to kill them all when he is ordered to take the child out of the car. Riccardo hesitantly obeys, but to everyone's surprise, he shoots Dottore with a gun secreted under the boy's blanket. Bisturi is also shot, but not before he manages to shoot Maria with a bullet intended to stop Riccardo. This leaves only Riccardo and the boy, who drive off with the stolen payroll.

Riccardo stops to place a call from a telephone booth at a Chevron station. He speaks to a Mrs. Girotto—"finally"—and demands 3 billion lire for the safe return of her child. He promises to phone with further instructions later, and walks back to the car—where the body of the boy, probably dead, has been secreted in the trunk.

Cast

Cast in the important role of the driver was Riccardo Cucciolla, who despite roles in nearly sixty films over a forty-year period was principally regarded as one of Italy's finest stage actors and dubbers of foreign film actors. Born in Bari, Puglia, on September 5, 1924, Cucciolla made his screen debut in Anton Giulio Majano's *La domenica della buona gente* (1953), starring Maria Fiore and Sophia Loren. One or two roles later, he began to focus on the theater and his filmography stops until 1965, when his name resurfaces high on the list of credits for Nello Santi's war drama *Italiana brava gente/Attack and Retreat,* directed by Giuseppe De Santis and scripted by Ennio De Concini, among others. He narrated Elio Piccon's 1965 documentary *L'antimiracolo*, inaugurating his long and successful side career as a voice actor. Cucciolla's career in crime pictures began with Giuliano Montaldo's successful heist drama *Ad ogni costo/Grand Slam* (1968), which featured him in the distinguished company of Edward G. Robinson, Janet Leigh, Klaus Kinski, and Adolfo Celi. This was followed by Alberto De Martino's *Roma contre Chicago/Bandits in Rome* (1968), Lucio Fulci's erotic *giallo* thriller *Una sull'altra/One On Top of the Other* (1969), and the biggest roles of his career—as Nicola Sacco, in Giuliano Montaldo's *Sacco e Vanzetti/Sacco & Vanzetti* (1971),[3] for which he won the Best Actor prize at the Cannes Film Festival, and as Paul Weber in Jean-Pierre Melville's *Un flic* (1972). After *Cani arrabbiati*, his career consisted mostly of supporting roles (including several in made-for-television productions, including 1980's *Sophia Loren: Her Own Story* and the 1982 miniseries *Marco Polo*), more voice work, and many stage successes. His last feature film was Krzysztof Zanussi's *Our God's Brother* (1997), which roughly coincided with his long-postponed dubbing of his role in *Cani arrabbiati.*

Identified onscreen by his real name of Aldo Caponi, the actor who played Bisturi is most famous in Italy as Don Backy, the name he has used professionally as a singer and songwriter since 1959. Born August 21, 1939, in Santa Croce sul Arno, Pisa, Backy discovered his calling in 1956, when he saw James Dean in *Rebel Without a Cause,* and Marlon Brando in *The Wild One,* and first heard the music of Bill Haley and The Comets in Richard Brooks' *Blackboard Jungle.* An impressionable young man, he was also influenced to become a body-builder after seeing *Le fatiche di Ercole* in 1958. "When I saw *Le fatiche di Ercole,* I was interested only in the body-builder Steve Reeves; I never asked myself who the cameraman might be, so I never knew," Backy confides. "I would have liked to speak to Bava about it, had I known, but now that opportunity has passed."

Backy's celebrated recording career began in 1960 with the 45 rpm

3 Perhaps as a nod to Cucciolla's famous role, *Cani arrabbiati* has the radio news announcer mention that the name of the pharmaceutical company's treasurer, killed during the robbery, was Armando Vanzetti.

single *"Volo lontano."* By 1962, he took the then-unusual step of composing his own music with *"La Storia di Frankie Ballan,"* making him analogous to the precocious young Italian-American singer/songwriter, Paul Anka. Backy was then "discovered" by fellow singer Adriano Celentano (*La ragazza che sapeva troppo*'s "*Furore*"), who signed him to his "Clan" label, where Backy recut *"La Storia di Frankie Ballan"* to greater success. That same year, he appeared (as himself) in his first movie: Stefano Canzio's pop musical *Canzoni canzoni.* Other films followed, for directors Lucio Fulci (*Uno strano tipo,* 1963) and Sergio Corbucci (*Il monaco di monza,* also '63), and Backy recorded *L'amore,* his first full-length album, in 1965. He struck gold in 1967 with the triple release of *L'immensità* as a feature film (starring himself), album and hit single. As musical trends changed in the late '60s and early '70s, Backy began to act more and record less, earning his principal living as a night-club performer. Prior to the making of *Cani arrabbiati,* he was appearing primarily in historical erotic pictures like G. P. Callegari's *Le calde notti del Decamerone* ("The Hot Nights of the Decameron") and Alfonso Breschia's *Poppea, una prostituta al servizio dell'impero* ("Poppea, a Prostitute in the Service of the Emperor," both 1972). He gives a remarkable performance in *Cani arrabbiati,* full of bravado and unpleasantness, yet also projecting a curiously broken and sensitive personality in Bisturi's devotion to Trentadue. The cover of his 1970s RCA album *Io più te* pictures him in character as Bisturi, making this nine-song collection something of a Bava collectible. After working with Bava, Backy made only a few more pictures before retiring from his acting career, which he later resumed in 1993 with the TV movie *Il viaggio . . . secondo Matteo.* Having released his last 45 rpm single in 1983, he also resumed his recording career as Don Backy around this time, in 1994 releasing an album that included *"Buon Natale"* ("Merry Christmas"), an improbable duet with the famous Italian mouse puppet Topo Gigio. Since 1996, he has been working as a successful writer of *fumetti* and nonfiction, publishing a trilogy of books about the Italian pop music of the early 1960s, concluding with his own memoirs of the Clan years.

Asked why he appeared in *Cani arrabbiati* under his real name, Backy replies, "It really wasn't my decision. The film wasn't given a theatrical release at the time we made it, and I don't even know in what form it is released now, or why they used my real name. I had no voice in the matter." Backy insists that he didn't act under his real name as a method of protecting fans of his music career from seeing him in a different, potentially disturbing light. "My singer–composer and acting careers have always been separate, so, when I played Bisturi, I went about creating the character without any thought of the possibile reactions of my fans as a singer. I wanted to depict a schizophrenic person . . . I think I succeeded."

Actor–writer–producer–director Luigi Montefiori played the role of Trentadue under the most common of his many screen names, "George Eastman."[4] Born in Genoa on August 16, 1942, he made his film debut in Maurizio Lucidi's Western *Due once di piombo/My Name Is Pecos* (1966), and his massive build and lusty features quickly stereotyped him in the roles of Western villains and spy movie henchmen. His big break came with *Fellini Satyricon* (1969), which cast him as the Minotaur, a role for which he accepted credit in his own real name. Typically, Montefiori was credited as Eastman, unless it was a film of which he was particularly proud, as in the case of *Cani arrabbiati* or Pupi Avati's *Bordella* (1976). Among his most popular credits are Corràdo Farina's *Baba Yaga/Kiss Me Kill Me* (1973, likely the film that brought him to Bava's attention), Lamberto Bava's *Blastfighter* (1984) and *Le foto di Gioia/Delirium* (1987), Bruce Beresford's *King David* (1985, in which he plays Goliath to Richard Gere's David), and a great many pictures for "Joe D'Amato" [a.k.a. Aristide Massaccesi], including *Emanuelle e Françoise le sorelline/Emanuelle's Revenge* (1976), *Emanuelle—perché violenza alle donne?/Emanuelle Around the World* (1977), *Porno holocaust* (1979), *Antropophagus/The Grim Reaper* (1980, which he co-produced, and in which he infamously rips a fetus from a pregnant woman's womb and eats it), and *Antropophagus 2/Absurd/The Monster Hunter* (1982). In 1976, he contributed to the screenplay of Enzo G. Castellari's classic Italian Western *Keoma,* and he directed his first film, *Anno 2020—I gladiatori del futuro/2020 Texas Gladiators,* in 1982. He has also written many other screenplays, most notably for Michele Soavi's outstanding directorial debut, *Aquarius/Stagefright.* Today, Montefiori continues to work principally as a writer for Italian television drama series.

In addition to Lea Lander and Maurice Poli, whose biographies are detailed elsewhere in this book, prints of *Cani arrabbiati* curiously list a number of actors who do not appear in the film at all. A role credited to Francesco Ferrini is conspicuously played by an uncredited Gustavo De Nardo, who appeared in more Bava films than any



A CLAPBOARD *shot from the filming of the movie's penultimate scene. Left to right: Maurice Poli, Riccardo Cucciolla, Lea Lander.*

other actor (at the time, most recently as the doctor in *Baron Blood*). Erika Dario, whom Lea Lander remembers as an American actress, is credited with playing the hitch-hiker Maria, though the role is actually played by familiar Italian character actress Marisa Fabbri.

Most conspicuously, the skewed credits of *Cani arrabbiati* omit all reference to the Ellery Queen short story that inspired it. Possibly, as Cesare Frugoni suggests, the storyline was so fundamentally altered in its adaptation that the script became an original work and acknowledgment was no longer deemed necessary.

Production

The production of *Cani arrabbiati* was threadbare, but rich in enthusiasm. The entire picture was shot on location over a three-week period, with most of the action taking place inside a moving car. The film's only set was the getaway car, but in order to accommodate different camera set-ups, prop reductions of the same car model were also used—one split down the middle, another with the front end cut off, and yet another with the back end removed. All of the driving scenes were photographed with the car and camera positioned on the rear platform of a flatbed truck that drove up and down the highway between Rome and Florence all day. To make the car appear to move took nothing more than Bava's usual ingenuity.

"As you know," explains Andrea Piazzesi, a friend of the Bava family, "if you are going to film in the streets, you need permission from the police to stop traffic and barricade people out of your way, and it can be quite expensive to hire policemen to cover the streets for you. What Mario did was to take a big truck and remove the rear section, so that it was completely open in the back. In this truck, he put the car, the camera and his entire crew, which consisted of maybe six people, and it was constantly moving. Because there was no shooting from the street, he needed no official permission [to make the film this way] because he was shooting in his own exclusive territory, so to speak!"



THE SCENE *as it appears in the film.*

Bad luck set in right away when Italian-American actor Al Lettieri (b. 1928, New York City) was initially cast as the driver. The burly, mustached Lettieri was a name star of the moment—his role as Virgil "The Turk" Sollozzo in *The Godfather* (1972) had led to nasty criminal roles in Sam Peckinpah's *The Getaway* (1972), Richard Fleischer's *The Don Is Dead* (1973), and John Sturges' vehicles for John Wayne and Charles Bronson, *McQ* and *Mr. Majestyk* (both 1974)—but he turned out to be more trouble than he was worth.

"Al Lettieri would have added an international flavor to the film; however, he was always drunk when he turned up on set," explains Maurice Poli. "He literally stank—mainly of whiskey. I remember seeing Mario give him direction and when he would turn to Mario, Mario would actually recoil; his face would screw up and he would recoil from the stench of alcohol coming from Lettieri's mouth. After a very short while, it became impossible for the rest of us to work with him and he was fired. He didn't look the part, really—spectacles and a little black mustache. It was unusual to see Lettieri in such a role; he was usually a gangster, and this role was so completely different. He was there for just one week." Within three months—on October 18, 1975—Al Lettieri was dead of a heart attack at age 47.

Lettieri was then replaced by Riccardo Cucciolla. With him (literally) at the wheel, the production ran much more smoothly. "Cucciolla was called in at the last minute," Poli remembers. "He was a very dear person and extremely professional, did everything to the letter."

One thing about which all the cast members agree is that, while Bava was as genial a director as he could be, the working conditions were every bit as uncomfortable as they appear onscreen. "It was a stifling film to shoot," Poli grimaces. "All of us confined in a car, closed in. It was summer, too—very hot, boiling. I think we shot both in English and in Italian, two different versions. There was a problem in that Cucciolla couldn't speak nor could he understand English. So we would be driving along and he would be reading his lines, in English, from the script, which was stuck to the windshield or the rear-view mirror of the car, in front of him. Even with the script, sometimes he was only able to say his lines in Italian."

"The film was shot in August, on the *autostrada* outside Rome," agrees Lea Lander. "As with *Sei donne per l'assassino*, Mario Bava was wonderful to work with and very understanding. He wanted to create a hot, stifling

4 The others include John Cart, Alex Carver, Lew Cooper, Richard Franks, George Histman, Larry London, Tom Salina, and various misspellings of his own true name.

atmosphere—a tiring atmosphere, exasperating, with extreme situations. He wanted to create this, otherwise we could have stayed in air conditioned cars."

Don Backy concurs: "The shooting was difficult, because the whole film takes place inside a car. And because it was summer, we all suffered from heat and discomfort. I also suffered because of my scruffy beard, which was particularly aggravating in the heat. But Mario Bava was a very nice guy, a real non-conformist, funny person, aware of the fact that movies should be fun, especially for the director—at least on that occasion. He was very friendly and very receptive to the actors' suggestions and ideas. When he was in a particularly good mood, he loved to sing a particularly filthy song, written to the tune of 'The Ride of the Valkyries,' and we all sang in chorus with him like a bunch of merry companions!"

Maurice Poli offers his impressions of his co-stars: "Gigi Montefiore was a very *simpatico* guy, as was Al—the singer, Don Backy. They were always sitting in the back of the car. They were both good fun, always fooling around. They would be cutting into the backs of the seats of the car, everyday, snipping a little away—for a laugh, of course. Lea Lander? Well, she wasn't an actress; she was a *re*actress. She just used to scream a lot and react to situations. But she and I had a mutual *simpatia* throughout the film.

"Mario was fantastic to work with," Poli continues, "even though the whole thing was doomed from the start. Mario was not really a director of action, but he took everything in his stride. He did a good job. He didn't worry about working with extremely professional actors, just people who were capable. He was a great technician, too. Some actors would have seen him as eclectic, eccentric. He believed in letting you get on with it. He was very tranquil, pacific . . . He wasn't always ready to bite your dick off, you know?"

Not long after Al Lettieri was fired, Bryanston Films withdrew their financial interests in the film, so what started out as an international co-production suddenly became a purely Italian production. As with Bava's previous troubled movies, the cast were generally kept in the dark about the precariousness of the shoot, with Bava distracting them with his jokes and ribald songs and upbeat attitude. More seasoned cast members like Luigi Montefiori had an inkling of what was really going on and protected their interests accordingly.



TRENTEDUE *taunts "Greta Garbo."*

"Only when the film was about to wrap were we finally made aware of the producer's financial problems," says Don Backy. "Luigi Montefiori insisted on being paid at the beginning of every week, before shooting. I worked anyway, even without getting paid. I just wanted the film to get finished and never made a fuss that might hold up the shooting."

Backy's acquiescence was not enough to safeguard the film against interruptions, as Lamberto Bava recounts: "I remember that we worked under very painful conditions; if you have only three weeks, working is already difficult; it's a very short time, considering that the time it normally takes to shoot a film is somewhere between 6–9 weeks. Our producer, Loyola, had so many money problems that, after the first week of the shoot, the crew stopped cold because their checks had not been dated. Everybody stopped cold for a couple of days, and then Loyola came and settled his accounts for the previous week, whereupon the technicians resumed working. But after a few more days, they stopped again because their dated checks started *bouncing*! It was *torture* to make that film!"

Not knowing what else to do, Bava arranged for a third party (possibly editor Carlo Reali, who went directly from *The House of Exorcism* to *Cani arrabbiati*) to apprise Alfredo Leone of the situation. "I got word that they had run out of money and was indirectly approached to see if I would be interested in stepping in," Leone reveals. "Of course, after all that had happened, I wasn't. I would have done anything to help out Mario personally, even though I was upset with him, but the quality control on that film was not the quality control I exercised within my own organization. They allowed the actors to speak their dialogue in Italian, which I did not. When I was talking to Bava about doing the picture, I was thinking about Ernie Borgnine, or maybe Marty Balsam, who was living in Italy at that time, for the driver. [5] They got Al Lettieri, who was drunk all the time—so they had to fire him, scrap everything they had done, and start over with Riccardo Cucciolla. He's wonderful in the picture, but I wouldn't have used him; he was not a name actor. And the girl, Lea Lander, had been forced on the picture. She wanted to be in the picture very badly, and she had a boyfriend—a very elderly, very wealthy man, maybe forty years older than her—and she got him to invest in the picture so she could play the role. I would have gone for someone like—well, like Elke Sommer, why not? I looked at the footage they had and, in my opinion, it was just not salvageable."

Leone's views on the film would later make a rather dramatic U-turn, but at the time, his decision may have been motivated by a need to slap a couple of wrists. ("Their picture was in trouble?" he chuckles. "I was *thrilled.*") Whether sincere or biased, his reasons for not getting involved were professionally valid, and Bava accepted them.

The film continued to struggle along without Leone's assistance, until it hit the kind of speed bump that could not be ignored. Erroneous newspaper reports of the time led to

rumors that the unfinished film was impounded following the death of producer Roberto Loyola in a traffic accident. This is actually a complex falsehood composed of various truths. In fact, when the picture was shut down, the principal shooting was only two or three days shy of completion.

"Loyola went bankrupt," Lamberto Bava recalls. "He wasn't bankrupted by my father's film, you understand, but because other films which he had produced had not done well and failed to return his investments, so he ran out of money. *Cani arrabbiati* was seized, its materials were seized, while the usual, interminable legal procedures that happen in such circumstances began to be activated." Among the materials impounded was a rough cut of the film that Carlo Reali had been assembling throughout the production, which had been deliberately shot in chronological sequence.

"Everything came to a stop while the film was being edited," Don Backy confirms. "The creditors required the balance, so they stopped the film. Because of that, I was never paid what I was owed, but I was especially sorry because the film wasn't theatrically released and, for me, it would have been a good opportunity. What a shame . . ."

It is also true that the production was disrupted by a death, but it was not Roberto Loyola who died. "It's ridiculous when people write that he is dead," laughs Lea Lander. "He still lives near Rome and works as an artist. Also, he was not my husband," she adds, referring to another oft-reported misconception.

Alfredo Leone reveals what actually occurred: "Joe De Blasio died—on the toilet. One day, I got a call from a friend in the American colony in Rome, who said he was taking up a collection to bury Joe De Blasio. I said, 'What are you talking about?' De Blasio died of a heart attack while he was in the bathroom. His checks were bouncing, everybody was ganging up on him, and one day, I guess his heart just gave out."

In the wake of De Blasio's sudden death, the production's unpaid bills kept piling up until his partner Loyola was forced to declare bankruptcy. His private holdings were impounded until his outstanding debts were paid. Among these properties were the original camera negatives of *Cani arrabbiati,* Reali's rough cut positive print, and a reel of Stelvio Cipriani's demonstration recordings for his proposed score. When the axe fell, principal photography had essentially finished, with only the equivalent of second unit material still unfilmed. What remained to be shot included a short main titles sequence, as well as various cutaway shots of helicopters and passing police cars to support the notion that the kidnappers were being pursued. Everyone involved in the production was terribly disappointed.

"It was a fantastic opportunity for me to work as a lead," sighs Maurice Poli. "I had a stupendous part in this film. If it had been released then, and been a success, I might have had a bigger, more exciting career. Oh, well . . ."

"It was a movie I counted on a lot," agrees Don Backy, "but it didn't happen. I think my performance was good. I wanted to create a lowlife character—I wanted him to be disgusting so that he couldn't be followed as an example—but I also wanted to give him some humanity, to mean that maybe, even in the most despicable person, there's a heart that can be rehabilitated. At least that's what I hope."

Resurrection 1976–97

Understandably, Mario Bava was devastated by this latest in a long line of creative defeats. "My father was very depressed," Lamberto Bava relates, "because he had not successfully completed this film and it meant a great deal to him. In the years that followed, he tried more than once to regain possession of the picture. He also sent me to speak with the bankruptcy curator, to see if there was some way of acquiring the film from the court, if only to finish it—but I'm afraid I wasn't very helpful in negotiating an agreement. In the end, it so happened that Lea Lander, the German actress who had a role in the film, succeeded in obtaining it from the court. I can't help but wonder how she managed to do this, considering how hard I had tried without getting anywhere. In any case, she succeeded and became the new owner of *Cani arrabbiati.*"

Lamberto's remarks gloss over the serious march of time. By the time Lander assumed possession and ownership of the impounded elements, twenty years had passed since the last day of shooting; Mario Bava had been dead for fifteen years and Lamberto himself had launched a successful directorial career of his own. Lander, who saw *Cani arrabbiati* as the major acting assignment of her career and the perfect advertisement for her talents, formed a production company called Spera Cinematografica to raise money for its completion. In the meantime, the elements remained in storage at Technicolor laboratories in Rome, inaccessible until the accumulated storage fees were paid.

Circa 1996, Lea Lander made the acquaintance of a young German film journalist and entrepreneur, Peter Blumenstock (b. 1973). In his early 20s, Blumenstock had founded his own record company, Lucertola Media, which began releasing classic Euro cult movie scores on limited edition compact disc in 1994, and this success led to his hiring by Crippled Dick Hot Wax, for which label Blumenstock conceived the immensely popular "Euro lounge" soundtrack CD *Vampyros Lesbos Sexadelic Dance Party* and the *Beat at Cinecittà* series. Blumenstock was introduced to Lander by Italian director Umberto Lenzi, because during an interview, he had expressed to Lenzi his interest in further expanding his business horizons.

"Lea had the rights to a number of different films, not just *Cani arrabbiati*," Blumenstock explains. "She called me to see if I would be interested in producing a film based on a script that she had, which Lenzi would direct. I went down to talk with her, and we discussed Lenzi, and then she mentioned Mario Bava, whose work I had always loved. She told me that she had appeared in two of his films, *Blood and Black Lace* and *Cani arrabbiati,* which surprised me, because I had not seen either of them at that point. I had heard of *Blood and Black Lace,* of course, but it was impossible to see at that time, especially in Europe. I became especially intrigued by *Cani arrabbiati* when she explained that it was a Bava film that had never been released. So we quickly forgot about the Lenzi project and focused our full attention on *Cani arrabbiati."*

The first important task was to raise the money necessary to liberate the film elements from the vaults at Technicolor and to finance the film's post-production. With the help of this author, letters requesting assistance were sent to the offices of various filmmakers who were known to appreciate Bava's work, all of which went unanswered. At the same time, Peter Blumenstock approached various Italian filmmakers in the hope of obtaining their assistance, also without success. "It was always the same story," Blumenstock shrugs. "It was very hard to get anyone involved, and if someone did respond, once they linked up with Lea, nothing happened."

Lamberto Bava counters that he did try to involve himself, upon learning that Lander had successfully obtained the film elements from the courts: "I met with her in the hope of reaching some agreement. Many years had passed and my father had died in the meantime, so I wanted very much that this film—the last film he directed entirely on his own—should be completed exactly as he imagined it. I knew that there were still things that *Papà* wanted to do: it would have involved no more than another couple of days to shoot those inserts. The dialogue had already been written by my father and was ready to be used for the dubbing, and there were also demos of the music which had been approved but had yet to be recorded in their final form. In brief, I was prepared to complete *Cani arrabbiati* in way that would make my father's spirit live again. I wasn't expecting to be paid—absolutely not! I merely wanted to work closely with her to ensure that the film would turn out as my father had envisioned it and prepared it to be. My only wish was to respect the spirit my father had invested in the film. In the end, I couldn't be sure that this would happen because—perhaps

5 Ernest Borgnine never starred in *Cani arrabbiati*, but he would later star in an Italian Western with the remarkably similar title of *Cani arrabbiato/Manhunt* (1984), directed by Fabrizio De Angelis as "Larry Ludman" and photographed by Guglielmo Mancori, Bava's D.P. on *Ringo del Nebraska/Savage Gringo*.

to avoid any additional expense—Lea Lander refused my offer of assistance and completed the film herself, against my wishes."

Lander was finally able to scrape together enough money to recover the materials from storage and to initiate a very basic restoration of the film. Some of the funding came from Blumenstock, who wanted to obtain the video rights to the film. "But," he explains, "Lea had so much riding on it that her ideas about its commercial appeal were completely unrealistic. She wanted hundreds of thousands of dollars for the VHS rights, if you can imagine that! It was completely crazy. Then, in a moment of inspiration, I asked her, 'Well, what about the DVD rights?' And I could not believe my luck because she agreed to sell me the DVD rights very cheaply, almost for nothing. Maybe $3,000. This is because DVDs were just being introduced to the market at that time and she had no idea what a DVD was!" Lander empowered Blumenstock to produce a limited edition of 2,000 discs.

The efforts that went into the film's reconstruction have variously been credited to Lander, Blumenstock, and even to this writer, but Blumenstock—who never set foot in the editing room—recalls that Lander worked on the project with an associate based in Milan, whom he never met. "I am certain that he, whoever he was, was mostly responsible for the outcome, because with Lea, nothing ever gets done. I was in touch with her throughout the process, so I know that they had to strike a positive print from the negative, which was then edited to match the content of various positive fragments [the Reali rough cut assembly] also in her possession, which were in extremely bad shape. But knowing what I know now, I don't think you could really call what they did a 'restoration.'"

The existing elements were without sound, so it was necessary for Spera Cinematografica to foot the bill to create a completely new soundtrack—inserting sound effects, hiring voice actors to loop the film in Italian (only Riccardo Cucciolla dubbed his own performance), and scoring the picture with Stelvio Cipriani's crude demonstration recordings.

Blumenstock: "I don't think they knew what they were doing, because they went about the restoration completely the wrong way. They edited the film on video—PAL video, at 25 frames per second—and also cut the sound in PAL, then tried to synchronize it to the negative, which was film, which runs 24 frames per second. It must have been a nightmare!"

Once the film had been assembled into releasable form, Lander bestowed upon it one perplexing final touch—the new title of *Semaforo rosso* ("Red Traffic Light"). Her rationale for choosing this title—a phrase that means "halt" for a film that does nothing but "go, go, go!"—was that Riccardo's car is commandeered by the gang while pausing at a red light.

It was under this bizarre moniker that *Cani arrabbiati* had its world premiere at the 14th Brussels International Festival of Fantasy, Science Fiction and Thriller Films in 1996. A 35 mm print was struck for the occasion and actor Riccardo Cucciolla was flown in to introduce it.

In the audience was Bava fan Alwin Dewaele, who published these observations of the event in the British magazine *Flesh & Blood*: "Unfortunately, the world premiere screening of *Semaforo rosso* at Brussels was sullied by the very worst examples of ignorant behavior and audience reaction. The Festival is well-known for audience participation, the crowd cheering at the slightest showing of gore or violence, and hooting and whistling at the merest hint of kissing or sex. This could be entertaining or enlightening in accompaniment with the latest Clive Barker or Peter Jackson entry, but surely not Bava's long-awaited masterpiece! The audience's behavior during this film was the worst I've ever witnessed here in Brussels, painfully ruining the film's most violent and intense moments with wild cheering, whilst other scenes were just hooted away. It is a shame that the first public screening of this film had to suffer the insults of a puerile audience who didn't have the slightest clue to who its director was and what other films he had made. A positive note, though, was the invitation of the film's lead actor Riccardo Cucciolla, who was briefly interviewed on stage before the film began (the usual clichéd questions, of course)."[6] Only a few years after attending the premiere, Riccardo Cucciolla died unexpectedly on September 17, 1999.

The film subsequently received wide critical acclaim, but in the opinion of Lamberto Bava—who knew better than anyone else the kind of movie his father had planned to make—*Semaforo rosso* was a travesty.

"I have seen it," Lamberto remarked at the time, "and I must tell you that, although the editing reflects my father's work, it was a mistake to leave it that way because, for *Papà*, this was only his rough cut. In fact, he fully intended to make additional cuts and other small modifications, before arriving at the final cut. Also, I must also report that Lea Lander did all of the post-production work (the voices, the music, the sound effects) as cheaply as possible, so that the film feels like one of those made-for-TV movies or soaps that play in the afternoons on the smaller private television stations—not like a film to be shown at the cinema. This obviously makes me very unhappy, and as for my father, I can assure you that he would be very pissed-off."



TRENTEDUE *and Bisturi fight over the rights to Maria.*

Don Backy, who finally saw the film more than two decades after giving his outstanding performance as Bisturi, was similarly disappointed: "I saw the film on a VHS tape that a friend (who managed to buy it) gave to me as a gift. It was I who came up with the title of the film.[7] I thought of it and proposed it to Mario Bava, who liked it, so I wasn't happy to see that the title on the VHS had become *Semaforo rosso.* The final result didn't seem very good to me, mostly because of the editing: *too slow.* I don't know who cut the movie, but if Mario had supervised the final editing, the result would surely have been better. I'm certain that he had a more frantic pace in mind. Perhaps some of the tense situations inside the travelling car are still missing, and the ones that are there are not sufficiently tense. I also felt that Maurice Poli was out of character. There's no reason why the two fierce characters played by George and me should fear the reaction of a boss who doesn't project a clear personality."

For his part, Maurice Poli admits, "I have never actually seen the film. I remember seeing the rushes, but everything was silent. I know the film was recently re-released, but no, I have never seen it. Apparently, it has a cult following around the world. Otherwise, you wouldn't be here to interview me, no?"



BISTURI *is unhinged after Dottore shoots Trentedue in the neck.*

Music

As finally heard in *Semaforo rosso,* Stelvio Cipriani's score for *Cani arrabbiati* is akin to an unfinished score for an unfinished movie. The composer was hired to provide a score early in production, and he developed the main theme either on the basis of reading the screenplay or seeing some of the early dailies. The score also bears a very strong similarity to another he composed around the same time, for Massimo Dallamano's crime thriller *La polizia chiede aiuto/What Have They Done to Your Daughters?* (1974)—so strong, in fact, that one can easily believe that both scores were written generically, to accompany any random Italian crime scenario.

The main theme of *Cani arrabbiati* is an intense, incantatory piece built on a three-note ostinato which is played thrice in ascending keys, before cycling back to the beginning. As we first hear the piece, the pattern is played on a harsh, spidery harpsichord—also the main instrument of the Dallamano score—accompanied by a small, brass-augmented jazz combo (the brass eventually overtakes the harpsichord) with sustained electric guitar. The arrangement is charging and momentous, but as the film progresses, the same piece is heard in different arrangements: a slower and more somber version (with the ostinato played on synthesizer to an unsettling, weightless effect), a light jazzy rendition heard on the car radio, and also a version closer to the original arrangement, in which the noodlings of a sawtoothed electric guitar take instrumental precedent. In this respect, Cipriani was following the model of Hitchcock's esteemed collaborator, Bernard Herrmann, who once scored an entire picture—Roy Boulting's psycho thriller *Twisted Nerve* (1968)—with different arrangements of the same music, which gave the movie an extraordinarily obsessive flavor.

Before the production ran out of funding, Cipriani was able to record demos of no more than three or four tracks, one of them being an oddball jazz arrangement of Schubert's *"Ave Maria."* Other Cipriani cues—written and recorded for other pictures—were recruited as temp tracks, including a cue written for Bava's own *Ecologia del delitto,* which is utilized three times in the picture: first as Riccardo takes the exit that leads to the rest stop, next during the killing of the hitchhiker, and finally as the car pulls to a halt at the ruined church where Dottore's second car has been parked in advance.

The score suffers a bit from its coarse recording quality—as Lamberto Bava has stated, it was meant to be re-recorded later, with greater studio polish (as indeed it was, judging from the 2006 Digitmovies CD release)—but *Cani arrabbiati* is a coarse film, and the grittiness of the music does not unreasonably compromise what is essentially a good match.

Rabid Dogs

After the film's premiere in Brussels, Peter Blumenstock patiently awaited the delivery of the DVD master promised to him by Lea Lander.

"I wanted a master in a decent format," he remembers, "but the first thing she gave me was a Super VHS copy—*for DVD!* I pressed for something better, like a SuperBetacam master, but finally all that she could deliver was a Betacam recording—which is an analog master rather than digital, but . . . you know, acceptable. I took it to a post house with a friend and we fixed the color and edited together a trailer. Given the facilities at my disposal, it was the best I could do; I

6 Alwin Dewaele, with the assistance of Nigel Burrell, "Mario Bava's Bleak World View: The Nihilism of Semaforo Rosso," *Flesh & Blood* 7, 1996, 7.

7 Although production stills show that the clapboard carried the title *L'uomo e bambino*, Mr. Backy must be mistaken about this, as a *Variety* report dated May 8, 1974—well before the shooting commenced—reported the *Cani arrabbiati* title.



BISTURI *and Riccardo dispose of the not-quite-dead body of Trentadue.*

couldn't invest any more money in the project, because in addition to what I had paid to Lea, there were the additional costs of authoring, duplication, packaging, and distribution, which involved an expense of well over $20,000. For a small, unknown film on a format that had yet to hit its stride, it was a huge financial risk for me to take."

Thus, Blumenstock's company Lucertola Media ventured—for the first and only time—into the realm of DVD production. "In reconstructing the film," Blumenstock explained in an article included on the disc, "the only problem was the absence of the opening title sequence, which was present in the script but never put on celluloid. We considered some no-frills alternatives—putting plain titles on a black screen, for example—but we finally decided to film a new opening scene, following Bava's posthumous directions."

Bava's annotated script describes the planned sequence as a slow zoom-out shot of a weeping woman, her silhouette visible through a transparent, billowing curtain. Bava's idea was that, on second viewing, the viewer would realize that this unexplained figure was in fact the child's despondent mother, reacting to the news of her son's abduction. Like the opening shot of Dario Argento's *Profondo rosso/Deep Red* (shot the same year), the sequence would go unexplained, entering into the viewer's subconscious as the story got underway, only to be summoned back to conscious attention when later events elucidated its true and critical meaning. It was an afternoon's shoot for Blumenstock, who filmed the shot in 16 mm. Though attractive and well-intended, the sequence doesn't really work because the imagery is stylized in a way that the remaining footage is not; in its stark artifice, it looks more like an Argento shot than a Bava shot). Also, the track-out is too slowly paced and the pose of the crying woman (Nina Gueltzow, the girlfriend of one of Blumenstock's coworkers at Crippled Dick Hot Wax)—is too stationary to seem genuinely upset or hysterical.

As the DVD entered its final stages of production, Blumenstock took some last-minute measures to ensure that the text screens and subtitles would read smoothly enough to please its principal audience in English-speaking countries. He asked me, Tim Lucas, to polish the English subtitles and the wording of the supplementary files, which I was pleased to do. Because my own knowledge of Italian was (and remains) limited, I was provided with a very rough translation of the film's scripted Italian dialogue by Sukri Mehemet, which was the foundation of my rewrite.

My original role was to polish this existing translation for co-credit; however, it soon became apparent that the film would not be well-served by Mehemet's strict translation. In English, the street language sounded too stilted and formalized—and this was perhaps caused by Mehemet's decision to translate the dialogue as scripted, rather than as spoken. The original dialogue was violent and crude, but also rich in character (and occasionally, humor), much of which was lost in literal translation. So I approached the dialogue as a novelist, studying the actors carefully and writing the dialogue with their emotions in mind, striving to make every line as true to their performances as to the scripted dialogue. I also took some minor liberties to make the dialogue sound as vivid and contemporary as possible. The original Italian dialogue contained a surprising amount of profanity for an Italian film of this period, but I added even more, because this is the way criminals speak on the screen today, especially in the wake of directors like Martin Scorsese, Oliver Stone, and Quentin Tarantino. The last thing *Rabid Dogs* wants to be is a restrained film.

I also added to the dialogue in a couple of ways, but only when it would not alter or detract from original meanings. For example, I chose to have the car radio announcer refer to a "robbery and kidnapping" (not just a robbery, as in the script), because this could be interpreted as a reference to the hostage Maria on first viewing, and understood on subsequent viewings as a foreshadowing of the film's bleak *dénouement*. The character names also required me to take certain liberties. In Italian, the word *Dottore* connotes an educated man, but there is no precise counterpart in English. It would have been misleading to have the others address him as "Doctor" or "Professor"—and these also seemed too cumbersome to be used as nicknames—so I settled on "Doc." It seemed critical to leave the name of Trentadue untouched, but since "32" would suggest a frightening, impossible endowment in America (where we continue to resist the metric system), I took the liberty of inserting a brief metric explanation. *Bisturi* means "scalpel" in Italian, which

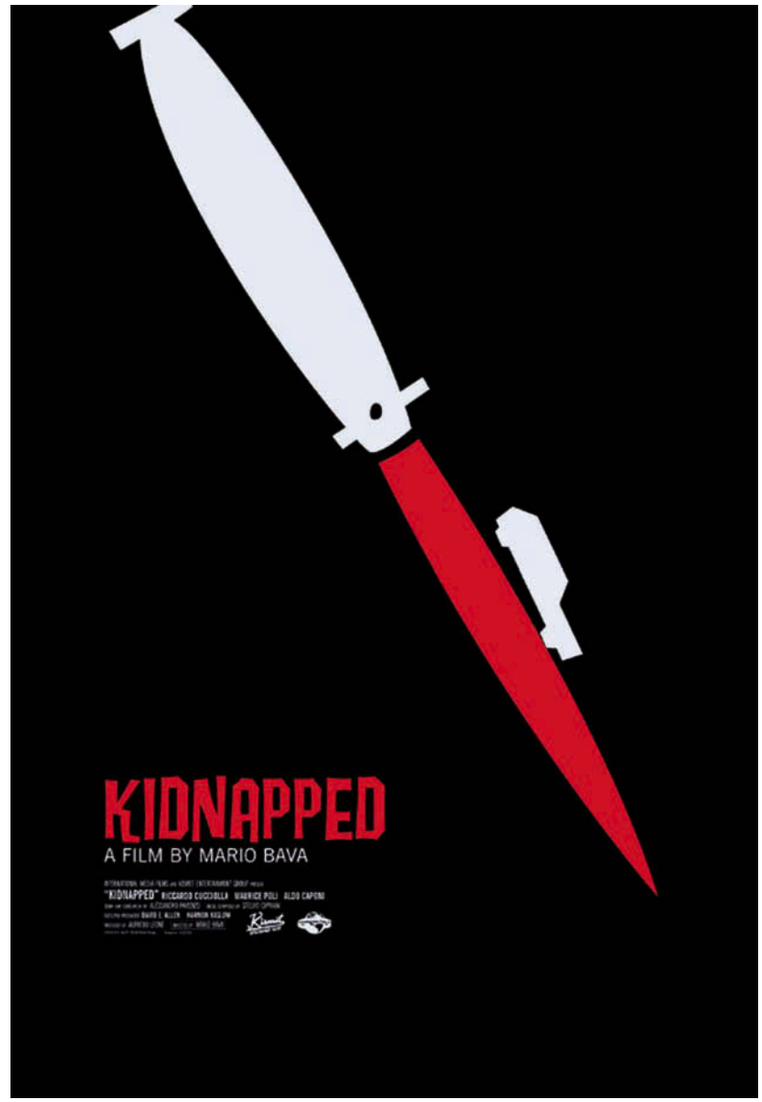
called for a synonym that could trip more easily off the tongue, so I renamed him Blade.

The Lucertola Media DVD of *Rabid Dogs* was released in January 1998. It was the first feature film to be released exclusively on DVD and, as such, it provided the incentive needed by numerous reluctant video collectors to embrace this new medium, which is today regarded as the fastest growing home entertainment market ever.

"I am very proud of what we accomplished with that DVD," Blumenstock says. "It was the very first Mario Bava DVD, and now nearly all of Bava's films are available in the format, which is unimaginable to those of us who remember how difficult it used to be, even to see one. And if you look at the DVD market today, there are so many great European horror films available, with never-before-seen footage and alternate cuts, it is amazing to realize how quickly the market and its audience have grown. And *Rabid Dogs* was pretty much the beginning of it all!"

Wild Dogs

In 2001, a somewhat expanded cut of *Cani arrabbiati* appeared on DVD in Germany by Astro Records & Filmworks under the slightly amended title of *Wild Dogs*. Carrying the onscreen title of *Wild Dogs semaforo rosso,* this disc eliminates the Blumenstock title sequence (or rather, repositions it as a supplementary item) and opens with a newer, more state-of-the-art title sequence patterned after the crude video-generated titles which accompanied Lea Lander's original *Semaforo rosso* print. It also concludes with some extra footage that begins with the shot of the child in the trunk of the car (actual motion footage, not the freeze-frame under the end titles of the Lucertola disc), cuts back to Riccardo shutting the trunk again, climbing into the car and driving out of the Chevron station, as the screen fades to black and the credits roll. An alternate take of this footage is also provided in the supplementary section. Although the Astro disc provides only Italian and German subtitles with no English option, this cut of the picture is marginally more satisfying. According to Alfredo Leone (who now holds the world rights to the title), this DVD is an unauthorized release.



US *promotional poster. A welcome return to the "School of Saul Bass" poster design.*

Kidnapped

The tangled web of *Cani arrabbiati*'s production history was dealt a new twist in 2002 with the completion of *Kidnapped,* a re-edited and re-scored version of the picture produced by Alfredo Leone, with new scenes directed by Lamberto Bava.

In late 2000, Leone acquired the rights to *Cani arrabbiati* from Lea Lander. The transaction brought him into the possession of Bava's annotated script, which mentioned numerous changes that were never put into effect in the existing workprint. Armed with these notes, Leone mapped out what needed to be done to complete the picture according to Bava's specifications, scripting a few short additional scenes. "The picture was unreleasable as it was," he opines. "It had no continuity, but it had great potential."

In early 2001, Leone travelled to Rome where he supervised the taping of some new video footage to provide a "rough draft" of his intentions. Among these scenes were cutaway shots of *autostrada* traffic, police helicopters hovering over the highway, and two dramatic scenes—one of which provided a new closing image for the picture, a zoom-in and freeze-frame of the boy's mother's face as she breaks down, upon hearing the terms dictated by his kidnapper.

In March, Leone screened this material for Lamberto Bava—with whom he had not been in touch since the 1970s—in the hope of persuading him to oversee the filming of the final supplementary footage. Lamberto had thoroughly disapproved of Lea Lander's earlier *Semaforo rosso* cut of the picture, and the experience had left such a bad taste in his mouth that he initially resisted Leone's invitation.

"It was *The House of Exorcism* all over again!" Leone laughs. "At first, Lamberto didn't want to do it. He was superstitious about touching it, maybe because it was something of Mario's. But he finally decided it would be better for him to do it than somebody else. I couldn't have been more pleased."

Lamberto Bava directed the additional scenes on location in Rome in late April and early May. "It was amazing," Leone marvels, speaking with genuine nostalgia. "We got together a small crew of people, most of whom had worked for Bava in the old days, when they were young and just starting out, but now they're all known professionals in their field. The cameraman used to be the assistant to Emilio Varriano, the original cameraman, and so on." Leone was also successful in soliciting a completely new score from the film's original composer, Stelvio Cipriani, including an original vocal ballad to accompany the end credits scroll.

Though the reshoots took less time to film than to prepare, not everything went smoothly and Leone occasionally noticed history repeating itself. "Just like I had trouble with Mario on *The House of Exorcism,* I had trouble with Lamberto!" he laughs. "The ending of the picture . . . I wanted the final shot to end with a zoom and a freeze-frame. Lamberto didn't want to do it. On the set, I told

him, 'Remember, a zoom-in and a freeze-frame." He didn't give it to me! I finally had to do it in the lab as an optical! He was very stubborn about some things. But afterwards, when he saw the finished picture, he called me and he said, 'Leone, I apologize. It's a wonderful picture, and I was wrong to challenge you.' What can I say? Like father, like son!"

Lamberto Bava believes that he and Leone were successful at reconstructing the film into a form closer to Mario's original intentions. "I re-edited the footage, trying to approximate what my father planned to do. There were some scenes that still needed to be shot and I shot them, doing them a little bit different, but always with a spirit close to what the film had to be. For example, I added the mother in the final phone call; I shot these with my son Roy. But, most importantly, I made some revisions, cutting some things my father didn't like. I think I knew my father better than most people, and I tried to imagine what he really wanted to do. Besides that, I had been his assistant during the production and I was the only one who had the script of the film. The problem was that we couldn't cut the original negative because we don't know where it is, so I was only able to re-edit the existing cut. My editor Mauro Bonanni helped me, and we also recovered some stock material from PAC, which gave us some shots of police cars from the 1970s. These were all things that weren't in the film at the time; luckily, I still had a list of things I was supposed to shoot as the film's second unit director [at the time the plug was pulled on the original production]."[8]

The *Kidnapped* cut omits the subjective cutaway to the pinball game as the camera slow-zooms into Bisturi's face after the shooting of Trentadue (which is missed), as well as Erika Dario's annoying "It's A Long Way to Tipperary" sing-along (which is not). As re-edited by Mauro Bonanni (though Carlo Reali still receives the only onscreen editing credit), *Kidnapped* generally plays more tightly than *Rabid Dogs*, but not to an extent that incriminates the earlier cut quite to the degree suggested by Lamberto Bava's remarks.

Lamberto's completion of the picture is seamless, incorporating stock shots of traffic and helicopters dating from the period in which the film was shot. It works as a whole and shows sound judgment in terms of what it removed. What it added, however, is not always so judicious. Viewers familiar with *Rabid Dogs* may question whether the film was well-served by *Kidnapped*'s occasional cutaways outside the getaway car, which diminish the earlier version's sense of sweaty claustrophobia and universal criminality.

Contrary to Lamberto's comment about being forced to re-edit the existing cut, *Kidnapped* picks up some shots not found at the time of the *Rabid Dogs* assembly. One of these is a shot of the bank manager phoning the police after the opening heist, which confirms Ettore Manni's previously inexplicable presence in the cast list.

The new material, featuring Fabrizia Sacchi as the kidnapped child's mother, is well-played but causes the film to tip its hand too early—and the closing scene of Roberto's call from the telephone booth is weakened by the insertion of Sacchi's emotings. In some ways, Riccardo Cucciolla's performance in this final dialogue scene is his most important moment in the picture; he was the film's star—and, at the time of *Kidnapped*'s release, its late star—and it's regrettable that his ultimate delineation of character would be punctuated and undercut by cutaways to a performance by an unknown. The scene works better if the viewer imagines the mother's distress through the steely calm of the kidnapper.

Alfredo Leone had final cut on *Kidnapped*, but its faults cannot be laid entirely at his doorstep; he was working in good faith from Mario Bava's surviving notes. Of course it is possible, had Bava lived to guide the film through its final editing stages, that he might have had second thoughts about the cutaways to the police and the distressed mother, but his notes show that he did intend them while the film was in production. If the overall effect of *Kidnapped* is not entirely an improvement, it is a smoother ride and Lamberto Bava's completion of the film is seamless and a professional yet loving job.

Of all the revisions found in *Kidnapped*, the most lamentable is the replacement of Stelvio Cipriani's original, propulsively anxious score with a new one, also by Cipriani. "We were preparing the film for a contemporary release," Leone explains, "so we felt we needed to get away from the original music. It wasn't bad for its time, but today, it sounds very dated, not like something you'd hear on a new picture. So I went to Cipriani and explained what we were doing, and he agreed to deliver an entirely new score. I think he did a wonderful job."

Cipriani's new score has a completely different character to his previous effort. The music of *Kidnapped* is light, calm, elegant if bland, middle-of-the-road music with a delicate dance beat. In no way does it reflect the tensions or suspense of the images onscreen, even turning Maria's desperate bid for escape into an opportunity for the score's dance track to stretch out like a sleek cat. Only during the climactic scene of Roberto's gunning of his abductors do the soundtrack and film feel emotionally in synch. Worst of all is the end credits song, "Hold On To Me," an old-fashioned Oscar-bid of a theme song (compared by some to *The Poseidon Adventure*'s "The Morning After") whose hopeful lyrics stand in defiant contradiction of the bleak cynicism otherwise characterizing the story's world view. It is impossible, too, to figure out whom, among the film's characters, the song's plea is meant to represent.

Disliking the film's original title, which he felt gave the impression of retroactively ripping-off Quentin Tarantino's *Reservoir Dogs* (1992), Leone settled on a surprising new title: *Kidnapped*. ("It was good enough for Robert Louis Stevenson," he reasoned at the time—to say nothing of Ellery Queen.) This revised, rescored version had its World Premiere at the Egyptian in Los Angeles on May 31, 2002, at the American Cinematheque's second Mario Bava retrospective. Alfredo Leone and Lamberto Bava were in attendance, and according to Internet reports, the screening was followed by polite, lukewarm applause. A Q&A session scheduled after the movie prompted no questions from the audience, so the American Cinematheque's Dennis Bartok filled the breach with questions of his own.

Both Leone and Bava professed to be satisfied with the film's reception. Lamberto later told the magazine *Nocturno*: "I attended the screening in Los Angeles, in Italian with English subtitles, and I must say that the film—now finished as it should have been—was not only remarkably different from my father's other films; more importantly, it had a raw quality that didn't exist in the other versions available previously."

At a private party following the screening, Bava was treated to an unexpected reunion. According to film historian David Del Valle, who was present, "I saw Lamberto standing there, not talking to anybody, and I walked up and introduced myself and said, 'Have you seen Barbara Steele?' His English was a little rough, but he said, 'I saw her when she was making the movie *La maschera del demonio* of my father.' And I said, 'Well, if you just walk with me around that corner over there, you'll see her again!' So we walked over together and I had the great pleasure of reintroducing Lamberto Bava to Barbara Steele. They took each other by the hands and she kissed him; it was a very special moment. He hadn't seen her since he was a starstruck teenager visiting the set of *La maschera del demonio*, and he seemed quite emotional. Afterwards, he told me that, for the first time since his father died, he could feel his presence in the room. It was a great party."

As responses to the American Cinematheque screening continued to accumulate on the Internet, it became apparent that, while *Kidnapped* was strongly disliked by some audience members who were familiar with the cut preserved on the *Rabid Dogs* DVD, those who had not seen the earlier version found it most impressive. When told that the film had been recut and given a new title, actor Don Backy responded, "I just hope that Lamberto improved the editing to give the entire movie a faster pace."

Leone considers *Kidnapped* to be "Mario Bava's crown jewel." Lamberto Bava agrees, albeit somewhat more tentatively: "It is now the film that Mario wanted . . . I think . . . *I hope!*"

Reviewing the *Kidnapped* cut of the picture under the title *Rabid Dog* [*sic*], *Variety*'s Dennis Harvey noted that the

picture "resurrected after twenty-eight years on the shelf, might well be Mario Bava's most atypical picture . . . Also known as the much-less-vividly-titled *Kidnapped*, feature . . . merits specialized distribution as a major '70s rediscovery . . . Perfs range from over-the-top (Caponi) to subtly ambiguous (Cucciolla), but all fit neatly into an overall *mise-en-scène* of gruelling realism. Only wrong note in restored pic's package is a rather cheesy soundtrack by Stelvio Cipriani, which regrettably recalls the sounds of synth-score 1980s direct-to-video cheapies." [9]



RICCARDO *carries more than a child under this blanket as he gambles on his survival.*

Commentary

Mario Bava's intentions for *Cani arrabbiati* were undoubtedly different from the results that were achieved by others working with his materials after his death, but his achievement is nonetheless remarkable. Regardless of the form in which it is viewed, *Cani arrabbiati* is to Bava's career what *Detour* (1945) is to the filmography of Edgar G. Ulmer: a minimalist *noir* road picture that stands as a definitive example of what a talented and experienced filmmaker can achieve onscreen with a lot of imagination, and little or no means. Bava had far less to work with than Ulmer—not having the luxury of PRC's studio sets and rear-screen projection facilities—yet he produced arguably superior results. The difference may be that Ulmer (who was forced to work for insignificant studios after being blackballed by Universal in the 1930s) worked with minuscule budgets because he had to, whereas Bava did so because he responded to the way low-budget filmmaking forces one to think and solve technical problems creatively. Ulmer was equally proficient, but slumming; Bava was in his element.

A headlong, deeply unsettling thriller from start to finish, *Cani arrabbiati* would be an impressive feature coming from any director, even from a young one feeling his oats, but coming from Bava—who had just turned 61 and was only five years from the end of life and career—it is an unexpected 180° turn away from the dead end necrophilic concerns of *Lisa and the Devil*, a forceful reassertion of his vitality and resourcefulness. Screened for the first time almost two decades after its director's death, it is the most Promethean film of Bava's career—not his best, but certainly his most externalized, energetic, and *alive* picture. It stands as a remarkable reinvention of his directorial persona, a film like no other Bava ever made—a story about the kinds of characters never acknowledged by his earlier work, in which stylish criminals committed brutal yet beautiful murder on the cool and unperspiring bodies of women torn from the covers of Italian *Vogue*.

Cani arrabbiati is also the only Bava film which takes place entirely in the real world, in real time, on real locations. The only other Bava films that could begin to make such a claim, *La ragazza che sapeva troppo* and *Ecologia del delitto,* take place less in the real world than in stylized realms of paranoid fantasy and avarice. Given the arrival of *Cani arrabbiati* in his filmography, Bava's earlier films—so commonly perceived as extreme with their aspects of sado-masochism, gruesome murder, and necrophilia—are suddenly unmasked as conservative fantasies from which every trace of reality was banished. However transgressive his earlier films may appear to be, the blunt, unglamorized and relentlessly cruel *Cani arrabbiati* exposes them all as the escapist entertainment they are.

Martin Scorsese has astutely pegged Bava as a 19th century horror director, [10] and it could be argued that Bava's most modernist works (*Diabolik, 5 bambole per la luna d'agosto, Ecologia del delitto*) are more 21st century than of their own time, given their vaguely futuristic art direction and the fact that they are only beginning to find a widely appreciative audience now. Therefore, the real distinction of *Cani arrabbiati* is its courage in reflecting—for the first and only time, honestly and without subterfuge—the 20th century world in which Bava actually lived, the roads he actually drove.

With his usual opportunities for stylized lighting denied him by his story's setting, Bava was free to devote more attention than usual to matters of performance. The result puts the lie to the frequent charge that he was not "an actor's director." First of all, if a picture's success is almost entirely dependent on successful casting, the acting ensemble shows impeccable judgment on Bava's part. The performances of Riccardo Cucciolla and Maurice Poli are skillfully subtle and mutually dependent, as the personalities of these two "idea men" seem to stand on equal footing (despite the

8 Manlio Gomarasca and Davide Pulici, "Il Talento di Mr. Bava," *Nocturno Dossier* 24, July 2004, 6–32.

9 Dennis Harvey, "Rabid Dog (Canni arabbiatti)" [*sic*] review, Variety, March 3–9, 2003, 46.

10 Martin Scorsese, quote "Bava seems to me 19th century . . ." in David Thompson and Ian Christie, eds., *Scorsese on Scorsese* (London, UK: Faber & Faber, 1989), 103.



BAVA *makes a comic grab for Luigi Montefiori's . . . thigh in this gag shot, to the amusement of Aldo Caponi.*

driver's disadvantage in this situation) for reasons that only become apparent in the final reel. It is one of the film's greatest pleasures to watch these two undemonstrative types locked in a quiet bid for control, as more demonstrative violence breathes down their necks from the rear—the division of front and back seats diagramming the separation of calculated reason and savage animal impulse. Cucciolla is to be particularly commended for a characterization that is wholly deceptive on first viewing, though it is completely supportive of its ultimate truth when studied in subsequent viewings. The film's success rests mostly on his shoulders, and he carries it with honor.

Luigi Montefiori gives a larger-than-life, bestial performance as Trentadue, blood-chilling yet funny, and also occasionally poignant and pathetic. More complex still is Aldo Caponi's multi-faceted Bisturi. The character manages to present shadings of the psychopathic, sociopathic, philosophic, sadistic, and comic, but there are moments that offer glimpses of a man ruined by bad company and worse opportunities, and his adoration for the "indestructible" Trentadue hints at homosexual devotion. Lea Lander gives a reasonable performance, but her hard-faced demeanor is a closed book; she doesn't permit the viewer many glimpses of Maria's true nature, or of her thinking process as she finds herself enclosed by clashing personalities, as she focuses her attention entirely on looking too hysterical to think and too frightened to move. Far worse is Erika Dario as the shrilly overbearing hitchhiker; as successful as she is at evoking the desired emotions, one can't help feeling that they could have been more subtly and effectively provoked.

Though it is more earthy, confrontational, and unpleasant than Bava's other work, *Cani arrabbiati* should not be mistaken for a return to neo-realism. While it does present us with a real-time drama of realistic situations, realistic settings, realistically profane dialogue, and—perhaps most uncharacteristic of all—consistently realistic lighting, it cannot be called destylized. Its action scenes, such as the opening bank robbery and the hostage situation in the parking garage, consist of carefully storyboarded camera set-ups, composed and edited with a dynamism that suggests comic book art. The use of wide-angle lenses, spreading various tight or narrow quarters across the screen, also lends to this quality, as does the startling metaphorical insert of the silver ball ricocheting through the works of a pinball machine as Bisturi struggles to comprehend the unimaginable shooting of Trentadue. A cutaway to an adding machine might have been more literal, as the vicious hoodlum tries to calculate what has just taken place in front of him, but somehow the pinball machine conveys the same thought.

Despite the severe limitations of scenery, the script manages to incorporate an impressive number of suspenseful situations: the presence of the sick child in the car; Trentadue and Bisturi's sadistic teasing of Riccardo, Maria, and the boy; the close encounter with a passing squad car; the tollbooth episode; Maria's escape (her gasp-inducing collision with the scarecrow guarding the cornfield prophesies a similar moment in Bava's *Schock*); Riccardo's unexpected encounter with a co-worker at the rest stop; the back seat rape, witnessed by other passing cars, which signals Dottore's loss of control; the gas station episode, as Maria must persuade the attendant to serve them while hiding the blood staining her blouse; the addition of the loudmouthed hitchhiker to an already overburdened human equation, and of course, the final sequence, which takes place in that favorite Bava setting: a ruined church. The script is not unlike a stove top where several different pots are set to boil at different times: Riccardo's anxiety as he is prevented from getting the child to the hospital, the hysteria of Maria, Bisturi's trauma at sitting beside Fagio at the moment he was shot in the head (and the seconding of this trauma when Dottore shoots Trentadue in the tunnel), Trentadue's alcohol-fuelled lust, the men's lighthearted cruelty toward the comatose boy, Dottore's concern over losing control of his crazed partners, and so forth. With so much tension involved, the film might well have been unendurable without some element of humor, which is provided in good quantity by Bisturi and Trentadue, both exhilarated and slap-happy at surviving the robbery. Even Lea Lander's dour, immovable expression of torment is tapped for humor, when Trentadue remarks on her knit-browed resemblance to Greta Garbo and Bisturi mimics her most famous line, "I want to be alone." In this humorous, trivia-tinged dialogue, and in other lines of deliberately shocking crudity—and cruelty, as when Bisturi describes how he once started to peel the skin from a cadaver but didn't complete the job . . . "What do you think I am, *crazy?*"—*Cani arrabbiati* anticipates the raw yet

hilarious dialogue that Quentin Tarantino would later provide for his criminal characters in *Reservoir Dogs* and *Pulp Fiction*.

By having 90% of its action restricted to the interior of a moving car, *Cani arrabbiati* posed a technical challenge for Bava that finds one of its few counterparts in Alfred Hitchcock's wartime drama *Lifeboat* (1944). A not-quite-real-time screenplay initiated by John Steinbeck, *Lifeboat* attended the personal and political conflicts of a group of people after rowing free of a torpedoed ship; it never leaves the confines of the titular vessel for most of its 96 minutes. Bava's film beats it on the grounds of authenticity, as Hitchcock's film was shot entirely in the studio. The quantum leap taken by *Cani arrabbiati* into the realms of obscene language, sexual cruelty and humiliation has another Hitchcockian parallel in *Frenzy* (1972), a film which had prompted Hitchcock's former associate and personal friend Norman Lloyd to exclaim to Mrs. Hitchcock after a preview screening, "It's the film of a young man!" But while *Frenzy* provided a climax of sorts to Hitchcock's career, it was not as audacious a statement as he had made earlier with *Psycho* (1960), simply a more overt one. No young person could ever mistake it for the work of a young man. *Cani arrabbiati*, on the other hand, is precisely that: a hellride with all the energy, profanity, nihilism, and rebellious anger of youth. [11]



MARIO BAVA *makes one of his many faces for the camera, flanked by an unidentified companion and Aldo Caponi.*

Where did this revitalization come from?

At the time of production, whether he let it show or not (he did not), Bava must have felt like a gambler all too aware that he might be rattling his last throw of the dice. Although everything about the production was reductive, *Cani arrabbiati* was very much a bid to change lanes on the *autostrada* of the Italian film industry, to leave the ghetto of horror movie production—in which his work was then developing a reputation of being old-fashioned—for the fast lane where all the young turks were breaking the rules. Some of the dialogue in *Lisa and the Devil* ("I can't live like this, in your shrine of death!") can be read in support of what some friends have said about Bava privately expressing a wish to break free of the horror genre. If he could not transform the genre, as he had tried to do, then he would set his sights on escaping it altogether. The raw emotion of *Cani arrabbiati* may have been fuelled by Bava's anger and desperation at having to deface the unreleased film which had been his grand summation; at losing the professional support of his valued colleague, Alfredo Leone; and at his disadvantage of being an older man in what had become a young man's world. Bava was surely hoping that this new project—so unlike anything else he had ever done—would redefine him in the eyes of producers and audiences as a viable, contemporary, hard-edged filmmaker, ready and able to adapt to reality. Unfortunately, greater realities were in the cards.

An important footnote that must be appended to any discussion of *Cani arrabbiati* is that, regardless of which version we might see, none of the extant editions represents a final cut approved by Mario Bava. The notes in his handwriting are a chart of his ideas during production, not necessarily a list of changes he was determined to make; if he had been able to shoot the opening sequence of the character whom Peter Blumenstock has dubbed "Bava's Mother of Tears," it is possible that he would have later decided not to include it, after all. As exciting as the *Semaforo rosso/Rabid Dogs/Wild Dogs* versions are, Don Backy has complained that their editing is not as tight as Bava intended, which is an important detail. While the *Kidnapped* version tightens the film's pacing, its improvements in this area are effectively undone by a flaccid score that insists on working against the grain of the film's pressure-cooker tensions.

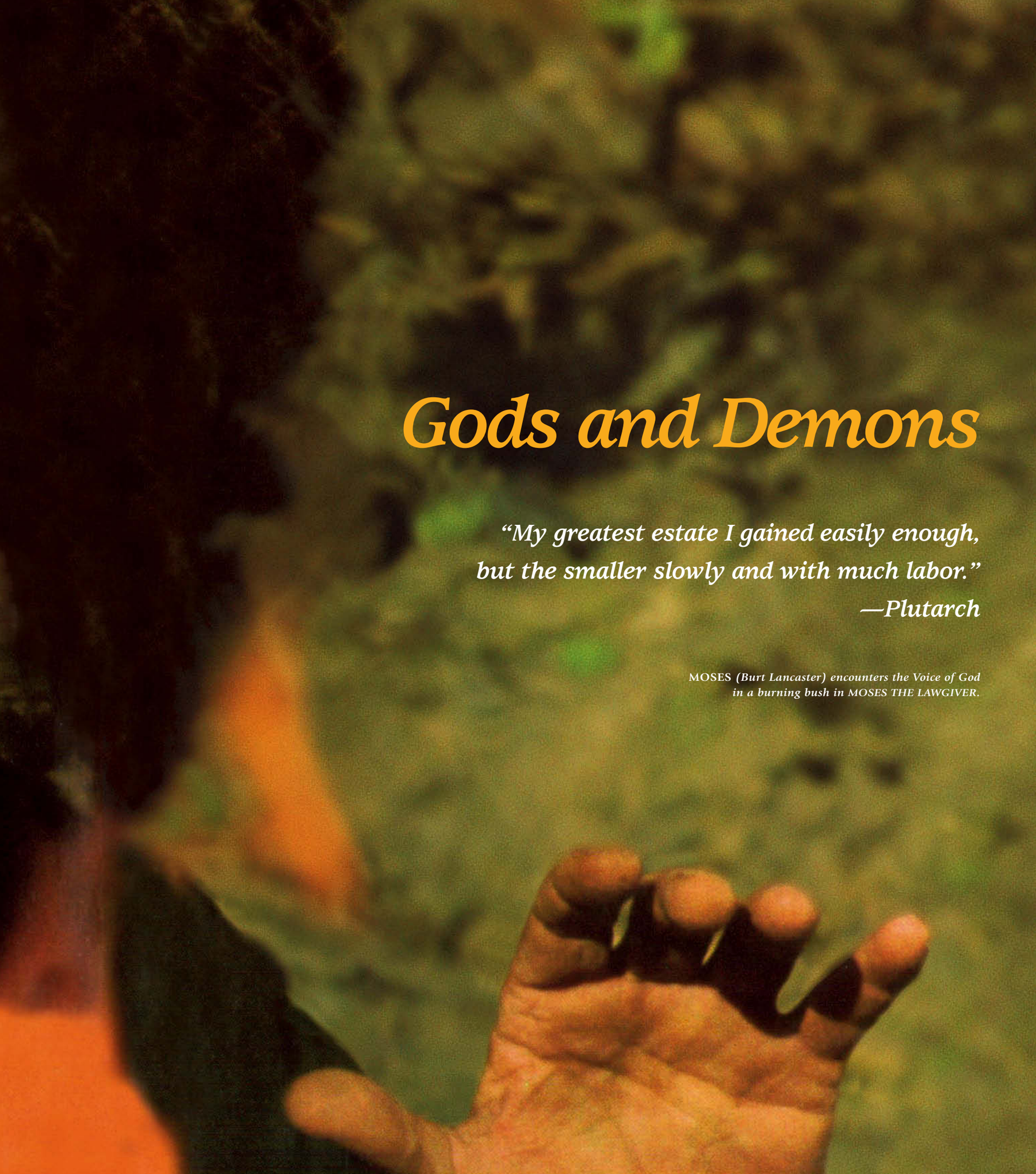
Regardless of which version you see, and despite the absence of a genuinely definitive cut, the remnants of *Cani arrabbiati* leave little doubt that it would have been recognized as one of the best crime pictures of its decade, had it been completed and released as planned in 1976. But such a happy ending would have been inconsistent with a career inexorably tied to death and irony.

11 There is also another curious coincidence linking *Frenzy* and *Cani arrabbiati*, though it doesn't appear to be a very meaningful one, and thus is being demoted to footnote status. In one of the less successful scenes of the Bava film, the hitchhiker Maria attempts to involve her fellow car passengers in a jolly sing-along of "It's a Long Way to Tipperary," the 1912 composition by Jack Judge and Harry Williams that became the prevailing anthem of World War I. Maria doesn't know the correct words of the song, which is about an Irish soldier's yearning for home, and simply repeats *"It's a long way to Tipperary / It's a long way to you . . ."* until we in the audience practically want to knife her ourselves. The parallel has to do with the song's actual chorus, which goes, *"It's a long way to Tipperary / It's a long way to go / It's a long way to Tipperary / To the sweetest girl I know! / Goodbye, Piccadilly! / Farewell, Leicester Square! / It's a long, long way to Tipperary / But my heart's right there!"* The title of the novel upon which Hitchcock's *Frenzy* was based (by Arthur LaBern) was entitled *Goodbye Piccadilly, Farewell Leicester Square*. An interesting, but almost certainly meaningless parallel—what would be more valuable to know is whether Bava chose the song for sentimental reasons (it was the biggest song of 1914, the year of his birth, selling over a million copies), or because it was the most annoying song he could think of.



Gods and Demons

"My greatest estate I gained easily enough,
but the smaller slowly and with much labor."
—Plutarch



MOSES *(Burt Lancaster) encounters the Voice of God in a burning bush in MOSES THE LAWGIVER.*





MOSES THE LAWGIVER

MARIO BAVA'S APPEARANCE on RAI-TV prompted an offer from the company to supervise the special effects for the network's most ambitious production to date: a lavish, $6,000,000 TV miniseries based on the Old Testament books of Exodus, Leviticus, and Numbers, entitled *Moses the Lawgiver*.

An international co-production, the filming was financed jointly by RAI-TV, the British networks Associated Television (ATV) and Incorporated Television Company (ITC), and CBS Television in America. The series was the brainchild of producer Vincenzo Labella (b. 1937)—a Biblical scholar who had previously served as a technical advisor on Michael Curtiz' *Francis of Assisi* (1961) and Carol Reed's *The Agony and the Ecstasy* (1965)—and writer–director Gianfranco De Bosio. Born September 16, 1924, in Verona, De Bosio wanted to tell the story of Moses as it had never been told onscreen before—in wholly realistic dimensions.

FILMED *indoors on a sound stage, this burning bush "exterior" is one of the many illusions engineered by Mario Bava for MOSES THE LAWGIVER.*



YOUNG *Moses (William Lancaster) attends the death of his adoptive mother, Princess Bithia of Egypt (Mariangela Melato).*

One of De Bosio's principal collaborators in this venture was Anthony Burgess (1917–1993), the Manchester-born author of *A Clockwork Orange* and some of the finest comic novels and literary criticism of the 20th century. Burgess had become increasingly involved in Roman topics after marrying an Italian linguistics professor, Liliana Macellari, in 1968. The couple had initially moved to the island of Malta, but relocated to Rome after becoming fed up with Maltese censorship of their incoming and outgoing mail. The multilingual Burgess, who had done documentary work in British television, quickly made himself available to Italian television and supervised the production of a successful docudrama about Michelangelo. *Moses the Lawgiver* became the third title in what Burgess called his "TV Tetralogy"—preceded by the Michelangelo docudrama and another on William Shakespeare and followed by the celebrated miniseries *Jesus of Nazareth* (1977), directed by Franco Zefferelli. His work on *Moses the Lawgiver* would make Burgess something of a celebrity in Italian film circles, and he was subsequently invited by Federico Fellini to write the dialogue for his "first film in English," *Casanova*. In fact, this 1976 production was scripted first in Italian by Bernardino Zapponi—who also wrote the Italian dialogue for the *Moses* project—and filmed without direct sound recording, just like any other Fellini film. Burgess was contracted to write the English teleplay for *Moses the Lawgiver* as early as 1973, and was originally asked to work in tandem with De Bosio and Vittorio Bonicelli, who had previously scripted John Huston's *La Bibbia/The Bible . . . In the Beginning* (1966), Roger Vadim's *Barbarella* (1968) and Mario Bava's previous miniseries *Odissea*.

"I found collaboration difficult and was forced to work entirely on my own, leaving emendation, addition and subtraction to be more or less improvised . . . while filming proceeded in Israel," wrote Burgess. [1] To free himself from the formidable baggage of Biblical scripture, and to develop a feel for the language and pacing for his teleplay, Burgess got down to work by writing an entire epic poem, which was later published (in 1976) as *Moses: A Narrative*. It was on the bones of this impressive work that he subsequently fleshed-out his teleplay for the six-part miniseries.

Moses the Lawgiver

Filmed at Cinecittà, Safa Paladino
and on location in Israel, Morocco and Italy
Fall 1974
First broadcast: June 21, 1975
Technicolor, 1.33:1, 360 minutes (miniseries),
141 minutes (feature version).

Production: RAI-Radiotelevisione Italiana (Rome), Sir Lew Grade, Associated Television (ATV, London), Incorporated Television Company (ITC, London). Producers: Vincenzo Labella, Bernard J. Kingham. Director: Gianfranco De Bosio. Teleplay: Vittorio Bonicelli, Anthony Burgess, Gianfranco De Bosio, and Bernardino Zapponi. Director of photography: Marcello Gatti. Second unit director: Ken Globus. Art direction: Francesco Cinieri, Pier Luigi Basile. Special effects: Mario Bava. Costume design: Enrico Sabbatini. Hairdresser: Giancarlo Marin. Choreography: Oshra El Kayam. Production accountant: Alicia Rivera Frankl. Editors: Gerry Hambling, Peter Boita, John Guthridge, Alberto Gallitti. Assistant editor: Noel Rogers. Music: Ennio Morricone and Dov Seltzer (songs and dance music), conducted by Bruno Nicolai. Sound recordist: Luciano Welisch. Sound editor: Win Ryder. Makeup: Vittorio Biseo. Dialogue director: Leslie Hodgson. Dubbing mixer: Paul Carr. Stills: Pierluigi. Post-production by Roger Cherrill, Ltd. (London). Distributor: RAI-RadioTelevisione Italiana.

Burt Lancaster (Moses), Anthony Quayle (Aaron), Ingrid Thulin (Miriam), Irene Papas (Zipporah), Aharon Ipalé (Joshua), Joseph Shiloach (Dathan), Marina Berti (Eliseba, Aaron's wife), Shmuel Rodensky (Jethro), Mariangela Melato (Princess Bithia), Laurent Terzieff (Merneptah, the Pharaoh), William Lancaster (young Moses), Jacques Herlin (magician), Mario Ferrari (Ramses II), Simonetta Stefanelli (Cotbi), Melba Englander (Merneptah's wife), Antonio Piovanelli (Koreh), Paul Müller (Merneptah's teacher), Umberto Raho (2nd magician), Michele Placido (Caleb), Yassi Warjansky (Eleazar), Paul L. Smith (goldsmith), Amos Talshir (1st thief), Haim Bashi (2nd thief), Haim Banai [Chaim Banai] (3rd thief), Galia Kohn, José Quaglio, John Francis Lane, Paul Varni, Dina Morrone, Giancarlo Badessi, Marco Steiner, Cosimo Cinieri, Renato Chiantoni, Didi Liekov, Enzo Fiermonte, Andrea Aureli, Percy Hogan, Fausto Di Bella, Richard Johnson (narrator).

Germany: *Moses,* 10/28/76, 131m
Hungary: *Mózes,* 4/20/89
Italy: *Mosè,* 10/16/76
Turkey: *Musa,* Akun Film
UK: *Moses,* Royal Premiere, 3/1/76, 141m
US: *Moses the Lawgiver,* CBS TV, 6/21/75. *Moses,* Avco-Embassy, 3/26/76, 140m

Synopsis

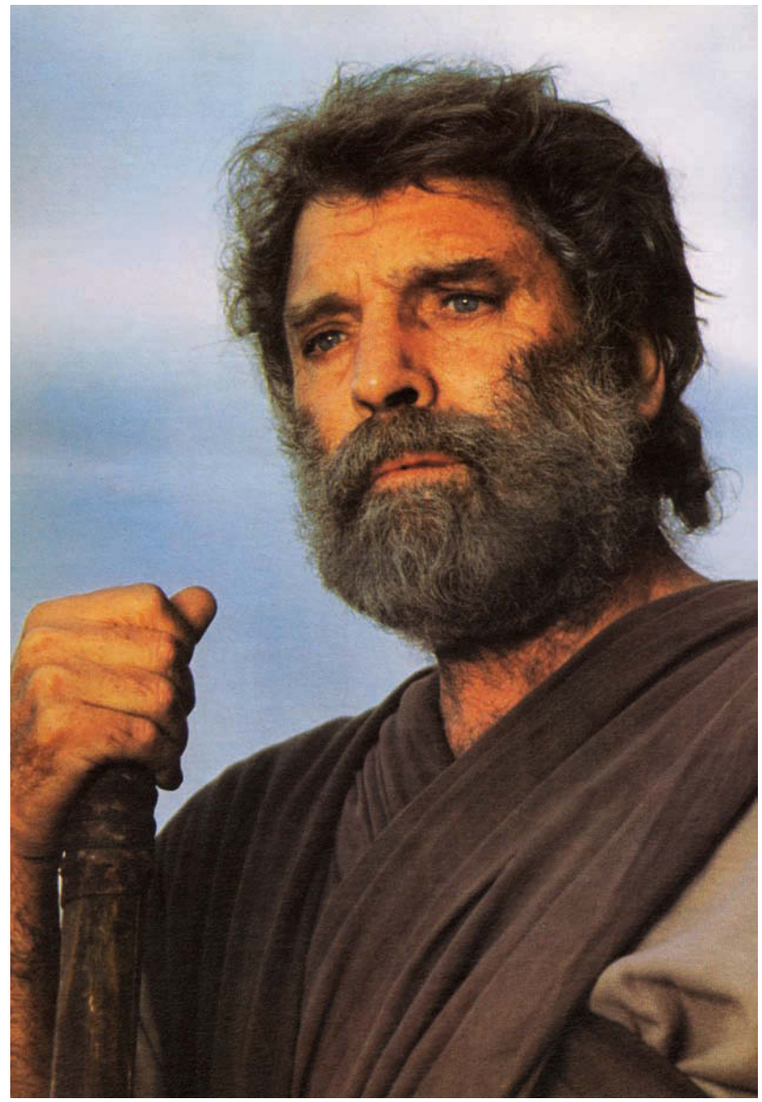
Part One: *Fearing the fertility and number of the Levites, Pharaoh Ramses II of Egypt decrees that they be enslaved, and subsequently orders their male children to be taken away and slaughtered. As the captive children cry, one of the Israelite women gives birth to another male, who is taken by his clever sister Miriam to the Nile in a basket of reeds and sent downriver in a maneuver to save him. The basket is found by Bithis, the barren daughter of the Pharaoh, who adopts the child as her own and names him Moses, which in her tongue means "my son." Ramses II eventually dies, and Moses grows to young manhood as a Prince of Egypt, an older friend to the new Pharaoh, his young cousin Merneptah. One day, Moses is punished by Merneptah—disappointed that his older cousin did not keep his appointment to take him crocodile hunting—and sent to oversee the slave workers. When one Jew, Dathan, is whipped for interfering with an Egyptian guard who was trying to rape his wife, Moses interrupts the punishment and accidentally kills the guard. Moses is then taken into the confidence of the settlement and meets Miriam and his brother Aaron, who reveal his true identity and past. Confused, Moses decides to flee Egypt and "find himself." He rides into the desert on camelback and, after many days of sojourn, must slay his camel to quench his thirst and cure his hunger. At the foot of Mt. Horab, Moses finds the encampment of Jethro, banished by his own people for his refusal to acknowledge their religious idols, who lives there with his seven daughters. Moses stays and, in time, becomes husband to Zipporah, the eldest, with whom he has a son.*

Part Two: *Many years pass, and Moses has become a legend among his own people, who tell stories about his preordained survival of the mass slaughter and how he will return someday to lead his people to freedom. But they are losing faith now, ending their stories with "someday, they say, he will come back . . . but I think he's dead now, in the desert, his white bones picked clean." Meanwhile, the now adult Pharaoh also finds himself thinking about Moses and decrees that he should be found in the desert and welcomed back to Egypt, his crime forgiven. A royal messenger finds Moses in Jethro's encampment, but he declines the invitation, sending back his compliments and the explanation "I have my own Kingdom."*

In response to his action, thunder erupts atop Mt. Horab, summoning Moses. He climbs up and finds a burning bush, which instructs him in the Voice of God to return to Egypt and lead his people to freedom. When Moses expresses skepticism about his ability to make others believe, God demonstrates mysterious feats of transformation—Moses' rod into a snake, his hand diseased and made well again—and intones, "Through this power, they will believe." Being slow of speech, Moses worries about his powers of persuasion and God commands that his brother, Aaron, will be his voice. After descending from the mountain, Moses continues to resist his calling and greater storms erupt as God demands his obeisance. When Moses rails verbally against God, rejecting his calling, he is struck dead—and Zipporah desperately volunteers to sacrifice their son in his place, then reconsidering: "Not a life, but a token"—and performs the first circumcision, a gesture which quells the thunder and brings breath back into Moses' lungs.

Meanwhile, Aaron is beset by symbolic dreams of his brother's imminent return. He shares them with Miriam, who advises him to go and meet Moses in the desert, giving him silver she has collected from the fallen purses of Egyptian guards to bribe the ferryman. Days pass in the desert, but as the discouraged Aaron collapses under the direct sunlight, pleading silently, "Show me a sign, brother," he recovers to find himself cradled in his brother's arms. He hears in thought, in his brother's voice (or perhaps the Voice of God), "Add no word. It is the sign."

Part Three: *In Egypt, Moses is warmly greeted by Miriam and her family; they bathe him and he looks forward to getting to know his siblings, and their children, better. Aaron, based in his instruction by Moses, instructs his people in the knowledge of their destiny as decreed by "the one true God, the God of the Israelites." Ironically, Dathan—the man whom Moses previously saved from unjust punishment—readily informs an Egyptian guard of Moses' return, in hope of remuneration. Moses is brought to the Pharaoh, to whom he expresses the realities of the man he has become. "It's a simple matter, Majesty," he says. "I've discovered where I belong." The Pharaoh corrects him, imperiously: "You belong to us."*



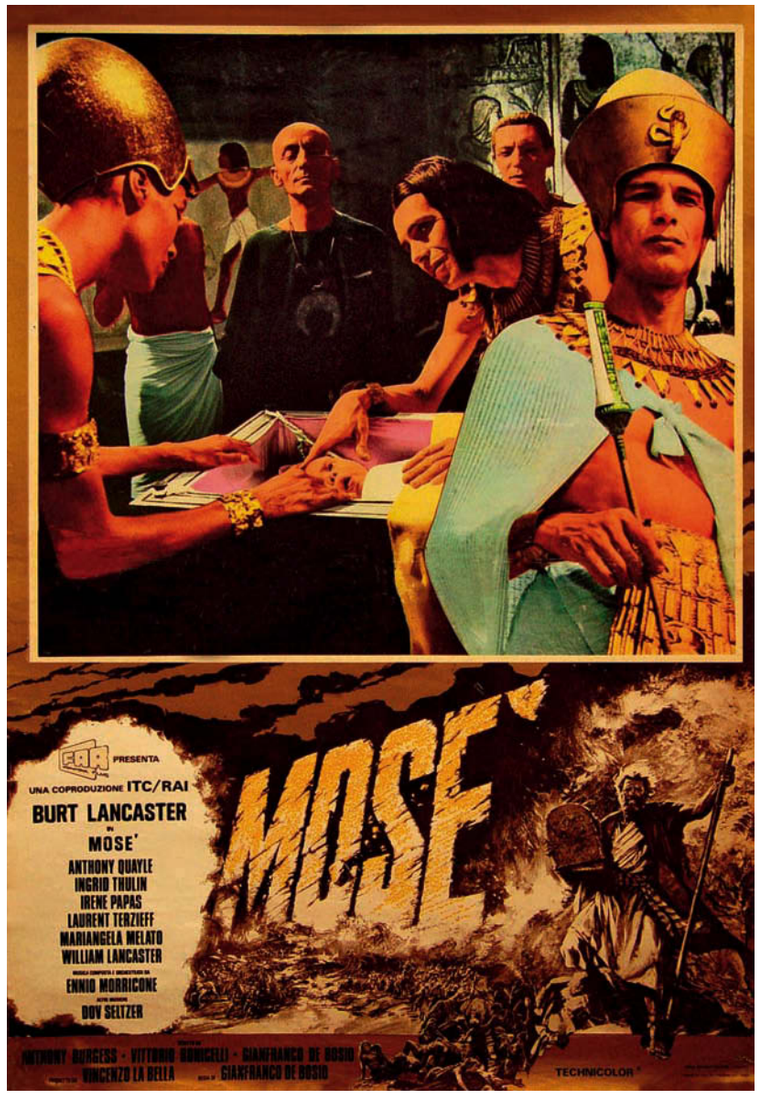
PORTRAIT *of Burt Lancaster as the mature Moses.*

Moses and Aaron soon petition the Pharaoh with a request to let their people go into the desert for three days to make sacrifice unto their God. Their request is denied. A persuasive miracle is required, so they later attend a ceremonial occasion on the Nile, which is miraculously transformed to a river of blood. Merneptah scoffs from his throne that this is the sort of trick his magicians could perform. So the ante is upped, and what Moses calls "the dance of numbers" begins—the curses of frogs, locusts,

1 Anthony Burgess, *Moses: A Narrative* (New York NY: Stonehill Press, 1976), from the Introduction.

pestilence, boils, and plague. When water is poured by an Egyptian, it becomes blood; when that same blood is poured by an Israelite, it becomes water again. The Pharaoh's favorite horse dies. He is persuaded by his advisors to grant the Israelites their religious observance, before he appears to be cowed by their power—but Moses and Aaron surprise him by raising the stakes. When the Israelites leave, they insist on being able to take with them all their beasts and goods and exit Egypt as free men. The Egyptian ruler refuses, and on the night of the first Passover, Death claims the sole heir to his throne as the Pharaoh covers his son's body protectively with his own—the Israelites having put Death off their own scent by sacrificing lambs to God and daubing the animals' blood on the doors of their homes. Bitterly, the Pharaoh mourns his son, damns his own gods as false, and orders the Israelites to go and take their goods with them. And so the Israelites leave Egypt, not to return but to go in search of the land promised to them by the lord God.

After three days, Merneptah joins his army in the desert to bring them back and sees his soldiers killed after following the Israelites into the parted waters of the sea. The two-faced Dathar praises Moses' leadership, but he disavows any suggestion that he is above the others: "Never forget the Lord God." Feeling his friendship thrown back in his face, Dathar fumes.



ITALIAN *manifesto for the theatrical release, picturing the Pharaoh Merneptah (Laurent Terzieff) at the moment of his son's death, the court magician (Jacques Herlin) in attendance.*

Part Four: *Moses leads his twelve tribes into the desert, where their search for the promised land of Canaan—which God has described to him as his people's inheritance—must begin. As Moses has forewarned his people, the search for the promised land does not come easily. After a brief period of rejoicing, and a seeming confirmation from above when a cloud in the likeness of a sacrificial lamb passes overhead, water becomes scarce and the young and thirsty begin to prey on the old and prudent. One of the younger men in the tribe speaks confidentially to Moses, pointing out that they are in fact moving away from Canaan, which lies to the east; Moses replies that he knows this, but that the approach to the city is perilous, being well-guarded by the people of Canaan and its neighbors, and would mean certain death. So the Israelites continue to move toward Canaan by moving away from it. When an oasis is sighted, their relief becomes anger as the water is found to be salty and undrinkable. Perseverence eventually delivers them to an even larger oasis, an unclaimed paradise of drinkable water, vegetation, and animal life. Some want to stay, but Moses insists that they cannot, as this is not their promised land. They continue to wander across the desert, the lack of food and water making them irritable and doubtful. In frustration, Moses promises them "meat in the evening, and tomorrow, bread to the full." His prophecy is fulfilled by a migration of quail at nightfall, and the discovery of tamarist trees in the morning, which bear a fluffy resin that tastes like bread. Their next settlement is raided on horseback by a nomadic tribe called the Amalakites, who fulfill Moses' bitter prophecy of bloodshed. One of the men in Moses' tribe proposes a strategy, which enables them to defeat their enemy and regain the road that will take them to Canaan.*

Part Five: *Moses and his tribes arrive at the base of Mt. Horab, where he is at last reunited with his wife Zipporah, his young son, and his father-in-law Jethro, now white-bearded. The reunited couple's lovemaking is interrupted by Joshua, who has need of his governing; a fight between two brothers, Judah and Reuben, over the wife of one has resulted in the murder of the other. Moses is called upon to decide the manner and gravity of the murderer's punishment, as these wanderers have no laws of their own. It is suggested that the killer pay for the life he's taken with his personal goods, but Moses objects, explaining that a human life is too precious, too spiritual, to be weighed in terms of material possessions. "We can value a human life," he reasons, "but only on its terms . . . a life for a life." But when Moses is asked to state when and how the murderer will pay for his crime, he hedges; it is beyond him to decide.*

Thunder erupts atop Mt. Horab and Moses knows that he is being summoned. He understands that the point of this visitation will be to determine the future laws of his people, and he gathers them to announce his imminent leavetaking, and recites a number of laws for their collective approval, including those sanctifying the Sabbath as a day of rest, and against coveting a neighbor's goods, worshipping graven images, and taking a human life. This, if they approve, he says, will be their "covenant with God." The tribes respond favorably, and Moses begins his ascent with Joshua, whom he considers his "right hand." Before continuing to the summit without him, Moses tells Joshua that, should he not return, he must govern in his place. Joshua objects, thinking Aaron the more appropriate choice, and Moses replies, "I must look to the young, the new."

In Moses' absence, his people—agitated by the rabble-rousings of Dathan—begin immediately to ignore the code they have agreed to observe. Adultery, work on the Sabbath, and other banned activities become commonplace, and

Aaron—whose ambitious wife Eliseba senses that Moses will pass him over for promotion in favor of Joshua—finds it beyond his powers to dissuade these misdeeds. The ignoring of the common code leads to open jeering, in the guise of a puppet show for children that burlesques Moses' conversations with God. Joshua returns and destroys the puppets, citing them as graven images and asserting that there is danger "even in children's play." As more time passes, Dathan initiates the rumor that Moses is dead. In desperation and fear, the tribes demand to see their collective wealth, given to them by the Egyptians, and then insist that it be divided equally among them. When Aaron reasons that this is impossible, he is overthrown and the golden objects and jewels are melted down and cast into the likeness of a golden calf. Aaron tries to put a good face on his defeat, explaining, "This idol is not God—but it will remind you of God each day, as you pass by it . . . What you see is an image of our unity as a people!" But the idol excites lust among the Levites, which erupts into a terrifying orgy that culminates in the stoning of Miriam and the rape and murder of an adulteress atop the calf. As morning comes, Moses descends from Mt. Horab, carrying the lovingly inscribed tablets of the law. In disgust, he confirms his people's breaking of the covenant by smashing the tablets against a rock. "We must start again," he says, wearily.

Part Six: *Moses' people vow not to repeat the same mistakes, and Moses determines to climb Mt. Horab once again and bring back a newly inscribed covenant. In reverent apology, the tribes build a house for the tablets, and upon his return, Moses tells Aaron that this will be his house, as he will be called "priest" and be the source of God's voice. Aaron views this as a punishment for his failure to control the people in Moses' absence, as he used to be his brother's voice, but Moses tells him to "take it in the spirit of a promotion." Miriam, laid low by her wounds, enters into delirium and dies as the tribes renew their transit. Soon, the promised land of Canaan comes into sight beyond the mountains. Moses sends a group of young spies to enter the country and return with food and an account of its people.*



ITALIAN *manifesto depicting Moses and brother Aaron (Anthony Quayle) making their appeal for freedom to the Pharaoh.*

While awaiting their return, Moses is informed of the failure of some men to observe the Sabbath and is asked to set a punishment. Unable to weigh one law more than another, and reasoning that it is a rejection of God's law like any other, he decrees that the violators of the law should be stoned to death. The tribe is outraged, but ultimately bow to his judgment. Now more than ever, Dathan mocks Moses' authority openly. When left alone, Moses prays to God, pleading with him to "let thy servant go." The voice of God responds by telling Moses that He will ride him like a horseman rides his horse, and as punishment for his uncertainties and his plea to be released, he shall never be allowed to set foot in the Promised Land.

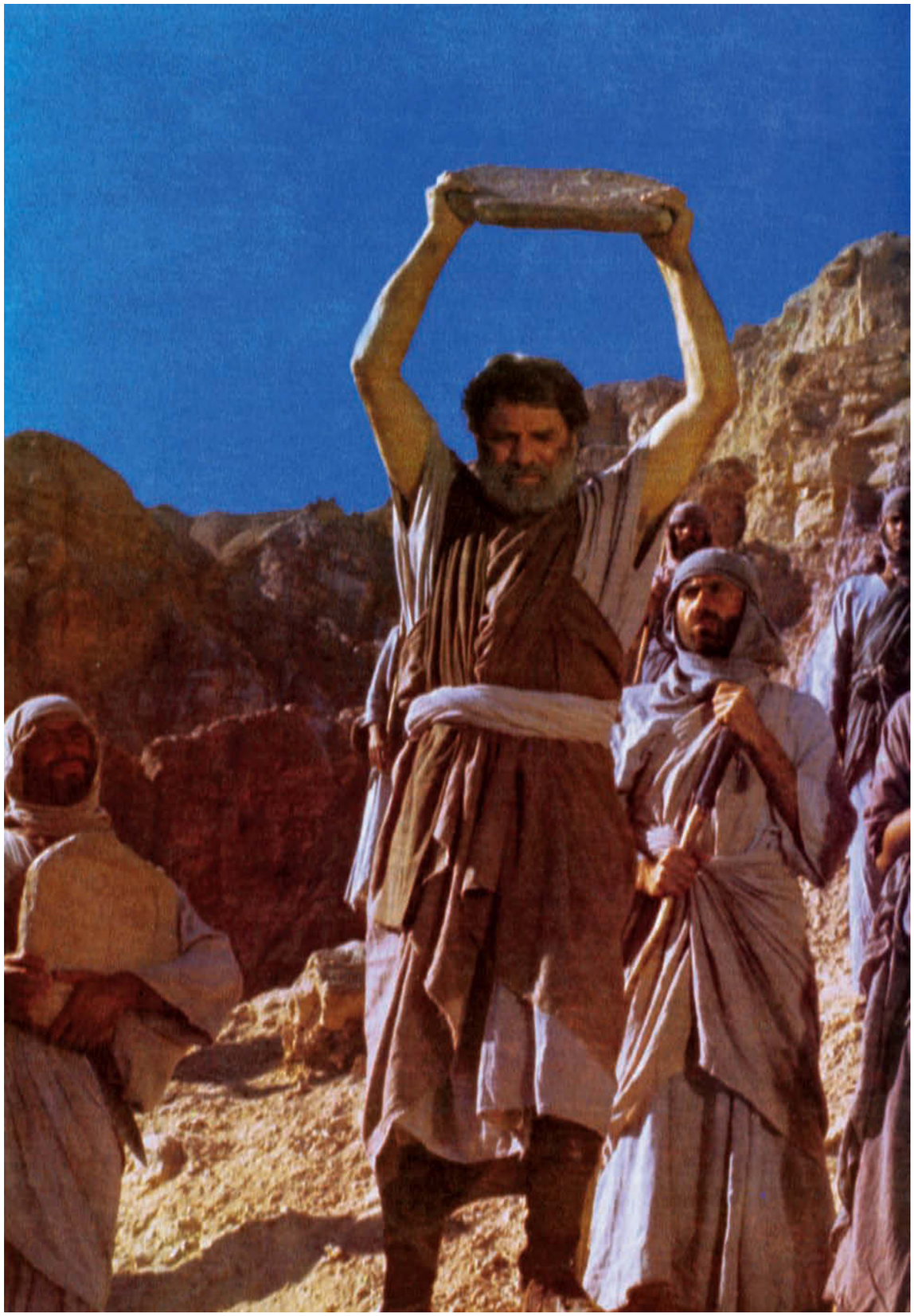
The men sent into Canaan return with a wealth of ripe fruit and confirmations of Moses' vision of "a land overflowing with milk and honey," but they warn it is a place of walled cities, inhabited by a large-built and war-like people. Moses addresses his people, explaining that this land is their God-given right, even if they must fight for it: "Freedom never comes easily." The tribes object, and Dathan protests most loudly of all, suggesting they nominate a new leader to guide them back to Egypt; as this "most obdurate" of Moses' children raises his voice in challenge to God's declarations, the sky darkens and the ground opens beneath him, swallowing him up. Moses stares down at his body in the pit and admits "I will miss your thorn in my side." He then banishes all of Dathan's followers back into the desert with their children, where they too must perish for rejecting the Lord's word.

The remaining Israelites declare war on the people of Canaan and launch a campaign of surprise attacks against them. When Moses is petitioned for consideration by the daughters of Zelafad, after their father and brothers are killed in this Holy war, he notices a flaw in the existing laws and amends it, so that a man's property will be passed along to his daughters in the absence of a son. Aaron dies of injuries sustained in travel. Visited in his tent one night by Aaron's son Eleazar, Moses initially mistakes him for his father and shows his age by addressing him as Aaron. He reflects that Aaron's sin was to love the people too much, and his own sin to love the people too little, by loving the law more.

When the battle is finally won, Moses scales a tall hillside under the guidance of God, who gives him the first view of the land that is now their own. God declares Moses' task finished. Beaming with achievement through a white beard, Moses lies down on the mountainside, forbidden to walk further, and rests—until the time he is called home.

Adaptation

"Right from the beginning, we deliberately forced ourselves to forget every Biblical film we'd ever seen," said Gianfranco De Bosio in 1975. "This wasn't particularly difficult since our film had nothing in common with such productions. I set out to tell the story of Moses in terms of the history of mankind. It is the plight of the people of Israel which fascinated



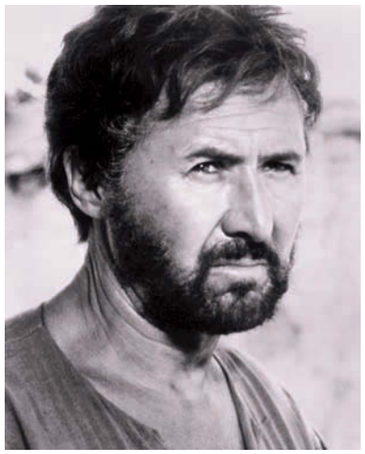
me, and there are many analogies between their suffering then and what they have had to endure over more recent times."[2]

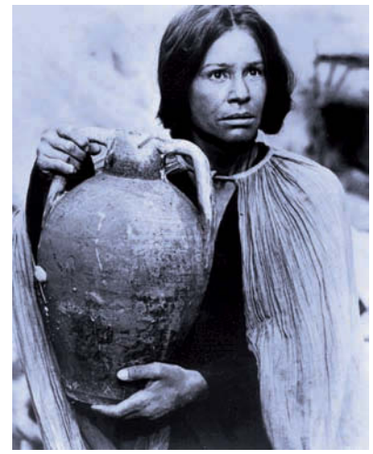
It was De Bosio's basic concept to liberate Moses, as much as possible, from the overblown, melodramatic religious spectacle of films like Cecil B. DeMille's *The Ten Commandments* (1956)—to depict Moses not as a bearded, stentorian superhero with a magic rod, but as a human being who has been ordered by destiny to rise to the challenge of achieving something extraordinary. His Moses is a simple man, halting of speech, who is burdened with a great vision, and great doubts as well; he must not only overcome the tyranny of Egypt, but the tyranny of the Egypt within himself, in order to deliver his community to freedom.

Moses adapted well to timely reinvention. He is depicted as a tribal hero, a bearded, long-haired champion of the young, who challenges imperious, war-waging authority that would knowingly order the slaughter its nation's young men; the idea being that a more relevant hero would help to make the ethics and ideals underlying the Hebrew faith more approachable to the average person, whether predisposed to sympathy or skepticism. When one of the younger Israelites use the word "progressive" to describe their move across the desert in search of the promised land, Moses echoes, "Progressive. It's a good word, progressive. It means to move forth." Moses' name is bestowed upon him by Bithia, in whose tongue it means "my son," but it is later revealed as meaning, in Hebrew, "to bring forth." (In one of many such ironic moments present in the humanistic script, Moses' birth parents "shrug Jewishly"—Burgess' phrase—when the word of his name is carried back to their home.) Thus, Moses is depicted as a progressive model for progressive times.

To tell Moses' story realistically, it was necessary for De Bosio to rationalize the miracles performed and claimed by Moses, according to legend,

DESCENDING *from Mt. Horab and finding his people in sinful chaos, Moses shatters the Tablets of the Law.*






in equally plausible ways. Psychological explanations were provided to make certain Biblical passages explicable on a more comtemporary, humanistic level. For example, Moses' encounter with the Burning Bush immediately follows the coming of a messenger bearing an invitation from the Pharaoh that he return to Egypt. When the bush speaks to Moses, the voice of God is depicted indistinguishably from Moses' own inner voice—thus, its instruction is available to interpretation as Moses providing an excuse for himself, delusionally, to go back to Egypt and resolve his own dogging sense of guilt about the man he killed and the family he left behind.

"The same applies to the Tablets of the Commandments," De Bosio continued. "Moses goes up the mountain and carves the Commandments in stone after having reasoned with himself and his people, after having interpreted various of his dreams and after having verified the needs of his people within the context of the times in which they are living."

Other miracles were given practical, educated explanations. When Moses promises his people that tomorrow they will have "bread to the full," he makes the promise aware that they will shortly reach an area of the desert populated with tamarist trees; thus, the miracle of "manna from Heaven" is explained in terms of the fluffy resin that grows on such trees, peeled away and carried by the desert winds, which is edible and has the taste of bread.

Likewise, the sea doesn't exactly part, at least not as spectacularly as it has done in other tellings of this story; instead, a strip of land is revealed by the divergence of the tides, allowing the Israelites to cross, and when the Egyptians follow, the tides rush back in resumption of their usual course, drowning these men and their horses. De Bosio theorized that the body of water crossed by the Israelites was misidentified in the King James edition of *The Holy Bible* as the Red Sea, believing it to be a mistranslated reference to the Sea of Reeds.

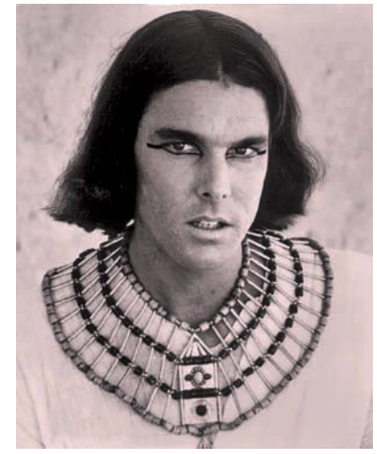
"It is a well-known fact," he said, "that a strip of land exists in the Sea of Reeds which appears and disappears according to the tides. Also, high waves can appear quite suddenly when the wind strengthens. It is perfectly possible that Moses led the Children of Israel across the exposed strip and that, immediately afterwards, a storm blew up and drowned the pursuing Egyptian horsemen. I am not saying that the storm was not sent by God; I only wish to show that the event could have occurred without God's help." Consequently, the parting sea of De Bosio's story is never identified—neither as the Red Sea, nor as the Sea of Reeds.

If anything, by removing any direct evidence of God's intervention from the storyline, De Bosio strengthened his story's emphasis on faith. And by approaching the miracles of the story from a rational direction—as simple illusions, psychological delusions, and as moments in which reality briefly intersects with the inexplicable, as through the inspirations of dreams—his orientation was perfectly in keeping with the filmic universe of Mario Bava.

Cast and Production

On the basis of Gianfranco De Bosio's original treatment, *Moses the Lawgiver* attracted a world-class star in Burt Lancaster. Born November 2, 1913, the once-athletic, robust actor had gracefully aged into an eloquent, graceful, elder statesman of the cinema. *Moses* was just one of a few major Italian productions in which Lancaster agreed to star during this period; it was immediately preceded by *Gruppo di famiglia in un interno/Conversation Piece* (1974), his reunion with *Il gattopardo/The Leopard* director Luchino Visconti, and followed by another of his greatest performances, as the landowner Berlinghieri in Bernardo Bertolucci's *Novecento/1900* (1977).

Full-bearded and solid of build, the 62-year-old Lancaster explained his reasons for accepting the role of Moses to a publicist visiting the set in Israel: "The treatment was excellent, beautifully constructed and with a timeless feel to it . . . [The script] reaches some good conclusions on what the Jewish character and moral values should be. In the Israelites' confrontation with God, they were a fractious people but filled with vitality. It is this characteristic which has kept the Jewish race alive through the centuries." Lancaster himself was a self-avowed athiest.



LEFT TO RIGHT: *Anthony Quayle as Aaron, Irene Papas as Zipporah, Ingrid Thulin as Miriam, Laurent Terzieff as Merneptah and William Lancaster as the young Moses.*

Though not Jewish himself, and inclined to keep to himself when not needed on the set, Lancaster nevertheless won the admiration and respect of the Italian crew with his love of opera, earthy language and unexpected acts of generosity. After completing his last scene in the picture, Lancaster surprised the crew with individual baskets of fruit as a parting gift. According to the film's pressbook (which is hardly under oath), the actor bade farewell to the Israeli members of the unit by

2 *Moses* pressbook, Avco-Embassy, 1976.

saying: "The Promised Land was just a dream to Moses, but you have made the dream a reality. I only hope that, through this motion picture, the world will better understand the Jews and what Israel stands for."[3]

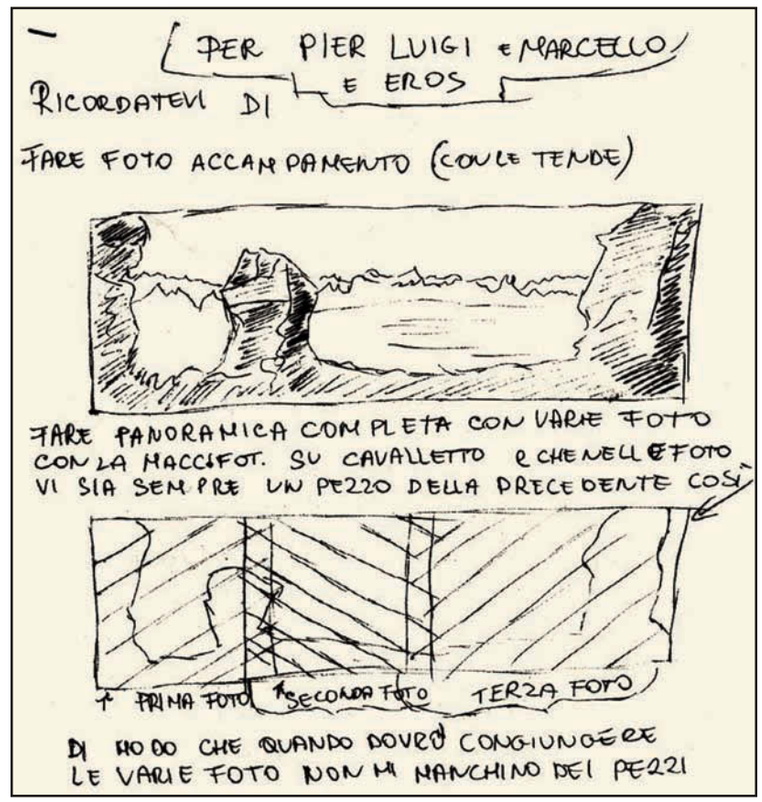
Anthony Burgess, who spent much time on the set, said that Lancaster entered so fully into the role that he actually was witness to an occasion when the actor performed a live, on-set miracle. While appearing on *The Dick Cavett Show* in the early 1990s, Burgess recalled the filming of the scene in which Moses was under attack by his followers, who were dying of thirst in the desert; Lancaster was supposed to strike a rock in anger, which would break and unleash a natural flow of water. According to Burgess, the special effect rig didn't work, take after take. Exasperated, Lancaster cursed and struck at another rock with his staff, and actual water came flowing out. Burgess was so impressed by Lancaster, as an actor and as a man, that he dedicated his next novel, *The Clockwork Testament, or Enderby's End*, to him—adding an unattributed line from James Joyce's *Ulysses*: ". . . deserves to live, deserves to live . . ."

Just as Lancaster had tried to arrange a part for his daughter in *Lisa and the Devil*, he ensured that the role of the young Moses would be played by his son William (b. 1947). Though William Lancaster looks the part, is an able-enough horseman, and acquits himself well in the role, *Moses the Lawgiver* marked the beginning and end of his acting career. In 1976, he sold a screenplay that became the Paramount comedy *The Bad News Bears*. It was a boxoffice success and resulted in a sequel also written by Lancaster, *The Bad News Bears Go to Japan* (1978), as well as a spin-off television series. Despite launching this franchise, the young Lancaster's greatest claim to fame was his screenplay for a remake of the science fiction classic, *The Thing From Another World*, which developed a reputation as one of the best unmade scripts kicking around Hollywood before John Carpenter finally filmed it in 1982. Though Carpenter's adaptation is widely held to be one of his best films, as well as an acknowledged turning point in the history of motion picture special effects, those who have read Lancaster's actual screenplay claim *The Thing* would have been a far better film had Carpenter stuck more closely to it. After almost two decades of apparent inactivity, Bill Lancaster died on January 4, 1997, at the age of 49—just a few years after the death of his father, on October 20, 1994.

Other cast members familiar from the Bava *dramatis personæ* include Irene Papas (with whom he had worked on *Odissea*) as Moses' wife Zipporah, *I vampiri*'s Paul Müller as the teacher of the young Pharaoh, and *La frusta e il corpo*'s Jacques Herlin and *Baron Blood*'s Umberto Raho as two of the Pharaoh's court magicians.



THE PARTING *of the sea—not the Red Sea, in Gianfranco De Bosio's interpretation.*



MARIO *Bava's original storyboard for the filming of this sequence.*

Special Effects

Though a good deal of *Moses the Lawgiver* was filmed on location in Israel's Negev Desert, Morocco and Italy, Mario Bava and his special effects unit (which included Carlo Rambaldi) worked close to home, either at Cinecittà or at the studios of Safa Paladino. It was during this period that Mario's grandchildren, Georgia and Roy, were living with him; on some days, to give his wife a rest, Mario took the kids to work with him.

One of Roy's earliest memories of his grandfather dates from the set of *Moses the Lawgiver*. "I remember him working on the burning bush, with the mountains in the background," he says. "He had built a model of the mountains and then he used a rippled 'water glass.' That's all I remember, because I was very young."

Though absolutely convincing as a location shot, the Burning Bush sequence was shot entirely indoors at Safa Paladino. The bush was an artificial tree built around a system of gas jets arranged in a branch-like formation; the fire could be increased or decreased as needed. When God's voice instructs Moses to drop his staff to the ground, his subjective view of the rod being transformed into a snake is rippled through Bava's "water glass," which he always used to denote subjective hallucinations. There is no transformation shot, as such; the rod is replaced by the snake, and vice versa, during cutaway reaction shots of Moses. Reportedly, Bava didn't even stop the camera, but let it roll as he kicked the rod out of view and dropped the snake into frame. Likewise, when the voice instructs Moses to place his hand inside his bosom and to remove it, the subsequent views of his hand—at first leprous, and then healed—are also filtered through the same distorting glass that was used to create Baroness Grap's mediumistic trances in *Operazione paura* and John Harrington's mind-bending flashbacks in *Il rosso segno della follia*.

Bava also supervised the filming of the various plagues that befell the Egyptians as they refused their permission for the Children of Israel to venture into the desert for their religious observance. A number of these effects are frankly unspectacular—which attracted a good deal of critical complaint against Bava—but this is the way De Bosio wanted them. For the plagues of flies, frogs, locusts and pestilence, and even for the "pillar of smoke" sandstorm in the desert, Bava resorted to documentary stock footage (as he had done on several effects jobs in the 1950s), which he occasionally augmented with original effects shots.

Georgia Bava has vivid memories of accompanying her grandfather to the effects workshop at Safa Paladino: "There were frogs jumping everywhere—and mosquitos! They were putting mosquitos on a kind of plastic circle, with mosquitos and bugs all in a row." Georgia may be misremembering the locusts seen in the film as "mosquitos," but they were affixed to a large, plastic disc that could be spun like a wheel in front of the camera as the actors flailed about, appearing to be under attack by a veritable storm of insects. The plague of frogs is introduced with a palpably Bavian shot of several frogs, silhouetted in a glass bowl filled with water tinted with a strong magenta light. Bava shot a great deal of footage for the plague sequences, but De Bosio reduced it to a minimum in the editing, and was particularly merciless with shots that might have been too fantastic in execution, as these were divergent from his central thesis.

Bava worked very closely with the production's director of photography Marcello Gatti, who had assisted him more than ten years earlier on *Le meraviglie di Aladino*. "Listen," Gatti says, "Bava was one of the greatest geniuses in the whole history of Italian cinema. Nobody had the ability to do certain technical things like he did! We followed his instructions and tried to figure out what he was doing in certain shots, but we never really understood what the hell he was doing—we just waited for the dailies to finally discover what we had really shot! He was great when we shot the parting of the Red Sea [*sic*] for *Moses*. He did a series of drawings, explaining to me everything about every single shot that we had to do, including a series of incomprehensible—for us!—close-ups of high and low tides, shot at certain precise times of day. He explained all of this with scientific precision, as though every detail was perfectly clear in his mind, even though his requests seemed very strange to us. Then he worked by himself on the editing of this footage and the final result was—the parting of the Red Sea! Incredible!"

Roy Bava remembers that "the parting of the sea was shot on a beach close to Lavigno called Coccia di Morto. They built some big slides to throw a lot of water down from a big container, and made shots of Egyptian troops riding with a lot of water falling down on them." These shots were then integrated into the final montage, sometimes as double exposures with shots of turbulent waves seeming to crash over the soldiers toppling from their mounts. A side view of the soldiers crossing the parted sea was also filmed, with actors on horseback riding along the very edge of the beach with the sea visible behind them; Bava shot this action on the top half of the full aperture frame, with the bottom half masked. He then masked the top half and filled the bottom half with a shot of tides rolling in a different direction.

Roy continues: "With Carlo Rambaldi, Mario also built some mechanical horses that could move by themselves, which were photographed crossing a scale miniature of the sea, which was built in a swimming pool at Safa Paladino. There was a little railway down the middle of the pool, with a lot of these little soldiers. On one side, they had built a little cliff that was one of the two shores of the Nile, with trees, and the railway went slightly underwater. There were also huge fans to create the waves on either side of the pool. The little soldiers were



BAVA *on location with Anthony Quayle and various crew members.*

3 Ibid.

toy soldiers, just like you would buy for children in a store, but Mario modified them—their costumes and weapons—to look like Egyptians. When he was busy creating miniatures, he very often tried to involve me, by having me paint the little puppets or cutting the fabrics for their robes. When he was finished, he gave some of the surviving soldiers to me, as a gift. They were really very good, even the very small ones. Unfortunately, I don't know where they are now . . ." [4] The mechanical horses and their doll riders were submerged as water drums were emptied into the pool from both sides, whipped into waves by the fans. For the initial scene of the waters clearing a central path, the same process was repeated but filmed in reverse.

Bava also supervised some optical inserts for the film, some of which involved the small carving of a bird-headed stone idol that appears quite gigantic in the scenes it shares in blue-screen and forced perspective shots with actor Laurent Terzieff. He was also required to join the film crew on location in Israel, where he created the illusions of the storm atop Mt. Horab, a miniature Israeli village, the view of the city of Canaan in the distance, and other location-based effects shots. Though he is not credited as such, it is possible that Bava was also recruited to direct some second-unit footage to help keep the production on schedule. "He went to Israel for a few months," Georgia confirms. "In fact, it may have only been a few weeks, but it seemed like a long time to me!"

However long it really was, Bava's stay in Israel felt like an eternity to him, as well. He grew so bored on location that not even his usual distraction of *bazzica scopa* could sustain him, and he reportedly advanced to more compulsive forms of gambling.

"I never had a single problem with Mario," says Marcello Gatti, "but there was one little thing about him that made me nervous sometimes. Whenever we weren't working, he always wanted to bet—*continuously!* On *anything!* He would put 10,000 *lire* [$6.00] on the table and say, 'Come on, Marcello, let's bet . . . If the next person that comes around that corner is a woman, I win; if it's not, the money is yours.' And I would shout, 'Goddamn it, Mario! Can't you leave me alone sometimes and forget about your fucking bets?'"



GERMAN *A2 poster.*

Actress Irene Papas, who played the role of Moses' wife Zipporah, and remembered Bava from the days of filming *Odissea.* "He had been on the set of *Odissea* quite often," she told interviewer Kit J. Gavin, "always in discussions with director Franco Rossi. Bava was warm, very quiet, and a real gentleman. I met him again when we were making *Moses the Lawgiver* together, and I was very impressed by his ability. I told him that he had such vision that he should be making movies—not just assisting directors and doing the special effects. He laughed and embraced me, and told me that he had been making movies for a long time—both for himself and with other people's names on them. 'But I was always there,' he told me—with a twinkle in his eye."

Commentary

Moses the Lawgiver was one of Mario Bava's few commercially successful projects of the 1970s, though it was not viewed by many as a success for him. Nearly every review of the miniseries and its subsequent feature-length reduction that bothered to mention his contribution bemoaned the "uninspired" lack of spectacle in Bava's special effects, thus missing the entire point of the production. The miniseries, as a whole, received considerable critical acclaim, but the expectations of any new title in this genre, by critics and public, had been formed by a different kind of Biblical epic, so De Bosio's fresh approach was commonly perceived as an inability to compete on equal ground with the likes of DeMille.

Taken on its own terms as a humanistic, historical drama of how an oppressed people were driven toward freedom by the inner voices and dreams of one man, *Moses the Lawgiver* is an extraordinary, rich achievement. By making its characters believable, first and foremost, as people, with all their attendant flaws and inconsistencies and humor, it brings the true solemnity of religion within reach of its audience and helps us to better appreciate the terrible human cost of defining the tenets of a belief, tenets which today we feel free to embrace, overlook or disregard entirely. By making its characters more human and approachable, one might expect the religion espoused by the film to be similarly diluted or relaxed, but *Moses the Lawgiver* is one of the most inflexible, unforgiving and resolutely Old Testament of Biblical epics. A director as nakedly manipulative as DeMille would never have depicted Moses ordering the stoning to death of men who failed to observe the Sabbath, but it is absolutely necessary to De Bosio's vision of a man who loves the law of the Lord more than his own people, for whom he has surrendered everything. There are times when Moses' behavior invites the viewer to question his sanity, but his devotion—and his results—cannot be questioned.

The cast is exemplary, with Lancaster and Anthony Quayle giving performances that rank among their very best. The lesser-known Joseph Shiloach also deserves special mention as Dathan, whose contrary, spiteful, jeering voice is a source of refreshment in a genre that tends to over-reverence; his antagonism confronts the endlessly patient Moses with unattractive aspects of humankind that most anyone will find all too familiar. After Moses shepherds his people

safely across the parted sea, Dathan enthusiastically commends his leadership, but when Moses denies his status as their leader, cautioning Dathan never to forget the Lord God, a slow zoom into Dathan's spurned expression underscores a crucial political fumble for Moses, which will lead to endless problems later on.

If the cast is memorable, this is due in part to Anthony Burgess, who gave them wonderful words to speak. *Moses the Lawgiver* may well be the most eloquent film of its kind, as it is hard to think of another religious film so wonderfully weighted with quotable wisdom:

> *"A miracle, I suppose, is something you need, happening when you need it."*

> *"You've been recalled to reality, Moses."*
> *"Called. Not recalled."*

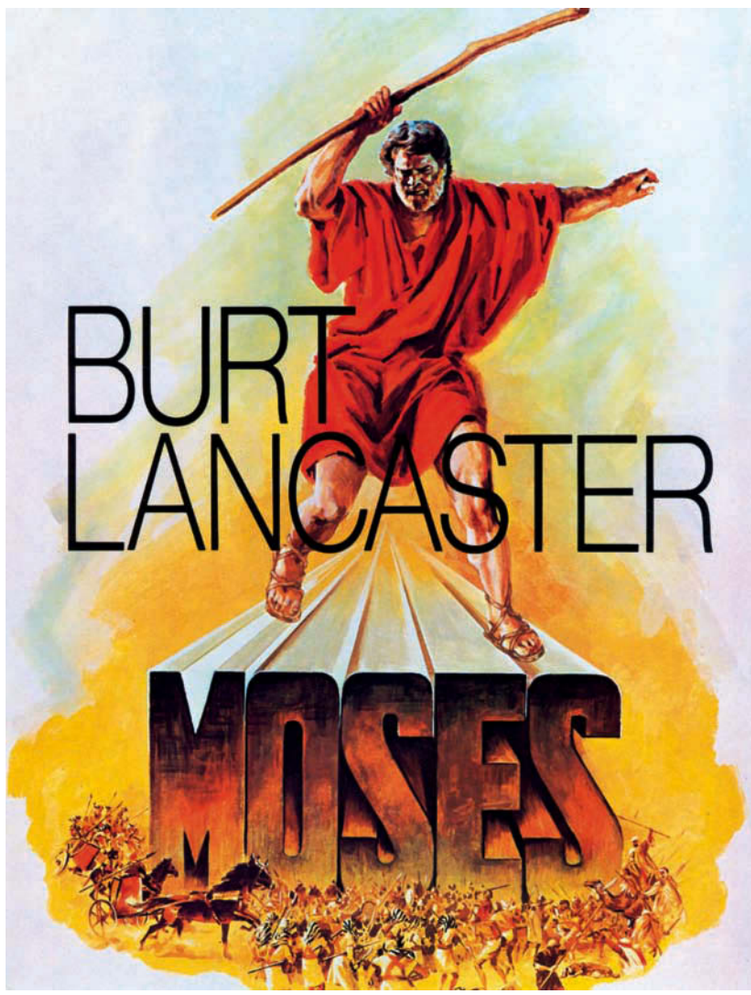
> *"Gratitude is not a word; it is the desire to keep saying the word."*

Burgess' script also knows when to speak without speaking, as when the meeting of Moses and Aaron in the desert is underscored with the profundity *"Add no word; it is the sign."* At times, the profundity of Burgess' language puts the lie to Moses' protestations of being ineloquent and needing his brother to carry his voice to the people, but Quayle does proves himself even more adept at speaking with persuasive reason. The peak of Quayle's contribution is in his pained delineation of the ultimate truth that, while Aaron has the gift of speech, and the belief to follow and bring others along, he does not finally understand the Holy Word brought to him by his brother and cannot sustain the unity of this would-be nation in his absence.

Also gracing the film is a major score by Ennio Morricone, which was released as a soundtrack album at the time and has subsequently been issued as an expanded, two-CD deluxe edition. The main theme is a mournful, stirringly reverent piece accompanied by a deeply beautiful melisma by Gianna Spagnulo; it conveys all the striving, aspiration, and doubt of the story to come. There is also a recurring, exultant, slightly shrill vocal piece entitled "Israel" which is used to accompany moments of success and confirmation. The score includes a number of tribal songs, heavily percussive and reliant on voice and instruments of unusual antiquity. While not one of Morricone's top scores as a whole, the two main cues are standouts in his discography and commonly included in anthologies of his best work.

As for Mario Bava's contribution to the film, it is more successfully realized than may be apparent at first or even second glance. By all accounts, he worked a great deal on the production, but his work is not as evident to the eye as one would expect. Bava did take some disappointing short cuts, such as the use of stock footage to depict the pillar of clouds (a dust devil) and the onset of pestilence (cicada infestation), but this was De Bosio's call; he was determined to de-emphasize traditional movie special effects while aiming for plausible explanations for the phenomena covered by the story. In cases like this, Bava's know-how was more archival than special effects-related. Other contributions, like the addition of Mt. Horab to shots filmed outside the Sinai peninsula, or the long-shot of Canaan nestled in a peaceful valley, are technically impeccable and as invisible to most viewers as they were meant to be. In those scenes where Bava's effects are most elaborate, such as the parting of the sea (which is never actually called the Red Sea or the Sea of Reeds), the results are excellent in some respects, but overdone in others. The use of double exposures to increase the presence of water in the shots of the Egyptian soldiers falling off their mounts into the sea seems unnecessary; the overlays accentuate an artifice that does not exist in the basic effect. Only in the sequences of the curse of frogs, and Moses witnessing the transformation of his rod and hand, stand out as being executed in true Bavian style.

This does not change the essential fact that *Moses the Lawgiver* is one of the finest films to carry Bava's name, even if—in the end—his presence is not so strongly felt.



US *campaign poster art.*

Moses The Feature

After the *Moses the Lawgiver* miniseries was completed, the producers decided to generate additional profits by following in the footsteps of *Odissea* and making a condensed, feature-length version available for theatrical release.

Titled simply *Moses*, the film was shortened to approximately 142 minutes and lost many of the miniseries' most compelling scenes, including Aaron's dream-inspired trek through the desert to meet his long-lost brother, and Moses' soliloquy as he walks through the streets of Pitom, his expressions of self-doubt contrasted with backgrounded friezes of lust and evil among his own people (children fighting and coveting one another's possessions, couples fornicating). It also contained quite a few rough edges. In the miniseries, as young Moses interferes with an Egyptian's whipping of an Israelite slave, he shouts, "I said, stop it!" In the feature version, Moses offers no vocal protest, though it was precisely this daring that made Moses legendary among his native people. By the same token, later, when the members of the exodus get lost in the desert, one of Moses' followers admonishes him, "You said you knew this place as well as you know the back of your hand"—but the earlier line referenced is no longer present. The stately narration of Richard Johnson—a constant in the original production that

4 Roy Bava, *Mario Bava Maestro of the Macabre* interview transcript, 2000.

gave it much of its warmth and nobility—disappears from the feature version for long stretches; it is heard mostly during the first and final half hours.

When *Moses* was released in America by Avco-Embassy Pictures—the Joseph E. Levine company founded on the success of *Hercules* and *Hercules Unchained* in the 1950s—some critics noted the presence of additional violence and glimpsed nudity in the PG-rated release, but these, too, judging from the film as it appears on videocassette, were illusory. On the contrary, the theatrical version contained none of the scenes of Yokebed breast-feeding the infant Moses, nor the scene introducing Dathan, as he interrupts an Egyptian caught in the act of raping his wife—which had also been omitted from the CBS premiere, but were subsequently reinstated for the miniseries' TV syndication broadcasts. While Avco-Embassy's domestic prints were issued in standard monaural sound, the prints distributed in Great Britain by ITC were reportedly graced with four-channel stereo that the company's ads trumpeted as "Super Spectrasound."

"Pit.," reviewing the condensed feature version for *Variety*, reported: "*Moses* is another attempt at compressing a big slice of Biblical drama, and once again the inevitable result is superficial storytelling. The Avco-Embassy release . . . has Burt Lancaster in a restrained and sometimes moving portrayal . . . whether the market is ripe again for a Biblical epic is sheer guesswork. The judgment here is for an indicated strategy of saturation playoff primed with heavy promotion, with the film's PG rating as a positive factor for some situations . . . pic strikes a reasonable balance between spectacle and narrative intimacy . . . Marcello Gatti's camera direction is at its best covering the desert and mountain terrain. Mario Bava's special effects are fine, notably his parting of the waters—more realistic than predecessor efforts."[5]

Baby Kong

Shortly after the broadcast of *Moses the Lawgiver,* Mario Bava was approached by Dino De Laurentiis, who offered him $100,000—probably more money than had been waved under his nose in his entire life—to come to the United States and supervise the special effects unit of his proposed $24,000,000 remake of *King Kong* for Paramount.



ORIGINAL *promotional art by Enrico DeSeta.*

Bava turned the offer down, recommending in his stead Carlo Rambaldi, who seized the offer with both hands. Rambaldi's work on the picture was highly controversial; $2,000,000 was eventually spent on the creation of a life-sized robotic Kong that failed to work on cue and would ultimately appear onscreen for a single shot. When Rambaldi won the Academy Award for Best Special Effects, stop-motion animator Jim Danforth (*7 Faces of Dr. Lao, When Dinosaurs Ruled the Earth)* resigned from the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences in protest. If the Oscar deserved to go to anyone, it was Los Angeles-based makeup artist Rick Baker, who wore a remarkably articulated ape costume of his own creation for 99% of Kong's appearances in the picture. In 1981, Baker became the first-ever recipient of the Academy Award for Best Makeup, for his work on John Landis' *An American Werewolf in London.*[6] As for Rambaldi, he subsequently redeemed himself with magnificent animatronic contributions to Steven Spielberg's *Close Encounters of the Third Kind* (1977) and *E.T. The Extra-Terrestrial* (1982). One can't help but speculate that, had Bava accepted De Laurentiis' invitation, Rambaldi's opportunities to contribute to these American classics might well have become Bava's.

When his grandson Roy asked Mario why he didn't accept De Laurentiis' offer, Bava reasoned, "I don't like to fly"—but his reasons ran deeper. "If you knew him," says Luigi Cozzi, "you would understand why Mario couldn't have worked elsewhere. He was not an international guy. He was so deeply Roman-rooted, the way he spoke was with such a strong Roman accent, it was difficult to imagine him anywhere else—not even in northern Italy! It really wasn't because of his age, it was because of the way he was."

Lamberto Bava begs to differ: "It's not that my father was scared to fly—in fact, he loved to travel—but he wasn't thrilled about the idea of spending six months in some foreign place. He was happy to stay at home with his books, near the fireplace, with my mother in the room nearby. His careerism was the opposite of some other film people."

While De Laurentiis' *King Kong* was still in production, the hype surrounding the picture inspired a number of low-budget filmmakers to announce or proceed with giant ape sagas told on a smaller scale. Universal was the first to announce a competing feature, *The Legend of King Kong,* which was advertised as coming but ultimately never made. The void was subsequently filled by Frank Agrama's parody *Queen Kong,* Paul Leder's *A*P*E** and even a Mexican film, *Las Muñecas del King Kong,* all made between 1976 and 1978. It was in the summer of 1976 that Mario Bava was approached by Luigi Borghese, a producer affiliated with 3B Cinematografica, who wanted to make a film that would not only ride this bandwagon, but proceed it. Borghese's plan was to make a film that could beat *King Kong*'s projected December release by opening in November.

A screenplay was written, locations were scouted on the island of Ponza, and Bava drew more than twenty

pages of storyboards for the production. 3B Cinematografica took advantage of the growing celebrity surrounding Renato Cestiè by signing the 14-year-old singing idol to star. Already a veteran of nearly twenty features, the blonde, freckle-nosed Cestiè had worked with Bava once before, pulling the trigger on Claudine Auger and Luigi Pistilli at the end of *Ecologia del delitto*.

In the hope of attracting international distribution deals, 3B Cinematografica produced a four-color flyer announcing the production for that year's MIFED film buyers market. A full-page advertisement utilizing the same promotional art also appeared in the October 20, 1976 issue of *Variety*. The *Baby Kong* flyer is such a riot of bad English and other misdeeds that it isn't surprising that the project never got off the ground. Identifying itself as "The Italian Reply to American Productions," it boasts that the film will be "Starring by: A FANTASTIC CHIMPANZEE—RENATO CESTIÈ," which not only manages to give the film's intended star second billing to a chimp but fails to distinguish between the two. Furthermore, as if admitting that few outside Italy would know Cestiè's name, the brochure explains him as "the same actor boy of many Italian dramatic films." (We haven't even reached the synopsis, and the document is already a catastrophe.) What follows is the film's synopsis, exactly as it appears in English on the document. By reproducing it verbatim, my intention is not to ridicule the copywriter's poor command of English, but to better illustrate how the concept's unfortunate mishandling contributed to its inevitable defeat:

Erik is a 12-year-old boy who lives with his mother, Mrs. Helen, in a little island in Aegeus where she works as English citizen attached to the Weather-Station.

Erik spends most of his time with his best friend, Baby—a chimpanzee and they organize to play jokes on the natives.

The island is a vulcan and the natives live on the sole possible side, where there is a little sea-port where a ferry-boat arrives once in a month.

In the hardest side of the islands, among fumaroles, rocks and grottos, a strange sciencist lives: Mr. Rupert Allenkraab and his servant, Mathias.

They live near an ancient Greek templus, on the highest hill. When they arrive to the village, once in a while for supplyings, their behaviours provoke curiosity everywhere, as it is impossible to understand what these two fellows really do so far away and alone. The natives say that Allenkraab is a strange scientist and somebody assures that he makes very strange experiments on animals and plants; and all that scares the inhabitants.

Intact Allenkraab has created animals that act as plants and plants that "move" and "live" as animals but the dream of the scientist is to prove his theory on the body of an animal, the nearest to the mankind, therefore he always watches "Baby" for capturing. He and his servant Mathias are waiting for a good circumstance to catch the chimpanzee.

A day there is a violent storm and all the inhabitants refuge into the houses; Erik is not island for studying. The scientist and his servant take this occasion and capture Baby and fire the shunty of the animal. When Erik turns back to the island, his mother says all the story but supposing that a rainbow distroyed the shunty and quite surely the animal dead in the fire. But the little Erik does not find the mortal remains of the animal therefore he believes that Baby is alive. His suspicious is in the exact way: the scientist. But Mathias captures the boy and consigned to Allenkraab who beats violentely Erik. Erik shuts for grief and a terrific yell replies from a grotto. Suddenly everything around has been destroyed and flight away and a monster appears but with Baby face. Allenkraab and Mathias refuges themselves into the laboratory. The scientist infact has not able to control the growth of the animal. Erik is scared but realizes that the monster is Baby, then he shuts "Allo, Baby!"

Immediately the monster has an intelligent lamp on his eyes; he reminds the boy and hand Erik near his face. There is a very touching moment between Baby and Erik. They are both happy to be back together. But Allenkraab comes out from the laboratory and handling a weapon and fire against the monster.

The shots noises Baby who has a destroying reaction; with a single cloup he cancels the laboratory and tre scientist.

Baby now is in danger having killed Allenkraab and Erik convinces him to refuge into a grotto also because all the village will persecute him as he has destroyed buildings, streets, killed animals. Baby infact doesn't realize how much strong he is and this fact brings him to provoke disasters on his passage.

There is a lot of action of suspense; Erik trying to save Baby and the inhabitants to catch him with any kind of weapons.

Most of the dangers made by Baby happen as a joke for the animal as he reminds when he was playing with Erik when he was normal tall. Cars destroyed, boats taken on the air with people in and then killed. There is terror on the island also because the normal weapons cannot stop him. It is impossible to call other islands as the radio station has been destroyed.

The sole way to kill the monster is to bomb his refuge so that all the mountain shall be his tomb. Erik refuses to contribute.

By the way everything is ready for the explosion. Erik does not know anything about this further tentative to kill Baby. The area around the grotto is full of soldiers ready to make explosion. Erik realizes that Baby now is really in danger. The boy now is running towards the grotto among the initial explosion and fire. Hundreds of rocks are burying the monster, who resists to let Erik to escape and save himself. As Baby sees that Erik is save, relaxes in the last breath and dies among explosion and eruptions of the vulcano waked up.

The monster has been killed as victim of human presumptuousness.

Locations were scouted, miniatures were built, but shortly before the giant arm of Baby Kong was due to be constructed, Luigi Borghese decided not to proceed with the filming. "When I went to America," he told the Italian magazine *Nocturno*, "De Laurentiis told me that it was better not to do *Baby Kong*. He told me to send him a number of scripts, that he would produce a film for me, but nothing happened. It was just idle talk." [7]

Reading the film's synopsis, one can't help feeling that *Baby Kong* was a disaster waiting to happen. If it had been made, chances are that it would now be regarded as an unfortunate disruption of the otherwise daring, adventurous works that composed Bava's final decade as a director. The title predisposes one to expect a comic spoof—*a sort of Honey, I Blew Up the Chimp*—but the intention was obviously to play the story at least somewhat straight, with Baby's oblivious rampage resulting in a number of accidental deaths. Of course, this is not to say that it couldn't have become a comedy; with Bava, there is every possibility that the script would be regarded as nothing more than a blueprint, a narrative foundation from which to improvise, or that it might even be discarded altogether. Certainly, the film would have given Bava the opportunity to demonstrate what could still be achieved with his "magic lantern" brand of special effects—in fact, anyone familiar with Bava's other works can easily visualize how some of the trick shots described in the synopsis would have looked onscreen: the ancient Greek temples on the hilltop near Allenkraab's laboratory, the emergence of Baby Kong from the whorling smoke of the grotto, the toy cars in Baby's hairy grip as the chimp ambles down the street of a miniature city, the actors inside those cars screaming against a blueback plate, the miniature explosions. All this, and bad late '70s dubbing, to boot.

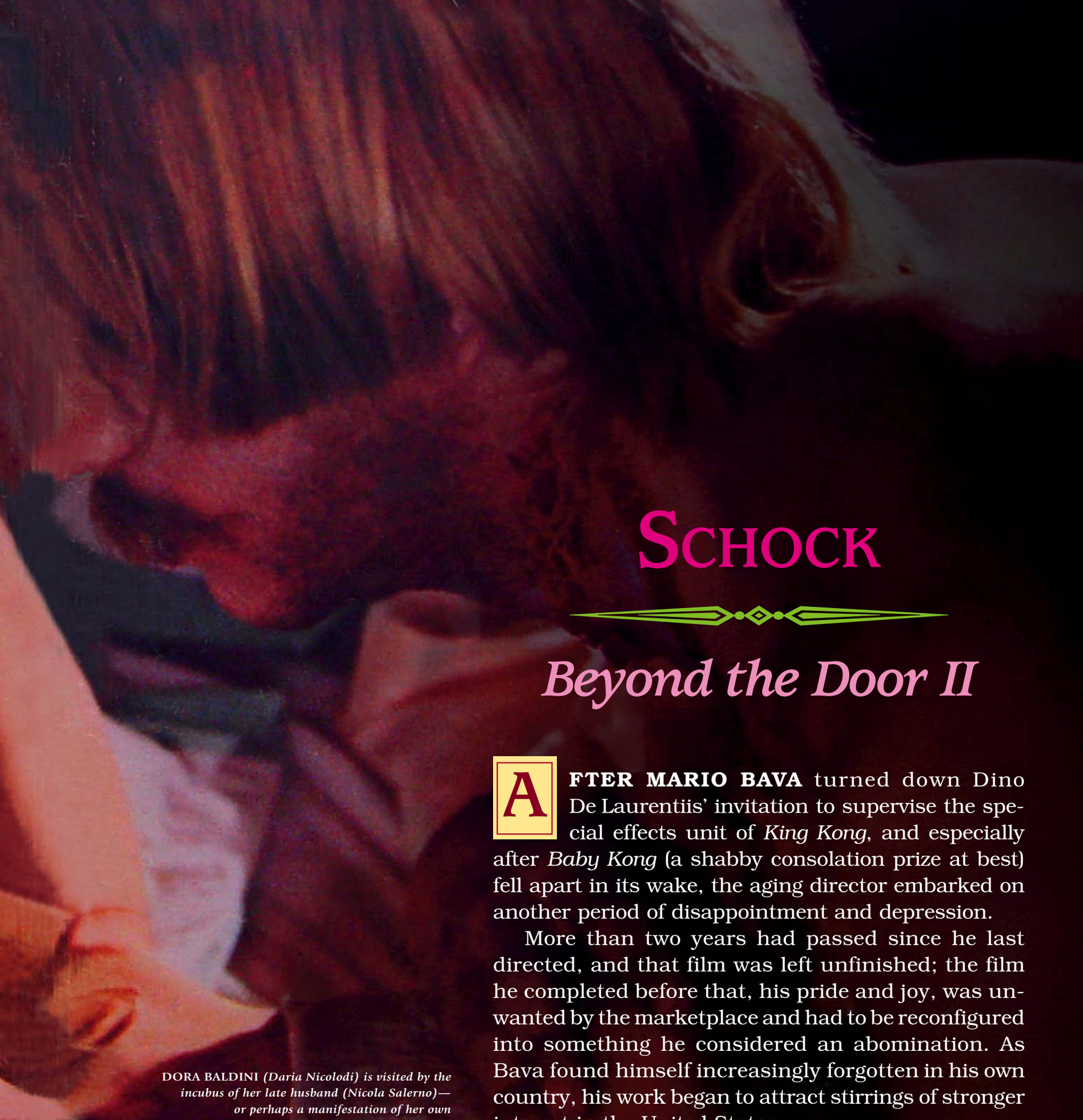
Bava would have given the picture at least a memorable scene or two, but one seriously doubts that a concept as essentially old-fashioned as this (belonging more to the naïve mid-1960s of *King Kong Escapes* than to the post-*Star Wars* 1970s) could have been a commercial success. More importantly, had Bava proceeded with *Baby Kong*, it might have prevented him from making *Schock* or *La Venere d'Ille* or both, which would have been a very great loss.

5 Pit., *Variety*, February 26, 1976, 22.

6 Earlier special Oscars had been awarded to William Tuttle and John Chambers for their respective makeups for *7 Faces of Dr. Lau* and *Planet of the Apes*.

7 Manlio Gomarasca and Davide Pulici, "Il Talento di Mr. Bava," *Nocturno Dossier* 24, July 2004, 6–32.





DORA BALDINI *(Daria Nicolodi) is visited by the incubus of her late husband (Nicola Salerno)—or perhaps a manifestation of her own murderous guilt—in* SCHOCK.

SCHOCK

Beyond the Door II

AFTER MARIO BAVA turned down Dino De Laurentiis' invitation to supervise the special effects unit of *King Kong*, and especially after *Baby Kong* (a shabby consolation prize at best) fell apart in its wake, the aging director embarked on another period of disappointment and depression.

More than two years had passed since he last directed, and that film was left unfinished; the film he completed before that, his pride and joy, was unwanted by the marketplace and had to be reconfigured into something he considered an abomination. As Bava found himself increasingly forgotten in his own country, his work began to attract stirrings of stronger interest in the United States.

In 1975 the American horror film fanzine *Photon* published the first substantial essay in English about his films: "Mario Bava: The Illusion of Reality," written by Alain Silver and James Ursini. [1] In his editorial "Emanations," *Photon*'s Mark Frank related: "Our Italian correspondent, Luigi Cozzi, was able to visit Bava shortly before the completion of this issue. His report makes the unfortunate observation that "the years have not been kind to the aging director. Bava has been replaced by Dario Argento as Italy's king of terror, with the former's films considered old-fashioned and dated. He confesses to having made most of his movies out of dire financial need, despite the fact that he recognized them to be poorly written with ridiculous stories." [2]

During the period of 1976–77, Bava was occasionally asked by colleagues for technical advice—for example, director Pupi Avati called him while preparing his film *Bordella* (1976) for pointers about the best and most economical means of creating the illusion of an invisible man—but otherwise he seems to have spent the better part of these two years out of work.

Without the therapeutic distraction of his vocation, Bava became embittered about the Italian cinema that was continuing without him, and he vented some of his harsh feelings in a 1977 interview with the French newspaper *Libération* (which wasn't published until after his death). Asked to share his views on the contemporary Italian cinema, Bava held nothing back: "If you mean those orphans of Rossellini who clog the streets of Rome shooting in Super 8mm, it's a moribund cinema. If you mean the Italian cinema that is known in France, that's just the mainstream cinema: Rosi's imitation thrillers, Comencini's phony melodramas, the trivial fictions of Scola, and Fellini's baroque forgeries . . . It's all been watered down to make it more palatable to the wretched masses who don't get the joke of the plastic sea in *Casanova* because they actually believe it's real." [3]

Mario Bava's next (and final) theatrical feature came about as a result of his son Lamberto's determination to raise his father out of his slump. "He wasn't working or doing anything," Lamberto remembers. "Also, because he wasn't a writer, and would rather do anything than write, he had no project. So I resolved to do whatever I could to provide my father with a project."



ONE *of Dora's housewarming party guests is her former psychiatrist Dr. Aldo Spedini, played by Ivan Rassimov.*

Schock

Working title: *Al 33 di via Orologio fa sempre freddo*,
"It's Always Cold at 33 Via Orologio"
Filmed at Vides S.p.a. (Rome) and on location
Spring 1977
First released: August 12, 1977
Eastmancolor, 1.85:1, 93 minutes

Production: Laser Film S.r.l. Producer: Turi Vasile. Associate producer: Ugo Valenti. Directors: Mario Bava and (uncredited) Lamberto Bava. Assistant director: Lamberto Bava. Story and screenplay: Lamberto Bava, Francesco Barbieri, Paolo Briganti [Alessandro Parenzo], Dardano Sacchetti. Continuity: Rosanna Rocchi. Director of photography: Alberto Spagnoli, A.I.C. Camera operator: Giuseppe Maccari, A.I.C. Second assistant camera: Giuseppe Alberti. Unit manager: Naldo Nibbi. Art direction: Francesco Vanorio. Assistant art director: Nicola Salerno. Special effects: Carlo Rambaldi. Wardrobe: Massimo Lentini, Franca Lulli. Makeup: Maria Luisa Tilli. Production manager: Giuseppe Mangogna. Grip: Sergio Serantoni. Gaffer: Sante Federici. Editor: Roberto Sterbini. Assistant editors: Sandro Broglio, Mario Recupito. Music: I Libra. Sound: Pietro Spadoni. Stills: Giuliana De Rossi. Distributor: Titanus.

Daria Nicolodi (Dora Baldini), John Steiner (Bruno), David Colin Jr. (Marco), Ivan Rassimov (Dr. Aldo Spedini), Nicola Salerno (Carlo). Uncredited: Paul Costello (man at party).

France: *Les Démons de la Nuit*, "Demons of the Night"
Japan: *The Shock*, Herald Films
Spain: *Shock*, Hispamex Films S.A., Technicolor
UK: *The Shock*, Eagle Films, 8/17/80, 86m 33s, Certificate "X," passed with no cuts
US: *Beyond the Door II*, Film Ventures International, Color by Deluxe, 4/79, 87m

Mario's semi-retirement had already pushed Lamberto into pursuing employment outside the family. In 1974, he worked as assistant director on Mario Lanfranchi's *Il bacio* ("The Kiss"), an erotic period piece starring Martine Beswick, and in 1975, he sold an original screen story that became Ruggero Deodato's *Un'ondata di piacere/Waves of Lust*. This erotic thriller starred John Steiner and Elizabeth Turner as a decadent couple who invite another twosome (Silvia Dionisio and Al Cliver) to accompany them on a yacht cruise for a *ménage a quatre*, not suspecting that they have murder on their minds. Lamberto got along very well with Deodato, whose primary work during this period was in television commercials, and subsequently joined his company as a production assistant. "He was without a doubt the most competent assistant I ever had," Deodato enthused, "and when I returned to filmmaking, we continued our association and made four or five films together." [4]

Primary among those films are Deodato's notorious, but undeniably accomplished *Ultimo mondo cannibale/The Last Survivor* a.k.a. *Jungle Holocaust* (1977) and *Cannibal Holocaust* (1980). Unlike his travel-wary father, Lamberto had no trepidation about following Deodato into the jungle hells of Kuala Lumpur in Malaysia, or to Mindanao in the Philippines. "I remember while shooting *Ultimo mondo cannibale*, [Lamberto] was bitten by a snake and we had to race him to a hospital by canoe," Deodato laughed. "We didn't know that the Indios had removed the snake's venom before the shoot!" [5]

Upon Lamberto's return to Rome, Mario would have just cause for taunting his son's adventurousness in travel—but something more than work came of the experience. While working as Deodato's assistant, Lamberto met and fell in love with script girl Rossanna Rocchi, who would become his second wife.

Safely returned to Rome, Lamberto turned his thoughts to generating a project for his father. There were a couple of stillborn projects dating from

the time immediately following the catastrophe of *Cani arrabbiati*, which Mario had worked up with Cesare Frugoni and Alessandro Parenzo. One was a film on genetic mutations called *L'uomo topo* ("The Rat Man"), an idea proposed by a film producer named Francesco Merli. "Bava's intention was to realize it using subliminal techniques, never showing the monster," Frugoni recalls. "It was a very complicated story, with an atmosphere typical of the late 19th century, very dark. It was set in modern times, but there was a mood *à la* Arséne Lupin; it was a French nocturne, but it would have to be shot in a Pasolinian way, very hard, in slums and awful dumping grounds. A strange operation, indeed."

More to Lamberto's liking was a project entitled *Radici di paura* ("Roots of Fear"), which was based on *Giungla domestica* ("Domestic Jungle"), a science fiction novel by Gilda Musa. Cesare Frugoni remembers the premise: "A botanist is killed in his greenhouse by a gang of robbers, and his plants—which have souls and are able to express their feelings—trap these criminals inside the greenhouse, causing them to die of asphyxiation and, after having breathed all the air, dying themselves. It was a very expensive movie, kind of a Spielbergian idea, so to speak. This was a project that Mario owned completely; he often spoke about it. He had also collected extensive material on the possibility of life and relationships between plants." Lamberto worked his father's pooled ideas for the project into a treatment and succeeded in interesting Titanus in the project.

Somehow Titanus could never locate the funding to push *Radici di paura* forward, so Lamberto turned his attention to updating Dardano Sacchetti's 1972 screenplay for *Al 33 di via Orologio fa sempre freddo* ("It's Always Cold at 33 Via Orologio"), his liberal adaptation of Hillary Waugh's *The Shadow Guest*. Lamberto toiled on the script at night, after putting in full days at Deodato's advertising agency.

"Lamberto worked on the screenplay for almost two months, locked in his study," his son Roy remembers. "It was my first screenplay, the first one I signed with my own name," Lamberto notes. "From time to time, my father called me or came to visit, saying: 'Read this fantastic story that I've found.' One of the stories he suggested was 'The Horla' by [Guy de] Maupassant, and perhaps the first seeds of *Schock* were sown there. I remember that [Mario] told me that he liked very much the idea that the furniture was moving about and was the protagonist of the story. My father didn't care much for actors and was always saying that he would love to make a film in which the objects were the actors." The finished script, retitled *La casa 8* ("House Number 8," the number signifying infinity), was acquired by producer Turi Vasile of Laser Film. By the time it went before the cameras, the screenplay would be credited to different writers: Lamberto Bava, Francesco Barbieri, Dardano Sacchetti, and Paolo Briganti, the latter a pseudonym for Alessandro Parenzo. ("I've signed many films as Paolo Briganti," Parenzo confesses. "It was the name of a friend of mine. I don't remember what kind of game he lost, but we had a bet and he lost. I was looking for an alias, so I took his name—I won it!") According to Lamberto, he wrote the script "with Sacchetti," but it "was later revised several times."[6] Sacchetti, on the other hand, remembers writing the script that became *Schock*[7] immediately after *Ecologia del delitto* in 1971, "but it was not made until 1977, after many modifications had been made to my original scenario."[8]

To trace the development of Mario Bava's final theatrical feature, we must go back to *The Shadow Guest* . . . but first, it will be useful to be forearmed with the synopsis of the film at hand.

Synopsis

After being away for seven years, Dora Baldini returns to the house where she once lived with her husband Carlo (a suicide), accompanied by their young son Marco, and her new husband Bruno, an airline pilot. Marco feels an immediate, strange bond to the place, and is drawn to the cellar in particular, which Bruno promptly locks. Marco asks his parents if they "are going to live here forever," which inspire thoughts of inevitable death in both parents. When they ask why he wants to know, he replies, "Just in case anyone asks me."

While cleaning the house, Dora finds the icy blue fingers of a large porcelain hand buried in the cushions of the sofa. She removes it and places it on a mirrored shelf unit, while Bruno builds a swing for Marco on a tree in the yard. That night, Marco insists on sleeping with the light on. Dora turns his light off after he falls asleep, but as she and Bruno make love on the living



DORA *is concerned about the aberrant behavior of her sensitive son Marco (David Colin Jr.).*

1 The essay has been reprinted many times, and was later amended, updated, and retitled ("Mario Bava and the Baroque Image") for its appearance in Silver/Ursini's book *The Vampire Film*, now in its third edition from Limelight Books.

2 Mark Frank, "Emanations," *Photon* 26, 1975, 4.

3 Levin Safao, *Libération*, May 5, 1980.

4 Luca M. Palmerini and Gaetano Mistretta, *Spaghetti Nightmares* (Rome, Italy: M&P Edizone, 1996), 56.

5 Ibid.

6 Palmerini and Mistretta, 27.

7 The film is sometimes misidentified in reference sources as *Schock (Transfert-Suspence-Hypnos)*, which is based on a misreading of the film's original poster art, connecting the title and its underlining ad copy—much in the same way that Lucio Fulci's *L'Aldila/The Beyond* is sometimes incorrectly referenced as . . . *E Tu Vivrai nel Terrore! L'Aldila*. Strangely, there are no such words as "transfert," "hypnos," etc. in Italian, though they do exist in French. Also, the Italian word for "shock" is "shock," without the additional letter C found on the Italian posters.

8 Palmerini and Mistretta, 131.

room sofa, Marco awakens and curses the animal sounds of their passion: "Pigs!" The porcelain hand shelved above the couple abruptly shifts, threatening to fall on the lovers.

The next day, while playing in the yard, Marco falls atop Dora and pantomimes intercourse with her. Dora distracts the child with a trip to the park, where they see a puppet show about ghosts, a subject that fascinates Marco. Afterwards, while visiting the seashore, Marco asks why his real father never comes to see him any more. Dora explains that Carlo was a great adventurer who liked to visit strange, faraway places; she explains that he is dead, and Death is the ultimate voyage from which we never return. That night, in Bruno's absence, Dora allows Marco to sleep in her bed. In the night, Marco wakes, rises, and looks through the window at his swing, which seems to move by itself. Returning to bed, Marco removes the sheet from his sleeping mother's body and reaches out. She is fondled by the rotting hands of a dead, adult male.

Dora hosts a housewarming party and invites some old friends, to Marco's disapproval. He expresses dislike of her friends, whom he has never met. Bruno returns home and greets Marco warmly. ("Been taking care of your mother for me?") That night, at the party, Dora talks briefly to her former psychiatrist, Dr. Aldo Spedini, and other guests gossip about how she hardly seems the type who would drive a man to suicide, though Carlo was crazy and on the needle well before he met her. Marco's strange behavior comes to a head: He seems resentful of Bruno ("He's not my father," he corrects a guest, "he's my mother's second husband") and reacts to a kiss between Dora and Bruno by swearing to Dora that he must kill her. Dora sees Marco brooding outside on his swing. The motions of the swing awaken thoughts of a metronome, leading to delirious images of laughing pianos, images of syringes, unpleasant memories of Carlo.

JOHN *Steiner as Bruno, framed by an ominous piece of sculpture.*



The next day, Dora cuts her finger on the piano and finds a razor blade secreted between the keys. She finds Marco exiting the cellar, which had been locked. Marco watches Dora in the shower and steals a pair of her panties. Later, Dora finds Marco in the cellar, huddled against a brick wall. ("My God, your skin's like ice!") She rushes the boy into a warm bed. Looking for something to cover him, she finds her panties slashed to ribbons. Marco then jumps up and down, boasting of having fooled her, and runs away. Dora pursues him and trips over a garden rake on the lawn, hallucinating that the rake is a dead hand clutching at her ankle.

Marco cuts Bruno's picture from a portrait of him and Dora. Dora is angry with Bruno for having talked her out of selling the house, and they discuss her past nervous breakdown. Bruno tries to talk to Marco about why he's tormenting his mother, but the boy insists that he is innocent of wrongdoing: "She's changed a lot since we've moved here . . . she's no fun any more."

While Bruno busies himself with changing the lock on the cellar, Dora wakes from a nap in a cold sweat and is approached by a sliding, ominous wardrobe cabinet. The knob of the bedroom door turns, and the dead hand reaches inside, a cutting blade in its grip. She forces the hand outside the door and locks it, but when she pulls back the curtain from her window to escape, the window is bricked over—identical to the brick wall in the cellar!

WHILE *playing with Marco outdoors, Dora trips over a rake—and imagines that a decomposing hand is clutching at her leg.*



The blade returns, hovering in midair, swooping and slashing at her. It cuts her nightgown, and she awakens with a start. It was a dream . . . or was it? Her nightgown is torn.

The next morning, Bruno departs for a flight to London. When Dora says, "See you tonight," Bruno replies, "Unless the plane crashes!" Dora is upset by his humor, and at that moment, she is nearly decapitated by the window screen as the sash cord frays in two, apparently under Marco's fierce concentration. That afternoon, Marco attaches the cutout of Bruno's head to his swing and gives it a push; simultaneously, Bruno's flight experiences extreme turbulence. A bouquet of seven roses arrives for Dora, but she is upset when she reads the card, made out in a child's handwriting: "Una per ogni anno: nonostante tutto sei ancora mia." ("One for every year: in spite of everything, you will always be mine.") Bruno calls; he is grounded in London until it can be discovered what went wrong with his jet.

Dora takes Marco to her former psychiatrist, Dr. Spedini, who has the boy draw a couple of pictures. He explains to Dora that the drawings show him to be "balanced, and quite mature for his age," though a picture of him and his mother indicates that "the child needs more affection, or feels rejected." Thus, the blame is turned on Dora. Spedini discusses in brief some of her past history, including her six months in a sanatorium, which included electro-shock therapy.

Marco takes a pair of scissors to a doll's throat, just as Dora cuts her hand on a broken medicine bottle. Dora thinks she hears someone playing the piano and goes downstairs; there is no one there, but a record has finished playing on the turntable. She sees what appears to be blood on the keyboard—but, on second glance, it comes into focus as a rose petal from her dropped bouquet of flowers. As she reaches out to gather them, the piano lid slams down near her hand. She hears Marco calling "Mama," but when she runs to the stairs, she sees the "Mommy" mechanism that Marco has cut from his doll's throat walking down the stairs toward her. A child's drawings of a gruesome murder bespatter the floor. Marco seems to float toward her, tears in his eyes: "Why, Mama? Why did you kill Papa?" Suddenly, Dora's consciousness is filled with a memory of Carlo reaching toward her, over the porcelain hand, to inject her with heroin. She remembers killing him with the cutting blade.



"MAMA, *I'll have to kill you!" threatens Marco at Dora's housewarming party.*

On Bruno's return, Dora tearfully confesses to the murder, but Bruno insists that Carlo killed himself. ("Once he started on the needle, it was already the end of the line! You were only a victim!") Bruno sedates his hysterical wife, and she dreams once again of the brick wall, blood seeping through its thick mortar. Hand-like shadows pull her covers down, exposing her nude body, and she is ravished by the incubus of Carlo. Dora awakens, and the house itself seems to be revolting against her—appliances shock her, apparitions of Carlo in mirrors threaten her. As Marco lies in his own bed, his eyes open and discolored as though possessed. Dora drifts downstairs into the cellar, where she finds Bruno dismantling the brick wall with a pickaxe. She realizes that Carlo's body must be hidden there. Bruno explains that, when he found her in a trance above Carlo's dead body, he concealed her crime by interring the corpse behind the cellar wall and pushing Carlo's boat out to sea, knowing that he would be declared legally dead after seven years. Until this moment, Dora has suppressed the traumatic memory of the murder. Sounds of activity inside the wall attract Bruno, and seem to confirm Dora's fears that Carlo is still alive. "Don't touch him," she warns, and as Bruno peers inside the wall, she kills him with a pickaxe and dumps his body inside the wall. The true noisemaker within—a rat—escapes and races up her nightgown, terrifying Dora, before darting away.

Dora is now completely insane. She returns upstairs, where the porcelain hand creeps toward her from its shelf, falls, and shatters. She goes to Marco and finds Carlo, his throat slashed, in his bed. Marco runs toward her from the end of the hall and becomes Carlo. A falling chandelier knocks her downstairs into the cellar. Here, the animated armoire stalks her, backs her into a corner. The doors of the cabinet open, revealing the murder weapon, in the grip of the dead hand. It approaches her and cuts a fatal slash across her throat . . . while held in her own hand.

Outside, the boy happily stages a tea party with the ghost of his father. "Now what game shall we play?" Marco asks.

Background

The story of *Schock* originated with Hillary Waugh's *The Shadow Guest*, first published in 1971. Waugh's novel tells the story of an American architect, Howard Whelan, who falls in love with a young actress he discovers on the New York stage. He begins to date the young woman—Angela, a naturalized American citizen born in Britain—and after a whirlwind courtship, they marry. The project of a lifetime forces Howard and Angela to relocate to London, where the oppressive weather, isolation, and reliance on servants cause Angela to feel

useless and self-conscious, and inspire a deep depression. Howard finds her the best available psychiatrist in Britain, a Dr. Armstrong, and she begins therapy—around the same time that her workaholic husband suffers a heart attack. With complete rest prescribed for him, and Dr. Armstrong's discovery of Angela's need to run a household, Angela begins to look for accommodation outside the city. She finds Heather Cottage two hours outside London, in the rustic coastal town of Wildhurst. The place has a strange ability to brighten Angela's darkened spirits, but Howard is appalled by its damp, depressing aspect. He is also incredulous that she managed to find the cottage, when it was so far out of her way; she admits to driving in a daze, and somehow finding herself there. Being more interested in Angela's psychological recovery than his own physical one, Howard agrees to lease it.

The Whelans soon discover that the cottage is haunted, according to local legend. Three years earlier, the only daughter of the Crimalins (the previous residents of Heather Cottage) was killed when she and her soldier boyfriend Theron Hastings drove off the bluff overlooking the coastline, after he failed to observe a steep turn in the precarious road outside the cottage gates. At night, the Whelans hear unpleasant laughter emanating from their downstairs rooms, and on the third anniversary of the Crimalin girl's death, they hear her fatal accident reenacted outside their home—though the phenomenon goes unheard by their neighbors. Worst of all is the sudden appearance of a shadowy male apparition on the grounds below their bedroom window, wearing a British soldier's overcoat. Angela is attracted to the mysterious visitor, but Howard feels a potent emanation from this "shadow guest" of pure evil.

When Angela begins having bad dreams about the dark figure seated at the walnut secretary desk downstairs, Howard and she investigate it, but they turn up nothing. A subsequent nightmare attunes the focus of her fears to a certain drawer, where Howard finds a hidden letter, dated 1944. Addressed to "Emmaline," it is a letter from a British soldier, reprimanding the woman for having married an American during his wartime absence, noting that he is aware that she's had a child by her Yank husband, and swearing to avenge her betrayal whether it be in this lifetime or the next. The letter is signed Theron Hastings—the name of the soldier who died in the car with the Crimalin girl three years ago. To make matters eerier, Angela tells Howard that her mother's name was Emmaline and that she was born in early 1944. Somehow, her thoughtless driving in the car that day brought her to the very cottage where her parents lived before they relocated to the United States, perhaps to escape the threats of her former suitor.



MARCO'S *behavior becomes unmanageable after the family moves back to the house where his late father lived.*

Howard does some more investigating and discovers that no physical trace of Theron Hastings was found in the wreckage. He is torn between two possibilities: (1) that Hastings' ghost is indeed bent on luring the child of his thwarted love to her death, or (2) that Hastings is still alive and committed to the same end. Howard sets a noose trap in the yard, to catch any tangible intruders. That same night, Angela is found walking in her sleep toward the bluff and, when Howard wakes her by gripping her arm, she tells him that the ghost walked right through his trap without springing it.

Howard determines that they should leave Heather Cottage without delay, but Angela is adamant that her presence there is essential to her well-being. When he insists, she begins to show signs of her former depression. He summons her psychiatrist from London, and after some complaining, Dr. Armstrong finally agrees to spend a weekend with the Whelans to observe her condition at first hand. The first night of Armstrong's stay, Howard keeps a close watch on his wife, but falls asleep—only to be awakened by the doctor's urgent banging on the bedroom door. Angela is sleepwalking toward the bluff! Howard runs outside, only to see the shadowy apparition standing alone at the edge of the bluff, looking victoriously down over the edge. Thinking his wife dead, Howard tackles the ghost's coat and goes over the edge, hanging onto an empty coat and a supporting wire! It was an illusion put there to trap him!

Hanging on to the wall of the bluff, Howard listens with disbelief to the voices above—of Angela and Dr. Armstrong, who are actually lovers who concocted the whole scheme in order to arrange his death and their inheritance. Thinking Howard dead, they walk back toward the house and blunder into his trap. Built to support the weight of only one person, the bowed tree cannot support two, and it is uprooted after dangling the murderous couple precariously over the other side of the bluff, killing them as Howard is left hanging on for dear life.

This is only a bare bones outline, but as one reads *The Shadow Guest* in all its detail, it becomes obvious that the novel was the seed from which *Schock* grew and mutated. In common, they

share the location of the house by the sea—complete with a swing in the front yard and ghost-like sheeted furniture within—which turns out to be the location of a repressed traumatic memory; both heroines suffer psychological breakdowns as a result of their isolation and environment; the ghost that beckons to Angela is a soldier in the British Navy, while Dora's husband is described as an adventurer lost at sea; Angela is tormented by nightmares of being chased by a walnut secretary desk, while Dora is pursued by an armoire cabinet; and whereas Angela discovers a clue to her past inside a drawer in the persistent secretary, the weapon used to commit the murder whose memory Dora has suppressed is found inside the armoire—Angela's discovery leading to the revelation of her birth, Dora's leading to her inevitable self-annihilation.

Given Bava's repeated interest in showing his characters becoming trapped in their own murderous snares, the novel's highly visual, ironic finale must have been one of its key attractions for him. It would also have given him on opportunity to end a film in the way Hitchcock had begun his 1958 classic *Vertigo*, with his protagonist dangling from a very great height.

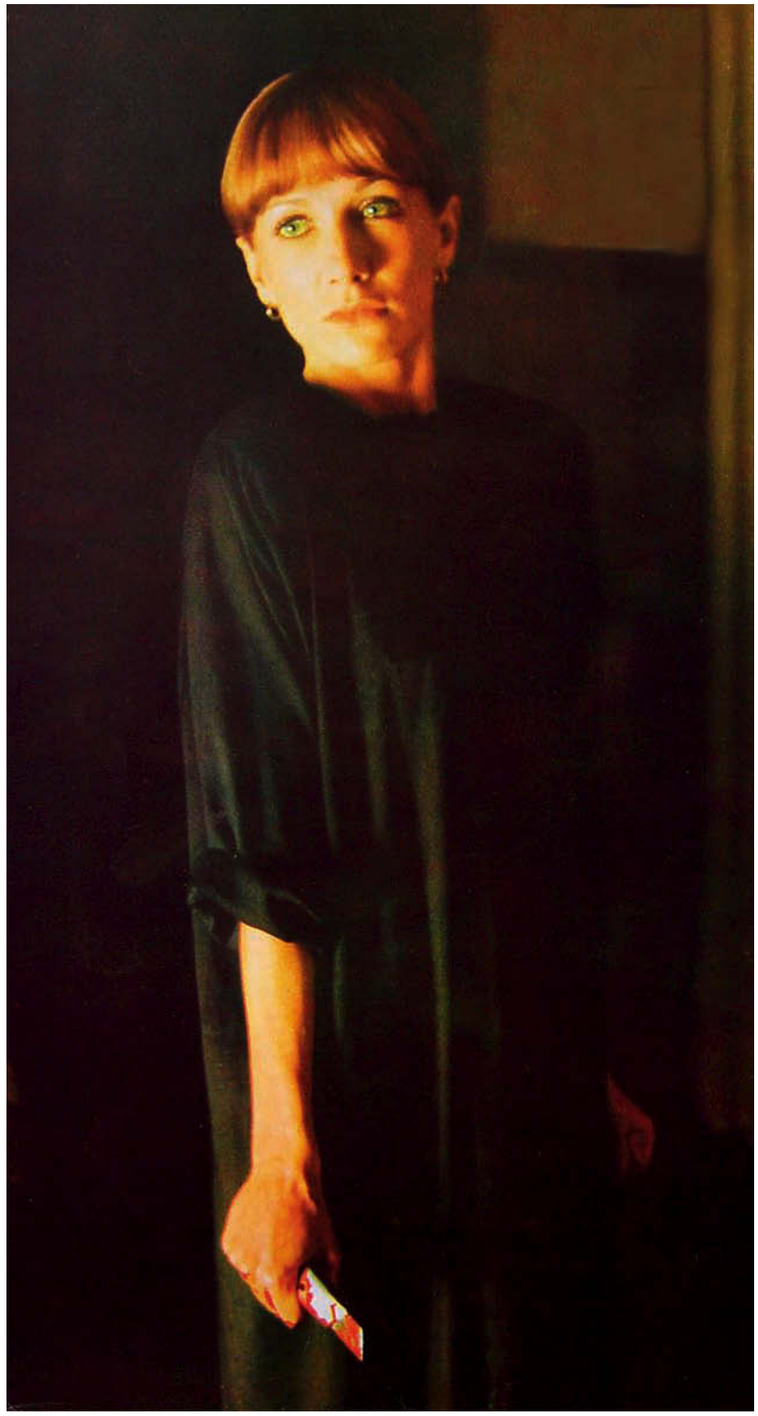
While Waugh's novel and Bava's film culminate quite differently, the direction taken by *Schock* is actually suggested in the novel, in an offhand way. In one instance, Dr. Armstrong tries to make Howard realize the absurdity of his fears by saying, "So a threatening letter was found in the desk. So a grave was found in the cellar." [9] In fact, Waugh oversteps himself here; no grave is found in the cellar in the novel—Armstrong was using this image to show Howard how hyperactive his imagination had become—but such a discovery is precisely what precipitates Dora's psychological breakdown in *Schock*.

Dardano Sacchetti admits that he was initially hired to adapt *The Shadow Guest* as a screenplay, and that his script was subsequently rewritten, by Lamberto Bava and others. As it changed hands between one producer and another, it ceased to resemble the original source. Of the two narratives, *Schock* is most satisfying, because its enticingly ambiguous interplay of crime, psychology, and the supernatural is far more compelling—and, in fact, more believable—than the hackneyed, gold-digging one given us by Waugh's novel.

Lamberto has said that he and Sacchetti, being young men in their 20s at the time, "wanted to make a different kind of horror film, something more contemporary; we were influenced by Stephen King." [10] While crafting the screenplay, they took care to include material that would provoke a favorable response from Mario, for whom it was intended. "We liked the idea of including a child," Lamberto says, "because my father used children in many of his movies—spooky children, ghostly children, using them as an annex to the supernatural. We liked the idea of a child that would rebel against his mother and say, 'Mama, I have to kill you!'" [11]

The character of Marco may have found his genesis in King novels like *Carrie* and *The Shining*, but in terms of its characters and story, *Schock* has another strong parallel in an earlier feature: *Night Hair Child/What the Peeper Saw* (1971), co-directed by James Kelley and Andrea Bianchi, and starring Britt Ekland and Mark Lester. In this British/Spanish co-production, Lester (best remembered for playing the title role in Carol Reed's *Oliver!*) plays the similarly named Marcus, a psychologically disturbed child of a man (Hardy Kruger) who remarries after the death of his first wife. The new wife, played by Ekland, becomes increasingly aware of a sexual tension between herself and the boy, whose flirtations become more open until, rebuked, they become murderous in character and lead her to suspect that the child may have been responsible for his own mother's death. Lamberto denies any knowledge of the film, but the similarities between the two films are striking.

Some observers have also speculated on the possible influence of August Derleth's classic ghost story "Mr. George," written in the 1940s under the byline Stephen Grendon. In this story (which was adapted for a second-season episode of *Thriller*), a 5-year-old girl named Priscilla is placed in the care of three money-hungry relatives after the deaths of her wealthy widowed mother and her companion, Mr. George. As the child's life is endangered by her caretakers, Priscilla finds herself protected by the



DARIA *Nicolodi gives a stylized, "silent movie" performance as Dora slips into madness.*

9 Hillary Waugh, *The Shadow Guest* (New York NY: Dell Publishing Co. Inc., 1972), 209.

10 Lamberto Bava interview, Anchor Bay Entertainment DVD of *Shock*, released 2001.

11 Ibid.



PHOTO *collage of John Steiner and Daria Nicolodi from an Italian fotobusta.*

"invisible hands" of Mr. George. While it is doubtful that Lamberto knew the story, it is possible that Mario had read it somewhere in translation.

Considering that *Schock* is so different from *The Shadow Guest* that it ceases to be an adaptation—and thus, was neither required to credit nor compensate its author—it says a lot about Bava's feelings of responsibility toward his collaborators that Sacchetti's early work on the original screenplay is acknowledged in the credits. Despite Sacchetti's primacy as screenwriter of the early drafts of *The Shadow Guest*, Lamberto Bava appears to have been most responsible for the final shape of the scenario that became *Schock*.

"*Schock* was written with many other people," Lamberto acknowledges. "The real writers were Sacchetti and myself. Francesco Barbieri helped a little, and the other writer [Alessandro Parenzo] wrote the final draft, which I later amended. But most of the film's basic ideas were mine. I—along with other men of my age—thought at the time, albeit mistakenly, that my father's horror films could be improved upon, or at least modernized in some way. What I wanted most of all was for my father to make a more contemporary horror film. I always thought, as a young man, that I could improve upon all of his films, even his best ones . . . which I now see was presumptuous on my part. *Schock* contains more of my ideas than any of his other films; I directed about 25% of it . . . but now, I don't think it's one of my father's best films." [12]

Cast

The principal role of Dora Baldini, one of the most challenging to be found in Bava's filmography, was awarded to Daria Nicolodi, an increasingly visible figure in Italian horror whom Bava affectionately called "the new vamp of all vampires." [13] Born June 19, 1950, in Florence, Nicolodi entered the cinema in 1970 and played small roles in films by Francesco Rosi and Elio Petri before her fateful, accidental meeting with Italy's young *maestro di gialli*, Dario Argento.

"We met in an airport long before we got together," she relates. "I was with my first husband, he was with his ex; I was going to South America, he was going to Africa; he was unhappy with this woman, and I was unhappy with this man. Our eyes, you know, met and I thought, 'Oh shit, I should go with this man to Africa rather than with this other to South America,' but then everyone went to their own destiny. Then we met again, maybe one year later, for the casting of *Profondo rosso*, and we remembered those glances, the locking of our eyes." [14]

Nicolodi was promptly cast as Gianna Brezzi, the trouble-making feminist reporter heroine of Argento's *Profondo rosso/Deep Red* (1975), in which she played opposite David Hemmings. Funny and flirtatious, Nicolodi's performance was like *His Girl Friday* remade with spidery gestures; she brought warmth, wit, and sparkle to Argento's hitherto cold and formalistic universe. She would soon bring much more. She became Argento's lover, the mother of his second daughter, Asia (born September 20, 1975), and next his collaborator—which is where their troubles began.

According to Nicolodi, she had actually known Mario Bava socially for "two or three years" before he hired her to star in *Schock*. They met as a result of a renewed friendship between Dario Argento and Lamberto Bava, who—one night during the filming of *Profondo rosso*—invited his father to join the three of them for dinner. Just as Dario and Lamberto, former classmates, rediscovered their common bonds, so did Mario and Daria discover a close kinship. During their first meal together, Bava feigned disbelief that Daria was an actress, exclaiming, "But . . . you're an intelligent person!"

"When he made films, he never ate with his actors, always with the crew," Nicolodi observes, confirming what others have said. "He told me that I was one of only two Italian actors that he did not mind eating with—the other

was Aldo Fabrizi. He said that actors were many times stupid."

Mario and Daria found an instant rapport, and when they reunited to make *Schock*, it was as though no time had passed since their previous meeting; it was, she says, as though they had known each other in a previous life. During the filming, Nicolodi's connection to Bava became very deep because she found herself playing the role of this very vulnerable woman at a time when she was feeling extremely vulnerable herself.

After the enormous success of their collaboration on *Profondo rosso*, Nicolodi had persuaded Dario Argento to make a movie about an uncharacteristic subject for him—witchcraft—and had given him the basic plot, many of the situations, and even the title of his next triumphant success: *Suspiria* (1977).

Nicolodi: "The title *Suspiria* comes from *De Profundis* by Thomas de Quincy, which I was reading at the time—so beautiful—and then I went to Dario and said, 'Do this! Do *Suspiria!*' And he said, 'It's an astonishing title.' And from the title to all the occurrences within the story, to the final scenes, to the magic side—it's mine. It comes from my grandmother, who was the inspiration of *Suspiria.* She was a great white magician; she could cure little children, old people, and her voice was always passionate and beautiful and pure, echoing her purity. She really had this experience, going to a place . . . I can't say it still exists; it burnt down in the 1930s . . . on the borderline between Germany and Switzerland. She went there to play piano . . . and she discovered that, in this school, they were in fact teaching Black Magic. She was always telling this story to me when I was a child, and it was fascinating to me—more than Pinocchio, more than Snow White."[15]

As *Suspiria* took shape, however, Nicolodi suffered a series of disappointments—including having the lead role she had hoped to play given to the American actress Jessica Harper—and her relationship with Argento did not survive the strain. In the wake of their separation, Nicolodi—by her own account—suffered a nervous breakdown and became anorexic, deteriorating to a weight of only 84 pounds, which explains why her ribs are so prominent during her nude scenes in *Schock*.

Nicolodi: "My agency called me one day and asked me, 'How would you like to work with Mario Bava? He would like you to play in his next film.' I said, 'Mario Bava!'—for me, a total myth! On my knees, 'Me? Really?' I went to meet with him, like a pupil in a school, and he looked at me and said, 'This is the script; you can play this.' It's a beautiful role . . . I immediately said yes, without reading it, because I wanted to work with him, and then I looked from the window—[we were on] the second floor—and he was sitting down, and he said to me, 'You look beautiful from down here; I will make you an image like this.' It was a total

DAVID COLIN *Jr. as Marco.*



DORA *pleads with Bruno to believe that she's not losing her mind.*



12 This quote is a conflation of a telephone interview conducted by the author in 1983, and Lamberto Bava, *Mario Bava Maestro of the Macabre* interview transcript, 2000.

13 Safao.

14 Daria Nicolodi, *Mario Bava Maestro of the Macabre* interview transcript, 2000.

15 Ibid.

spiritual adventure with him. He was so beautiful, you know? His soul was so pure and his imagination so high . . . I was reading at the time a novel by Robert Louis Stevenson called *The Gardener*, and he [writes about] a man saying that he was like a *padrino*—a Godfather, but 'Godfather' sounds like the Mafia—anyway, like the grandfather in a fairy tale, you know? Bava was like this kind of person; he had this spirit of a beautiful person, and a great, great soul.

"He was so funny," she continues. "He had a big, humorous side, and he was never one to make big dramas out of little things. His spirit was not very Italian, *capito*? One day, I was afraid of shooting one scene, very afraid, and he said to me, 'Don't worry, I will say to you what I once told an American actor, who was really bad . . . He was terrible,' he said to me. 'I will shoot the back of your head and cut immediately to another thing, maybe a dog." Bava made her laugh with this remark, putting her at ease. [16] (At one point in the movie, Marco asks Bruno, "Can I have a dog with long hair like Mommy's?"—a line which Bava added to the script as an affectionate wink at Daria, who wore her hair in an unusual, half-straight, half-crimped style as Dora.)

Cast as Dora's husband Bruno was British actor John Steiner, born in Cheshire, England, on January 7, 1942. After making his first appearances on stage, he landed his a highly visible role in a 1962 episode of the ITC series *The Saint.* He scoared a great critical impression in the premiere New York company of Peter Weiss' *Marat/Sade*, Steiner recreated his role in Peter Brook's 1966 film of the play, which was followed by small parts in Stanley Donen's *Bedazzled* (1967) and Peter Hall's *Work Is a Four-Letter Word* (1968). "The one place where *Marat/Sade* had been a really huge success was in Rome," Steiner recalls. "So I went there and discovered that everyone knew who I was! I was instantly offered a whole lot of work. I felt very grand and snooty in those days and didn't want to do a lot of it; then I decided I'd see what would happen and started it, and one thing led to another. It went on, and that's how it worked. It found me, really. I didn't go to Italy with the idea of making a career. I arrived to find I was already known there." He was billed third from the top, under Tomas Milian and Orson Welles, in Giulio Petroni's *Tepepa* (1968), and after that, the work never stopped. One of Steiner's most frequent employers was Bava's old friend, director Lucio Fulci, who used him in *Zanna Bianca/White Fang* (1972), *Il ritorno di Zanna Bianca/Challenge to White Fang* (1974), and the vampire comedy *Dracula in Brianza* (1975). In 1975, he starred in Mario Girolami's acclaimed crime thriller *Roma violenta* and in Ruggero Deodato's erotic thriller *Una ondata di piacere/Waves of Lust*, written by Lamberto Bava.



DORA *in conversation with Dr. Spedini.*



THE HAND *of the dead reaches out to caress Dora's face as she sleeps.*

David Colin Jr. was born in 1968 and made his screen debut in Ovidio Assonitis' *Chi sei?/Beyond the Door* (1974), playing the disturbed 7-year-old son of a demonically possessed Juliet Mills. Though Colin's character was called Ken in the English-dubbed export version, he was called Marco in the Italian version. He goes by the same name in *Schock*—which was called *Beyond the Door II* in America, but the two characters are unrelated. Colin makes his home in Rome today.

So minimal was the cast of *Schock* that its only other featured role, that of psychiatrist Dr. Aldo Spedini, was played by the menacingly handsome Ivan Rassimov. The first child of Croatian parents, he was born Ivan Djrassimovic in Trieste on May 7, 1938, and is the older brother of actress Rada Rassimov (*Baron Blood*). After graduation from the University of Trieste and performing his military service, Rassimov decided to become an actor. His first film was *Super rapina a Milano* (1964), which had several Bava connections—it featured *La maschera del demonio*'s Andrea Checchi and *Cani arrabbiati*'s Don Backy (a.k.a. Aldo Caponi), and was directed by its star, Adriano Celantano, who sang *"Furore"* for *La ragazza che sapeva troppo.* This was followed by the bit part of Carter in Bava's *Terrore nello spazio.* After another small role in Damiano Damiani's *La strega in amore/The Witch in Love* (1966), an excellent adaptation of Carlos Fuentes' supernatural tale "Aura," Rassimov became a star of Italian Westerns, a setting for which he adopted the *nom d'ecran* of "Sean

Todd." Under this name, he was toplined in Eduardo Mulargia's *Cjamango* (1967), Sergio Garrone's *Sei vivoi vivere . . . spara/If You Want to Live . . . Shoot!* (1968), and *Non aspettare, Django . . . spara/Don't Wait, Django . . . Shoot!* (1968), also for Mulargia, which featured his sister Rada (under her own name). In 1970, he played a redefining role in Sergio's sexy *giallo, Lo strano vizio della signora Wardh/Next!*, in which he was cast as a man with strange, penetrating eyes who stalks the shapely Edwige Fenech, the only lover who understands her "blood fetish." So memorable was Rassimov's fierce presence and chemistry with Fenech that he was cast opposite her twice more by Martino, in *Tutti i colori del buio/They're Coming to Get You* (1972) and *Il tuo vizio è una stanza chiusa e solo io ne ho la chiave/Gently Before She Dies* (1972). Again his career took a new turn with Umberto Lenzi's *Il paese del sesso selvaggio/Man From Deep River* (1972), a dark adventure film—inspired in part by *A Man Called Horse*—that cast Rassimov as an American explorer who is captured by an Amazonian tribe, subjected to a series of gruelling tests meant to gauge his strength of body and character, and finally confronted by another tribe of cannibals. The scenes of torture, actual animal slaughter, and gory acts of cannibalism proved a popular dare with audiences the world over, and inspired in turn the Italian cannibal films that proliferated later in the 1970s and '80s. Rassimov would be featured as an iconic element in two more of these, Ruggero Deodato's *Ultimo mondo cannibale/Jungle Holocaust* (1977, assistant directed by Lamberto Bava) and in Umberto Lenzi's *Mangiati vivi/Eaten Alive* a.k.a. *The Emerald Jungle* (1980). Rassimov subsequently retired from acting to work as the director of a publishing house specializing in *fumetti*. He passed away after a short illness on March 13, 2003.

The spectral Carlo, Dora's other husband, was played by Nicola Salerno, whose principal job on the picture was assistant art director.

16 Ibid.

Production

Schock was filmed over a five-week period in the spring of 1977, on a remarkably meager budget of only $60,000. The exteriors and most of the interiors were shot at the modern Roman villa of Nicola Salerno's famous father, actor Enrico Maria Salerno.

"Salerno's companion at the time, Marisa Valenti, was the sister of the associate producer, Ugo Valenti—I think that's how it happened," surmises John Steiner. "Salerno knew who Bava was, and it was kind of a family thing. That's the way pictures were made in Italy—a sort of family arrangement. The weather was quite nice, actually, and it was a very nice villa. I remember Salerno walking around with a kind of boiler suit on."

Other scenes, including those set in the dank cellar of the family home, were filmed at Vides. The mere mention of the studio causes John Steiner to gasp. "I wonder if Vides still exists!? Oh my God, Vides were really sort of . . . *shacks!* They were the last of the low-end studios, and very little was being shot. I think we were the only movie being shot there at the time. Those were the last years of the Italian movie business, really. Video hadn't quite caught on yet, but was beginning to. When I first came to Italy in 1967, they were making 300 movies a year, but by the time I was working with Mario, the movie industry was sort of coming to an end—this was certainly true of movies that were made for theatrical distribution. After that, it was all movies made for video."

The cheap studio provisions were made more tolerable by good company, particularly Bava's warm humor and the *simpatia* that Steiner, as well, discovered in the company of Daria Nicolodi. "Well, you meet people in your life for whom you have a real close affinity," he says, "and for me, Daria was one of them. I felt I knew Daria from the second I first met her. I don't think that has anything to do with ability or whatever; she was just somebody who was 'in my world,' as it were. The minute I met her, I relaxed and was sort of comfortable, you know? Interesting woman, I think." On the subject of young Master Colin, Steiner waxes more philosophically: "I remember, when I was at drama school, we had an actress—an aging actress who was quite well known in the West End—and she always used to say about acting with children and animals, 'Remember, dears, they are going to upstage you, whatever you do. Therefore, the secret is . . . to *ruin* them in rehearsal! When the time comes to perform, they will be so tired, they won't know *what* they are doing!



PLAGUED *by accidents and apparitions, Dora suffers a nervous breakdown.*



That's the only way to defend yourself.' Well, I didn't really have any problems with that, but of course, the movie is about a little boy and kids are always going to take the attention away from the adults. You know—the law of the land. [David] was a little kid. He was really quite smart, actually. But I was much more interested in Daria Nicolodi than in *him*, you know?"

Nicolodi recalls the filming as a tremendous challenge, supremely difficult, but ultimately joyous. When she first arrived on the set, she was feeling vulnerable and unattractive as a result of her breakdown. "You had to be there to feel this," she says, "but at the beginning, I felt that [Mario] didn't like me very much the first two days. [I thought] he was used to another type of actress, maybe more beautiful and with more of a classical approach to acting, you know? And then, on the second day, I told myself, 'I am not here to be loved . . . I have to give him all that I can'—and I had a scene in which I screamed, fell down, and was running . . . , and I did it so strongly that he understood, and that's how we came to understand and appreciate each other."

The actress' insecurities were such that she telephoned Dario Argento, prevailing upon her estranged lover to visit her on the set. "I visited the set of *Schock* many days," Dario Argento confirms. "It was one of the first films Daria made without me, and she asked me to be there to give her support." At some point during the filming, Nicolodi took Bava into her confidence and told him the story of her falling out with Argento and her resulting breakdown, and admitted to her anorexia. This brought them closer together as friends and collaborators, and Bava helped her to use her experience as valuable reference in playing Dora Baldini, which was to become the most impressive performance of her career.

It is now well-known that *Schock* was partially directed by Lamberto Bava, and one naturally wonders how this

IN HER *hallucinations, Dora is stalked by her husband's ghost, determined to end her life with this cutting blade.*

division of labor was initiated. Lamberto's friend and former assistant, director Michele Soavi (*La chiesa/The Church, Dellamorte Dellamore/Cemetery Man*), explains: "When I first met Daria Nicolodi, I asked her a great many questions about *Schock*, because I was an admirer of Mario Bava and had a special interest in this picture. She told me that Bava started out directing the picture normally, but after a few days, he began to complain that he wasn't feeling so good. He would continue to work a while, and then go home, leaving the direction to Lamberto for the rest of the day. Daria said that she loved working with Mario in the mornings, because he made the atmosphere on the set like a party—but when Lamberto took over, he was so nervous that he made everyone else feel nervous and a little sick! She felt quite certain that Mario was faking his illness; it was his method to give Lamberto some experience at directing."

After listening to Daria's viewpoint, John Steiner responds: "Interesting . . . Yes, *really* interesting, and in some ways, I would agree. What it was, I think—I think that Lamberto, certainly when the two of them were working together, you felt that here was the son coming along in the shadow of his father. He was less experienced, and so forth. I don't think Mario was frivolous at all; he was just down-to-earth and confident and knew what he was doing. I mean, yes, he used to arse around and lark about, and I think that did make for a kind of party atmosphere. Lamberto . . . I don't think he felt pressured by the need to prove himself or anything, but he didn't have his father's enormous experience, and therefore wasn't quite as relaxed. Mario was always joking. He would be telling dirty jokes all the time, and he loved his crew. He was always joking with his crew. He'd been behind a camera all his life, and had come up as a lighting cameraman . . . he was like a part of the crew. Mario really didn't care what the script was. He had the story in his head, and he knew the effects he was going to create. If you wanted to change something in the script, it didn't make any difference to him at all. He knew that, whatever you did, he could just fix it in the dubbing. Lamberto, I think, was more interested in the script—what's there, how it's going to work."

Lamberto offers his own version of events: "At one point, like a good father to his son, he let me direct some scenes. He gave me the scenes that he knew I couldn't screw up too much. I got to shoot a lot of scenes, actually, because my father would say, 'I'm tired—you shoot the scene.' It wasn't true—he wasn't really tired; he let me do it because he probably felt it was time I started directing on my own." [17]

Despite their marked differences in temperament on the set, Lamberto's approach was sometimes preferable to Mario's technique for an actor like John Steiner. Like Stephen Forsyth before him, Steiner had the impression that Mario was not terribly interested in matters of performance, and generationally removed from his accustomed way of working. "I think I got closer to Lamberto, who was more my age, then I was to Mario," Steiner admits. "Lamberto, being younger, was slightly more modern in his approach to actors. I think the old Italian school of directing has always been highly influenced by Fellini, who believed it didn't matter who the actor was, as long as he looked right, and it didn't really matter what was coming out of his face because you could always give him the telephone directory to read and dub him later. I found that particularly frustrating, and I think that's why I never worked with Fellini—nor did I ever have any desire to work with him, for that reason. He was a man of incredible genius and enormous charm, but not, I would have thought, much fun. I don't think Fellini had a huge regard for actors."

Though Lamberto's nervous disposition communicated his creative tensions to the cast and crew, this was not the case with Mario. Despite having to deal each day with dark, psychological terrain, none of the actors felt particularly affected because Mario had such an extraordinary gift for alleviating troupe pressure. "Mario was always joking," Nicolodi effuses, "so nothing I did with him was painful, not even something risky like falling down the stairs. I had big furniture falling all around me, I had cuts on my body, I was full of bruises—big black things—in the scene where the bureau cabinet comes closer and closer to me. It was very tiring work and took a lot of energy, but it was always fun." [18]

"I don't think anybody ever took the material terribly seriously, you know," adds Steiner. "It's like back when I was doing *Marat/Sade*, people would say, 'Oh, but doesn't it affect you?' Well . . . *no!* I mean, I was very young then, and I remember we were doing two shows a night, I was in New York, a 25-year-old kid with everything at my feet—I mean, I didn't sleep! I would be up all night and maybe catch a couple hours of sleep in the afternoon, go to the theater and do all that, and then go out and party!



NICOLA *Salerno frightens the wits out of Daria Nicolodi—and audiences worldwide—in the film's most successful scare.*

17 Lamberto Bava, *Shock* DVD.

18 Nicolodi.



DORA, *now completely insane, stands over the murdered body of husband Bruno.*

That's all you really thought about. And then people would ask, 'Oh, but that material! Didn't it wear you down?' Well, by the end of the run, I nearly had a nervous breakdown, but that had nothing to do with the material! It was 'cause I'd been burning the candle at both ends! Likewise with *Schock*, I frankly can't remember . . . well, even what the movie was about, really! I just remember it being very, very enjoyable. It was very relaxed; we were sitting up at the villa most of the time; Daria was wonderful company; Mario was fun; the crew was great—it was a fun movie! I remember it being very enjoyable to do—apart from the day I had to wear the axe."

What about the day he had to wear the axe?

"It's all so vague now," laughs Steiner, "and you know, the funny thing is, I was always getting chopped by axes! I did another one [Dario Argento's *Tenebrae*, which also featured Daria Nicolodi] where I get chopped by an axe, so one's sort of blurred into the other. I remember walking around for a morning with this axe sticking out of me, which was extremely uncomfortable; it had this sort of metal thing that went 'round my chest and held the axe, and then my shirt was all steeped in stage blood, which stinks. It was very uncomfortable!"

Lamberto proved that he also wasn't without humor by agreeing to make not one, but two cameos in the picture. He first appears as the moving man in the opening scene, carrying a box into the house and later shaking hands with Bruno before driving away with two other men in the moving truck, and he later appears on the left side of the screen during a shot of the distressed airline passengers on Bruno's turbulent transatlantic flight.

Special Effects

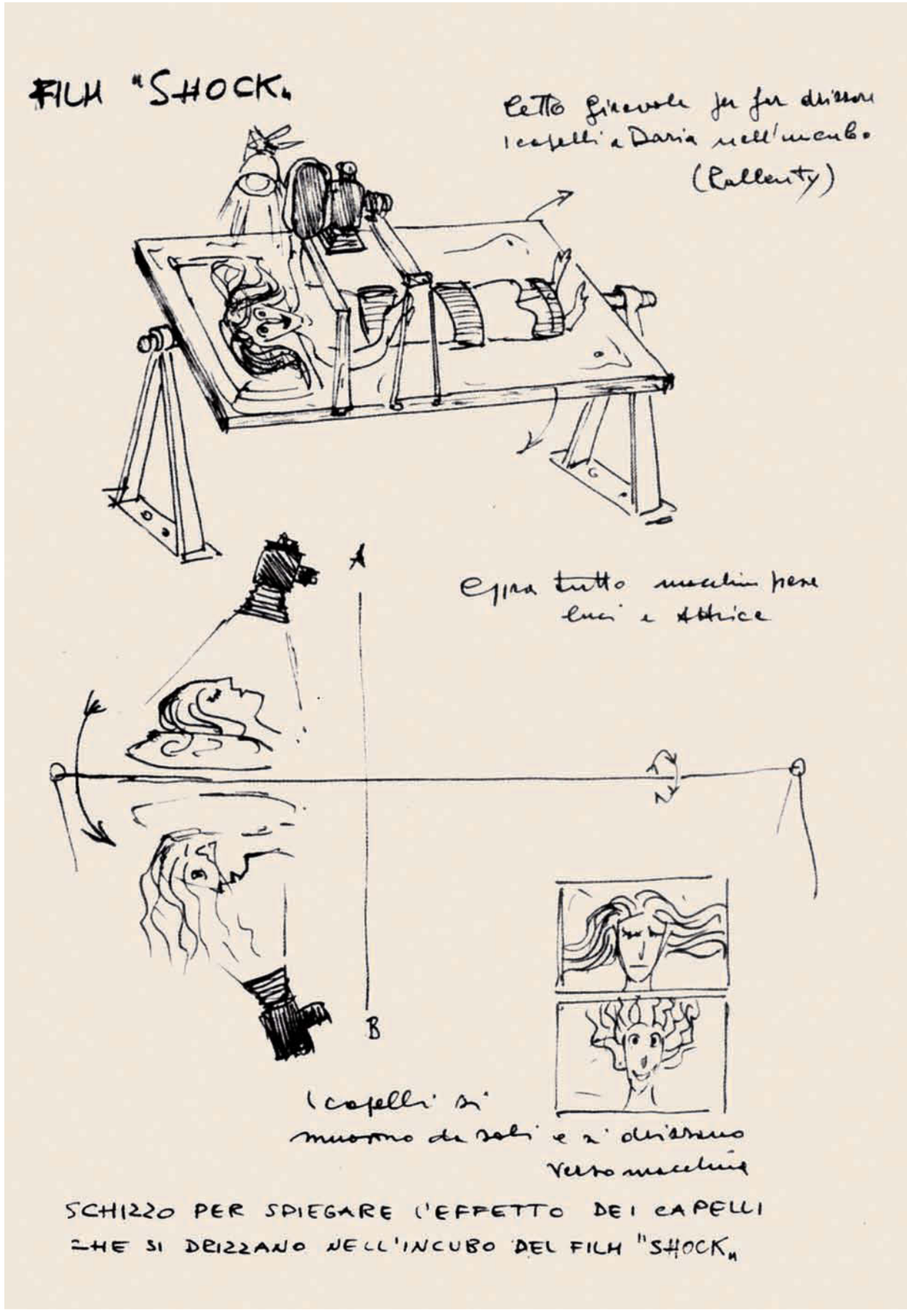
One of the most interesting aspects of *Schock* is its charmingly naïve, yet effective use of what might be called "magic lantern" special effects—a brand of illusion so antiquated it has almost no other counterpart in the sound era of motion pictures.

Particularly evocative is the shot that begins with a phantasmal apparition—vaguely evoking the shape of the porcelain hand sculpture—that appears to float forth from the brick wall in the cellar, across the room, until we see that it is not a supernatural emanation at all, but rather the result of Marco shining a light through the hole he has cut into a photograph of Bruno and Dora, by removing Bruno from it. This shot, and another showing two luminous, disembodied hands creeping up Dora's bedsheets and pulling them from her body, were created by shining light through a simple stencil—a technique dating back to the shadowplays of Robertson (a.k.a. Etienne-Gaspard Robert, 1763–1837), the macabre showman who delighted in projecting illusory imps and demons from a lantern onto the walls of tombs in 18–19th century France. It also recalls the celebrated shot in F. W. Murnau's *Nosferatu* (1922), in which the taloned hand of the vampire rises up the front of the cowering heroine's nightgown in silhouette, and squeezes her heart.

Daria Nicolodi remembers the preparation of this scene with amazement: "We had no money, you know, but Mario said, 'Never fear, the phantasm is easily done!' He took a section from the daily paper, *La Carta Spesa*, and with his scissors—he always had his scissors—he made a hand. It looked like a hand cut out of the paper, but when you shone light through it, it became the phantasm!" [19]

The remainder of this "phantasmal" sequence—in which Nicolodi's hair is seen to come alive, moving weightlessly about, as the spirit of Carlo invades her body—involved the most elaborate pre-planning of all the film's live effects. For this shot, Nicolodi was secured horizontally to a mattress affixed to a revolving platform with a 35 mm camera mounted directly above her face. As the camera

BAVA'S *diagram for the apparatus needed to film Dora's incubus visitation in SCHOCK.*



rolled, the platform was turned like a *rotisserie*. Because Nicolodi was so thin, the shot evinces absolutely no shifting of gravity and only her hair appears to be moving, Medusa-like, around her pleasured eyes and salacious lip-licking as she is possessed by the ghost. "When Mario drew the storyboards, he included a diagram that showed exactly how the shot was to be achieved," says Lamberto Bava. "The way the scene was shot was exactly how it was designed on the drawing board."

The subjective sequences of Dora's hallucinations were also shot live: rippling the image by photographing it through Mario's "water glass," stretching the image by filming it through glass that could be tipped toward or away from the lens, and stacking the image into totems by filming the actors' reflections in the mirrored shelves positioned below and above their faces.

"The great thing about Mario Bava," John Steiner emphasizes, ". . . he just had fabulous technique. His effects were amazingly simple, usually done with lighting effects or clever cutting. I remember there was one thing he did, which was fabulous. He had a little piece of glass, which he had obviously had made for him, and it had a ripple on it. He would take this piece of glass and just move it up in front of the camera as it was shooting, and it looked as if a wave of water—or optical water, as it were—came down and veiled the scene. I was very impressed by that, I remember. Spagnoli was probably operating the camera, and Bava would be holding a rippled sheet of glass, manipulating the glass, by hand, in front of the lens, bringing up the ripple at the time he wanted it to appear. Bava wasn't a writer, *per se*, but he had this great eye for visual effects—always very simply done—which came out of an innate sense of knowing how things work on the studio floor."

Other live effects include the animated empty swing and moving

19 Ibid.





MARCO *appears to be genuinely possessed by the restless spirit of his dead father, interred behind a brick wall in the cellar.*



porcelain hand (both operated by invisible strings) and the rat Dora encounters in the cellar (a rubber prop was animated by a two-string system which, when the two threads were pulled apart, caused it to dart forward). Most memorable of all the trick shots is also the simplest: Marco runs down a hallway toward his mother, disappears below frame, and is replaced by the suddenly uprising apparition of Carlo.

"Lamberto actually filmed this shot," Michele Soavi confided to me in 1983, "but he takes no credit for it, because he was simply following his father's storyboard. It was entirely Mario's conception." [20] However, by the year 2000, Lamberto Bava was taking credit for directing the shot—and its conception. "I remember my father used to tell me that the best trick shots are the ones executed most simply. This was a great revelation to me. I learned how to make trick shots, like the scene where the child runs toward the mother . . . I rehearsed this shot

THIS *objective shot shows that the cutting blade wielded by Carlo's ghost is, in fact, wielded by Dora herself.*

with my son Roy and his babysitter; I saw that it could work. I mentioned it to my father and he agreed, saying it was great. We shot seven or eight takes and most of them didn't work, because the timing was off; we're talking fractions of a second, but the right take is very scary. I remember we had a screening of *Schock* in Rome, twenty years ago. There were 8,000 people. I stood at the back of the theater and watched 8,000 people jump backwards, like a wave, because of the fright of that moment!" [21]

"It's so simply done, but it's unbelievably effective when you're watching it," praises John Steiner.

Mario Bava believed in the value of occasionally dispensing with suspense altogether. If a film had already succeeded captivated its audience, it wasn't necessary to continue baiting them. "If a door is creaking and someone is slowly walking down a corridor, before the scene has time to play itself out, the audience has already begun to tear it apart with their jokes," he explained. "But, on the other hand, if the shock comes suddenly, the audience will jump out of their seats . . . really jump!" [22]

Lamberto remembers hearing similar advice from his father. "[He said that] in order to make a good horror film, the audience must jump out of their seats at least four or five times. That was our motto: If the audience jumps, the film is good. There are any number of ways to make an audience jump; it can be as simple as a door opening unexpectedly with the right sound." [23]



US *one-sheet poster.*

Music

Shock's resolve to embody (in Lamberto Bava's words) "a more contemporary horror film" is most obvious in its choice of musical soundtrack. While *Schock* was not the first Mario Bava film to be scored in a rock (or semi-rock) style, its music is unique in his filmography for the extent to which it reveals the unmistakable influence of Goblin's "into the red" scores for Dario Argento's *Profondo rosso* and *Suspiria*. In fact, at the time of the film's release, it was widely speculated that I Libra—the band credited with composing and performing the score—were the Argento-sponsored group Goblin working pseudonymously, as they sometimes did as studio musicians.

I Libra (Italian for "The Scales") were actually a spin-off congregation of musicians led by Walter Martino, Goblin's original drummer, who left the band prior to their recording of the *Profondo rosso* soundtrack in 1975. The group consisted of Sandro Centofanti (keyboards), Dino Kappa (bass), Carlo Pennisi (guitars), and Walter Martino (drums and percussion). A former member of the band, Maurizio Guarini, has also claimed to have provided additional keyboards and synthesizer programming to the *Schock* recordings.

Composed by Martino, the *Schock* score bears some striking similarities to Goblin's *Profondo rosso* score, at least in its broadstrokes—an ebullient synth-and-percussion-dominated main theme, a recurring lullaby motif, and an emphasis on eerie electronic atmospherics (these are particularly effective during the "incubus" scene). But whereas Goblin was a progressive rock unit greatly influenced by other keyboard-dominated "prog" acts such as Emerson Lake & Palmer and Tangerine Dream, I Libra—on the evidence of the *Schock* soundtrack album, their only issued recording—were more intrigued by free-form experimentation and tonal exploration, showing an alliance with *avant-garde* experimenters Edgar Varese and Karlheinz Stockhausen, though they were still capable of rising to the challenge of an occasional, full-sail, prog rock team effort. When performing in this mode, I Libra's liking for jagged rhythms, unpredictably shifting time signatures, and a balance of keyboards, guitar, trebly bass, and jazzy percussion revealed a guiding affinity for the music of Yes.

The title theme, "The Schock," heard frequently throughout the film, opens with a wash of supernaturally flavored synthesizer, followed by the tentative steps on the high strings of an electric bass which state the initial theme. This theme is then punctuated by a staccato synth attack, underscored by rolling percussion; this phase is then abruptly replaced by a charging rhythm of bass and drums, accompanied by brisk guitar as the synthesizer takes the lead. As involving and well-structured as this piece may be, it appears to have been recorded before the band could compose a proper musical resolution; instead, the instrumentation continues to build to a point of meltdown, ending in chaos after barely more than 4 minutes.

The acoustic guitar piece by Carlo Pennisi that accompanies the Baldini family's outdoor play and the testing of the swing built by Bruno is titled *"L'altalena rossa"* ("The Red Swing") on the soundtrack album. This cue unfolds from a single acoustic guitar to a tuneful, double-tracking of the instrument, followed by the appearance of a third track in which the instrument takes a melodic line over the sparkling, mountain water-flavored

20 Michele Soavi interview, Anchor Bay Entertainment DVD of *Shock*, released 2001.

21 Lamberto Bava, *Shock* DVD.

22 Alfredo Castelli and Tito Monego, interview in *Horror* 1, 1969.

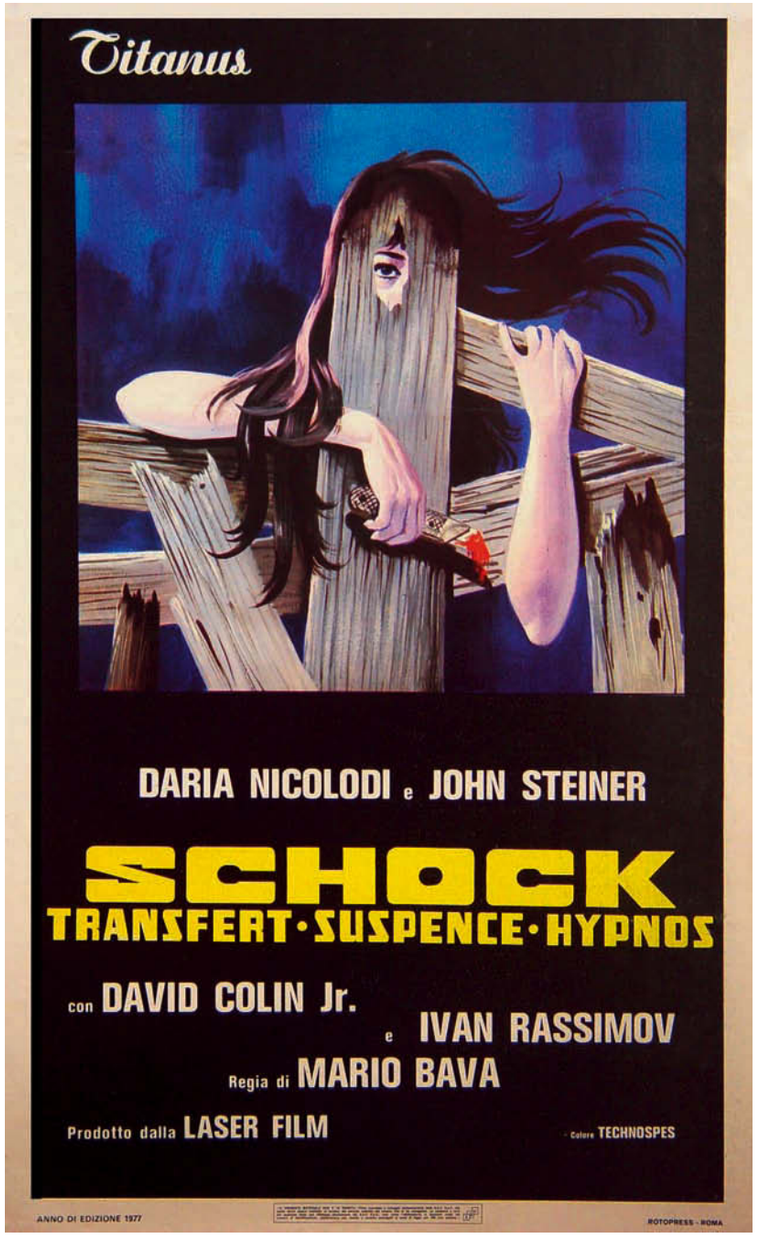
23 Lamberto Bava, *Shock* DVD.

backwash. Though attractive, this lilting folk effort sounds like little more than a sketch or demo for a fuller band recording, with the third guitar suggesting a vocal line. Distinctly out of character with the electronic tense of the rest of the score, this piece sounds inappropriate in the context of the film itself.

The next piece, a musical triptych called *"Transfert I/Hypnos/Transfert II,"* reveals I Libra in their most experimental mode. *"Transfert I"* is performed entirely by Walter Martino, and begins with stark, tribal percussion that is quickly processed with reverb, and then double-tracked to create a dribbling impression; *"Hypnos"* is a psychologically hued synthesizer wash played by Sandro Centofanti, highly prophetic of the Frippertronics and Soundscapes solo recordings made by King Crimson founder Robert Fripp in the late 1970s and 1990s, peppered with disconcerting surges of church pipe organ and distorted guitar; and *"Transfert II"* renews the initial solo percussive dribbling, joining it with synthesizer and a second percussion track, as the two erupt in pocket calculator-like beeps and sonic squiggles.

"La Baia," heard during Dora's conversation with Marco about death, is recorded over the literal backwash of incoming tides. In contrast to this sound effect (which may have been generated by synthesizer, though it's indistinguishable from a location recording made at the beach), Sandro Centofanti's piano initiates a theme; however, his performance never quite sails out of its introductory mode to allow it to develop. Consequently, though the cue works sufficiently well in film context, when audited on its own, it sounds like an improvision rooted more in technique than inspiration, bolstered with sound effects in an attempt to lend substance to its meanderings.

It is followed by a diptych, "*La Cantina/The Schock (ripresa).*" In Italian, *"cantina"* means literally "a little song," and this is the tinny, synth lullaby/music box piece heard throughout *Schock*. A cycling pattern of 19 notes, the monotonal line is joined at 0:35 by a sawtoothed synth line that shadows each of the notes with a slight discordance. At 0:56, a third, still more dissonant synth element is added, and the three lines play essentially in concert until the individual pieces accelerate or decelerate, overriding and perverting the innocence of the initial track until the piece sounds as if it's being literally pulled apart between our ears. At 1:55, the performance is spliced to a reprise of the charging climax of the title theme, ending after slightly more than 1 minute on a neat slide down the synthesizer keyboard.



ITALIAN *due-foglia poster—compared with the uncredited cover art for Popular Library's paperback edition of a Shirley Jackson novel.*

"Tema di Marco" ("Marco's Theme") is another diptych, whose two parts share the same name. Here the *cantina* is reprised, with the second synth entering at 0:17; these are then joined at 0:26 by surging, sighing synthesizer parts, which effectively weds the divergent themes of child psychology and the spectral. At 1:05, I Libra startle the listener by exploding into the most fully achieved and sustained band performance of the entire recording. The double-time thumping of Martino's bass pedal leads into a turbulent, cyclical piano part, which in turn introduces Dino Kappa's heroic, striving bass line, a somewhat romantic guitar lead by Pennisi, and an escalating chorus break that culminates in a resumption of the initial piano and rhythm section parts. Here, Martino maintains an accelerated heartbeat pounding under the music which adds to its insistent character. This splendid piece is heard in the film under the end credits.

"L'incubo" ("The Incubus") is the experimental centerpiece of the album. Opening with bullying, *avant-garde* tapping and zapping, with bursts of blowtorch synth, Martino's percussive intro is given soul with the introduction of Centofanti's baleful, chilling, viola-like synth, rendered with lots of right-to-left phasing. Building into strange atmospherics of whooshing winds, ghostly surges, and pipe organ smearings, it becomes a montage of ethereal atmospheres, ghostly and oppressive. As a piece of electronic music, it actually beats anything written by Gino Marinuzzi Jr. for *Terrore nello spazio*.

"Transfert III," as the title suggests, is another overdubbed percussion piece. In any other context, it would be accused of self-indulgence; here, especially given its brevity, it seems merely inconsequential.

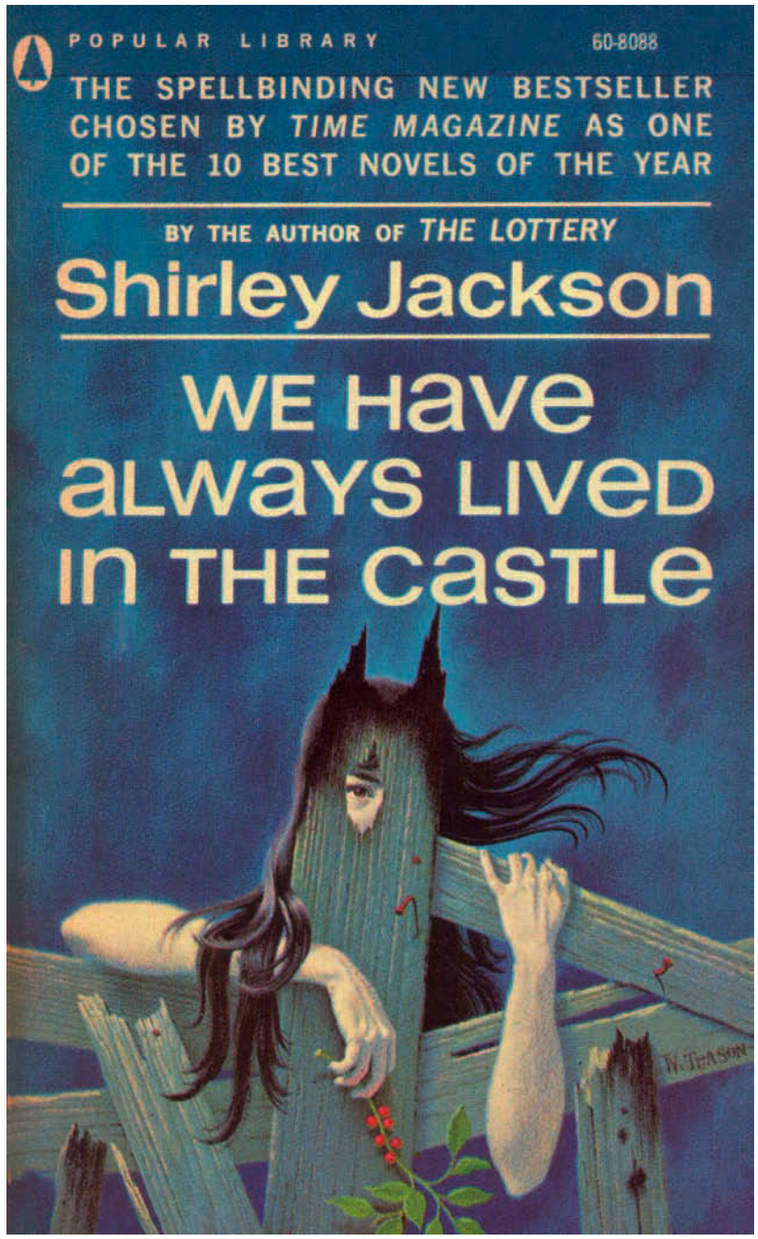
"Il Fant. Suona Piano" is, in some ways, the highlight of the album and is the cue most frequently used in the film itself. It begins with Centofanti's solo piano beautifully and eloquently restating—in unaugmented terms—the unsettling, opening synth chords of "The Shock." In this context, as the piano is supported by an underlayer of highly colored synth, the theme sounds more sensitive, melancholic and tormented, and Centofanti's performance not only hearkens back to the psychologically rich cues of Carlo Rustichelli, but actually prophesies the basic tenor of the score that Keith Emerson would subsequently compose and record for Dario

Argento's *Inferno.* It's he most essential component of the *Schock* soundtrack; one's only regret is that it lasts less than 2 minutes.

The final track is another diptych: *"Transfert IV/Tema di Marco II (ripresa)."* The first part offers the only vocal on the album, as various subverbal mutterings, mumbles and harsh breathing accumulate in a taunting, increasingly hostile reverb environment, soon joined by a synthesizer undertow. From 1:29–1:51, the *cantina* re-enters, then is overcome by synth dribblings and other curious sound elements, all playing at different speeds until the listener feels bullied into disorientation. This continues till 3:02, at which point the piece erupts into multi-channeled laughter (heard in the film as the voice of the "laughing piano"), and at 3:10, the band come together one last time for a very short reprise of the closing theme, this time with the synth adding a flutish flavor. The performance breaks down after less than a minute, resulting in a most unsatisfying conclusion to a most uneven album.

Schock is a peculiar score, *avant-garde* and trend-following in equal measure, played by a band with perhaps more musical talent than sense of direction. In scoring the film, Mario and Lamberto Bava used all of the band's cues to some extent, but clearly favored the less challenging fare, emphasizing *"The Shock,"* variations on *"Tema di Marco,"* and especially *"Il Fant. Suona Piano."* The I Libra music provides an enjoyable accompaniment, but we must question whether a pulse-pounding prog rock score is what this tragic story called for. It certainly adds to the film's entertainment value, especially on repeat viewings as the music becomes an increasingly central part of the experience—but it also cannot help but seem to sensationalize, even trivialize, the film's violence rather than underline the emotions of the story. With the exception of the poignant *"Il Fant. Suona Piano,"* the score does not underline Dora's breakdown with the more complex shadings of anxiety, dread, and morbid romanticism that a classical or neo-classical score could have provided.

In short, I Libra's *Schock* is a skilled but immature score that lends pleasure to the film while also limiting its depth, too often making these scenes from a woman's private hell seem . . . kind of cool.



Distribution

Schock was first released in Rome in August 1977, where it was promoted with poster art that had nothing to do with the movie itself, but was brazenly based on the cover design of Popular Library's 1963 first paperback edition of Shirley Jackson's novel *We Have Always Lived in the Castle.* The original art pictured a sorcerous dark-haired woman half-obscured by a ragged driftwood fence, her slender arms entwined with the planks—one of her hands lazily gripping a weed—and peering through a knothole with one plainly deranged eye.[24] The Italian poster art replaced the weed with a Stanley cutter blade, stained with blood. The campaign misspelled the title of the film as *Schock*, a word underlined with a triple-punch promise of *"Transfert—Suspence—Hypnos,"* which has subsequently been listed as the film's complete title in dozens of misinformed reference books.

Schock earned a disappointing 99 million *lire* [$62,000] at the vacation-season Italian boxoffice, so international sales were not quickly forthcoming. Nevertheless, the film was honored at the 1978 Catalonian International Film Festival at Sitges, Spain, where Lamberto Bava was awarded the Sitges Medal for Best Screenplay. An American release would not follow until December 1978, when it was acquired by Film Ventures International (a company co-owned by Edward L. Montoro and *American Bandstand* host/producer Dick Clark) and promoted with heavy television and newspaper advertising. The low-market, Los Angeles-based distributor retitled the picture *Beyond the Door II*—an allusion to their previous hit, *Beyond the Door* (a.k.a. Ovidio Assonitis' *Chi sei?*, 1974), which also featured David Colin Jr. in a minor role.

In retrospect, it's hard to understand how any company could still be trying to make a buck with "demonic possession" campaigns six years after the release of the William Friedkin's *The Exorcist* (1973)—two years after *The House of Exorcism*!—but that's exactly what FVI's campaign promised. The film performed surprisingly well under the circumstances, and it was followed more than a decade later by another Ovidio Assonitis production, Jeff Kwitny's *Beyond the Door III* (1989)—a US/Italo/Yugoslav co-production, starring Bo Swenson. Of course, its story had nothing to do with either of its predecessors.

Prior to release, Film Ventures tightened the film by removing a small amount of footage, and ensured the temporary confusion of their audience by leaving a key bit of exposition—the note that is delivered to Dora, attached to seven red roses—in Italian. More than twenty years later, when the film

24 During this period, Barbara Steele is said to have singled out Jackson's *We Have Always Lived in the Castle* for praise, saying that it was a book that she would dearly love to turn into a film. One can't help but wonder if she was attracted to the book because she saw herself as that character on the book cover.

was resurrected in America on DVD by Anchor Bay Entertainment in 2000, their restored version (bearing the original title) proved that Bava had in fact taken care to film an insert that showed the note written in English: "One for each year—in spite of all you are still mine."

Commentary

Lamberto Bava admits to feeling a sense of guilt about how his own personality dominates his father's last two films, *Schock* and *La Venere d'Ille*, which he co-authored and co-directed. "From the mid-1960s onwards, I began to think that horror was something other than what my father was filming at the time," he explained. "In fact, *Schock* is completely different to my father's other films; it's a psychological horror film that revolves around a woman whose whole environment turns against her."[25]

In all fairness to Lamberto, survivors of the dead always find excuses to feel guilty. No matter how hard he may have consciously tried to make something unlike his father's "traditional" approach to horror, *Schock* is perfectly in keeping with Mario's earlier films, particularly the romantic *La frusta e il corpo,* with its murderous heroine succumbing to the phantasmal projections of her own guilt. For both Dora and Nevenka, and other characters in the Bava canon, their delusions culminate in an act of suicide that essentially cements their relationship in the hereafter. These same preoccupations will be found still at work in *La Venere d'Ille.* From the very first shots of *Schock*, as the camera prowls along a beach and the empty rooms of the Baldini home, the film is imagistically imbued with Bava's familiar sensibilities, which are further confirmed by the tongue-in-cheek spookiness of the first narrative shot—in which a piece of covered furniture has its ghostly white sheet pulled away by an unseen hand (as happens in *5 bambole per la luna d'agosto* with the purloined scarf) and the foregrounded cobwebs are swept away by a broom that appears to be wielded by ourselves. There are also scenes and dialogue in the film that seem to speak, biographically, on Mario's behalf. A case in point is this poignant discussion between Dora and Marco:



JAPANESE *poster.*

"Look, Marco—you're old enough to understand, I think. You know your father was a man who liked to travel a great deal. He loved airplanes, sailboats, and he loved to visit faraway places. Well, one day he went on one of his voyages and never came back. Your Daddy is dead, Marco."

"What is death, Mama?"

"It's like going on a trip, darling, except one doesn't come back. One goes away forever. . . Death is a part of life and we must learn to accept it."

This exchange (which illustrates a parallel between Carlo and Bruno, both being voyagers, and thus establishes the possibility of history repeating itself) is also redolent of Bava's own recurring themes and autobiographical concerns. It provides a plausible explanation for Mario's own fear of travel—a fear of dying, which he very nearly did while filming *Le meraviglie di Aladino* in Kairouan, Tunisia. It also recalls the long sea voyage that Mario's father Eugenio took with Mussolini's sons, when Mario was still a child. During this voyage, or one of Eugenio's other frequent disappearances, did young Mario worry that his father had actually died and that his mother was keeping the truth from him?

Another biographical element can be glimpsed in the frightening pranks Marco plays on his mother—jumping out of nowhere, hiding a razor blade in the keys of a piano, and feigning illness—as the young Mario himself had done on the occasion he fooled his mother into thinking his foot had turned to stone. These and other family stories were well-known to Lamberto at the time he wrote the script, and though not consciously incorporated, he knew his father well enough to tell the kind of story he might have written himself, had he been more verbally inclined. Since the very beginning of his directorial career, it was the object of Mario Bava's cinema to focus on the psychology of fear, to chronicle the crumbling of a world of delusion around a single character, exposing them to the truth about their world, their family, their past, themselves.

Schock goes so far as to quote a classic moment from *I tre volti della paura*, as Dora finds Marco in the cellar, kneeling beside the brick wall where his father is buried and crying, "Mama, I'm cold!" Marco's swing also conveys connotations of Melissa's graveyard swing in *Operazione paura*, and Ely Galleani's swing in *5 bambole per la luna d'agosto*. These may be borrowings from older films, but they never feel stale or suggest a tired artist resorting to self-imitation. The challenge is to reinterpret these points of resonance so that they vibrate anew, and they do. Thus—despite Lamberto's feeling that he may have let his father down somehow by asserting himself creatively on this project, despite the replacement of the toppling suits of armor with toppling suites of furniture and the fact that all the picture frames on display are minus their paintings—*Schock* remains very much a Mario Bava film.

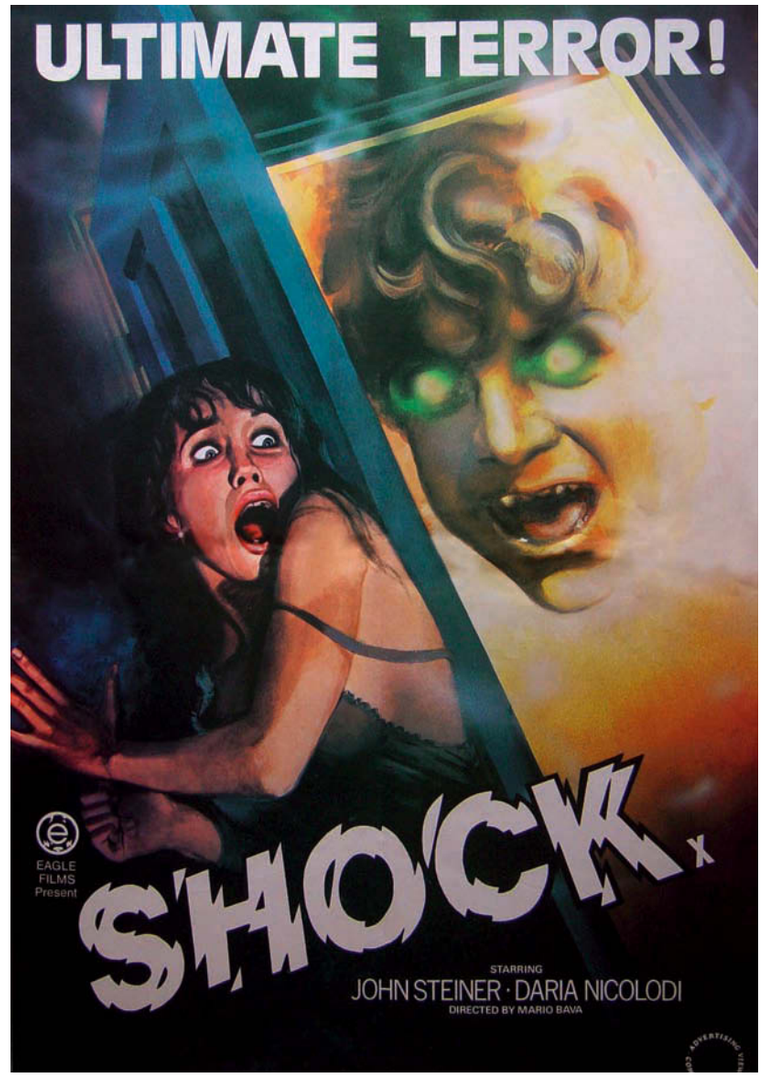
Schock can also be seen as the culmination of Mario Bava's longtime fascination with Guy de Maupassant. The author of over 300 stories, one-tenth of which dwelled on horrific subjects, Maupassant—like Bava—was an essentially frightened man whose art was repeatedly drawn to the subjects of madness and the fear suffered by a single person alone in a room.

"I'm afraid of myself! I'm afraid of fear, afraid of my panic-stricken mind, afraid of that horrible sensation of incomprehensible terror. Oh, you can laugh if you like, but it's terrible—and incurable. I'm afraid of the walls, of the furniture, of familiar objects, which seem to me to take on a kind of animal life. Above all, I am afraid of the horrible confusion of my thoughts, of the way my reason becomes blurred and elusive, scattered by a mysterious, invisible anguish . . .

"I experience the horror of everything that is, to the point of longing for death."

These were not the words of Mario Bava, but they might easily have been excerpted from one of his rare interviews. These were the words of Maupassant, whose example not only influenced the flavor of Bava's work, but also the tenor of his life and his philosophic views of the world. The first part of the quotation comes from Maupassant's 1883 short story "He" ("Lui"), and the last is derived from his personal correspondence. Maupassant's macabre stories appeared to spring from his imagination, but as this juxtaposition of quoted fact and fiction proves, his stories had their origin in the real world as he encountered it. The same is true of Mario Bava's films.

Literary scholars claim that Maupassant's ironic, frightening and frightened work was greatly influenced by his observations of the Franco-Prussian War and its effects on the *bourgeoisie* and working classes. In reviewing the life and career of Mario Bava, we can see immediately that his childhood, and the years of his early adulthood, coincided with the disruptions and ruptures of world war. Just as Maupassant survived his own country's defeat and witnessed the deposition of French emperor Napoleon III, so did Bava witness the occupation of his country and the trial, court-martial and public execution of Benito Mussolini, who was not only Italy's *duce* but a personal acquaintance—a man closely associated with his father, and indeed the bedrock of his family's professional life. The work of both artists, Bava and Maupassant, can be said to occupy a shattered world that may outwardly appear to be moving toward recovery, but is haunted underneath by guilt, shame, corruption, and the spectre of inevitable death.



UK *poster.*

When Dora Baldini accepts the cutting blade from the wardrobe cabinet—much as John Harrington accepted the cleaver from the cabinet in *Il rosso segno della follia*—and uses it to cut her own throat, she is committing suicide as Maupassant himself once attempted to do. After cutting his own throat, Maupassant was sent to an asylum where he suffered from continuous hallucinations until his death on July 6, 1893, at the age of 43. Suicide at the imagined hands of another: a cause of death that also befalls Miss Chester in *I tre volti della paura*, and Nevenka in *La frusta e il corpo*.

Schock is most noticeably unlike Mario Bava's earlier work in terms of its cinematography, which is remarkably formulaic and tame, considering the talent placed in charge of it. The film was shot in Eastmancolor by Alberto Spagnoli, with Giuseppe "Beppe" Maccari operating. Spagnoli was a talented man and had a notable career; he had started out as the camera assistant of Carlo Di Palma, working on such films as Elio Petri's *L'assassino* (1961) and Michelangelo Antonioni's *Deserto rosso/Red Desert* (1964), and graduated to camera operator on Mario Monicelli's *L'armata Brancaleone* (1966), the historical adventure infamous for its scene of Vittorio Gassman flogging a topless Barbara Steele. His first work as a director of photography was Emilio Miraglia's *giallo, La dama rossa uccide sette volte/The Red Queen Kills Seven Times* (1972), and a few films later, he earned his international stripes photographing *Daisy Miller* (1974) for Peter Bogdanovich. Pursuant to *Schock*, Spagnoli would be the cinematographer of Antonio Margheriti's *Killer Fish* (1979), Joe D'Amato's *Orgasmo nero* (1980), Enzo G. Castellari's Jaws rip-off *L'ultimo squalo/Great White* (1980), and Luigi Cozzi's *Ercole/Hercules* (1983) and *Le avventure dell'incredibile Ercole/Hercules II* (1985). After a clearly declining career, he died in 1985. His operator Giuseppe Maccari had, if anything, an even more distinguished career, having worked in this function on *Il gattopardo/The Leopard* (1963), *La Bibbia/The Bible . . . in the Beginning* (1966), *Candy* (1968), Fellini's *Toby Dammit* (1967), *Satyricon* (1969), and *Carnal Knowledge* (1971), before becoming the talented cameraman of Carlo Vanzina's *Sotto il vestito niente/Nothing Underneath* (1982), Christopher Coppola's *Dracula's Widow* (1989) and Dario Argento's segment of *Due occhi diabolici/Two Evil Eyes* (1990).

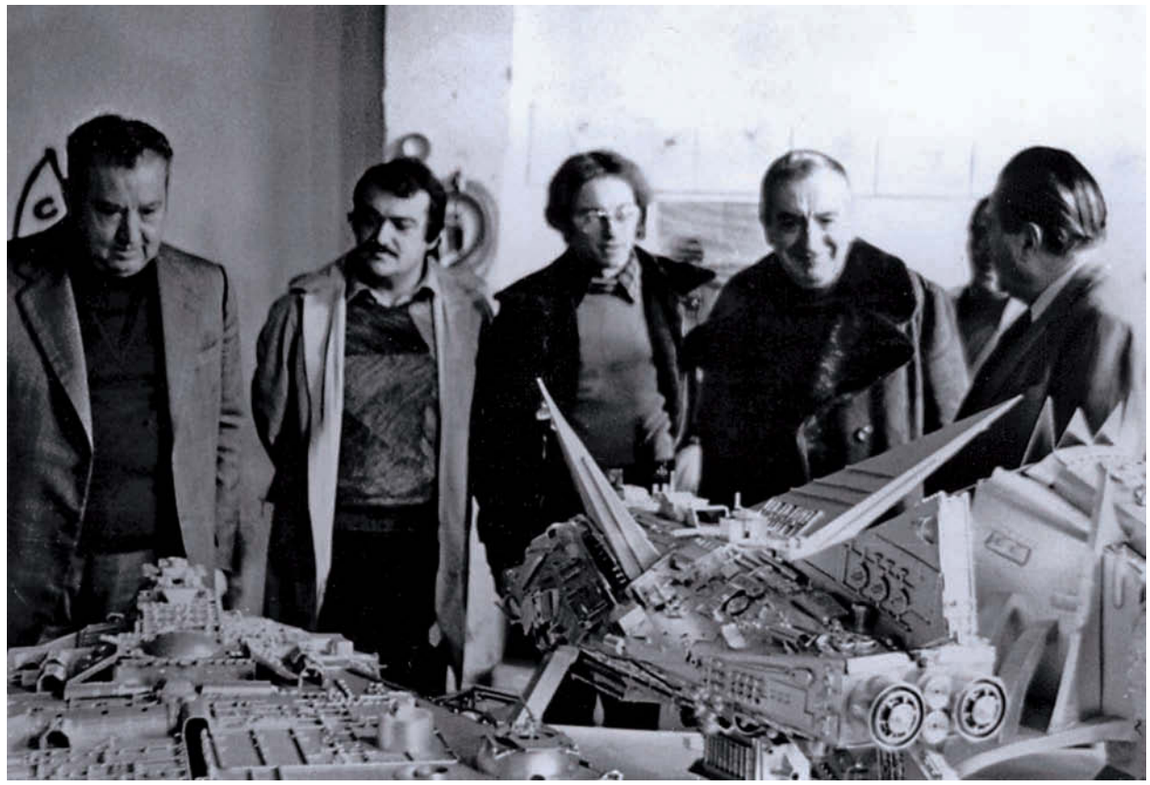
Schock's use of color is also not what one expects from a Bava film, being at once subdued and heavily anchored in an autumnal color scheme of browns, greens, and russets. Furthermore, the camera is often disappointingly immobile and some shots demanding an extra measure of control, such as the chaotic scene aboard Bruno's malfunctioning jet, are uncharacteristically poor. Only in the subjective, delusional imagery of Dora's breakdown, as pianos laugh and the faces of Dora and Carlo are stretched like putty, do Bava's signature tropes reassert themselves, echoing techniques previously explored in *Il rosso segno della follia*. On earlier films with low budgets, such as *Il rosso segno . . .* and *Ecologia del delitto*, Bava conserved money by acting as cameraman himself—a choice which could have only helped *Schock*. However, by agreeing to photograph the film, Bava's

25 Palmerini and Mistretta, 27.

presence on the set would have been compulsory throughout, which would have worked against his hidden agenda of handing the project over to Lamberto. It was a gesture similar to what Riccardo Freda had done for him twenty years earlier on *I vampiri* and *Caltiki il mostro immortale*.

The film's bonding ingredient is Daria Nicolodi, whose emotionally and physically demanding performance compares well to that of Catherine Deneuve in Roman Polanski's *Repulsion* (1965)—a similar record of a woman's descent into madness, but a much cooler disengagement from reality. It is crucial to a proper appreciation of Nicolodi's work to view her performance in Italian, where her words (and wonderfully deep, smoky voice) are in closer register with her actions; witnessed here, it is one of the finest performances Bava ever presided over—in fact, two fine performances, as Nicolodi also does a remarkable job of recreating the emotions already recorded on film in her Italian looping. To see the film at its best, one must watch *Schock* in Italian.

Though her work in the last half of the film easily qualifies as a *tour de force*, Nicolodi's performance is not as ideal in the first half. "My grandfather liked to tease Daria," remembers Roy Bava. "He said that she was very good in scenes where she had to be frightened, but that in the normal dramatic scenes, she was too 'actressy.'" This judgment is more than a tease; it is absolutely correct. Nicolodi has lovely Renaissance features, a naturally elegant bearing, and a personal sense of style that make her a pleasure to watch onscreen. In the scenes of Dora's mental disintegration, she is riveting, bringing a stylized edge to her madness that shows a potent, even elemental understanding of cinema. It is—like Daliah Lavi's work in *La frusta e il corpo*—a silent movie performance in the best sense. In moments of passivity, she is also good; but in the scenes of ordinary interplay with her family, Nicolodi often looks self-conscious, overacting and working too hard to communicate the inner life of her character. Despite these minor criticisms, it must be repeated that Nicolodi's performance should only be judged by the way it appears and is heard in the Italian version, which she dubbed herself. *Schock* has never been a favorite among Bava fans in the United States, and its lukewarm reception is undoubtedly due to the mostly lame, sometimes harsh character of the dubbing, which conspires to diminish Nicolodi's fine work and completely wreck David Colin Jr.'s.

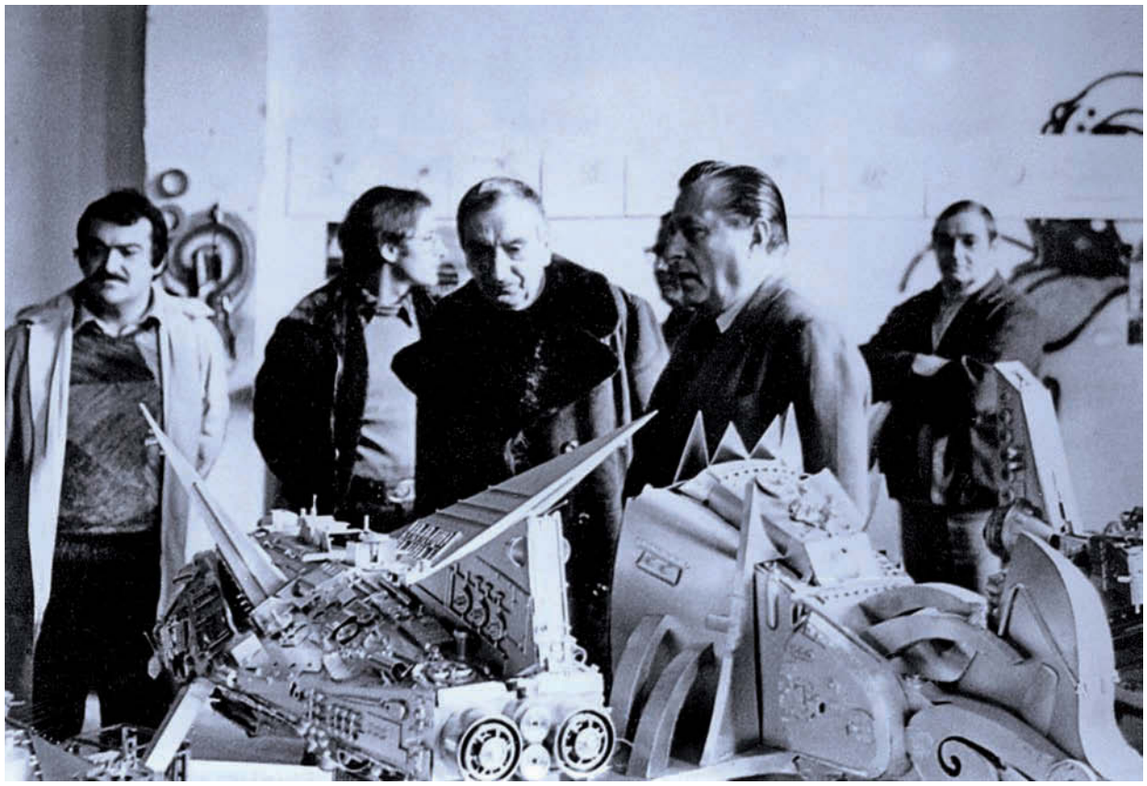


FULVIO LUCISANO, *Lamberto Bava, and Mario Bava pay a surprise visit to the special effects workshop of Armando Valcauda (center).*

It doesn't help that the family unit of Nicolodi, John Steiner and David Colin Jr. is itself unconvincing. Steiner is the most naturalistic of the bunch, but—despite their offscreen rapport—he shows no real chemistry with Nicolodi, and in terms of his ultimate guilt, the film tips its hand much too early with shots of a suddenly grim Bruno covertly locking the cellar door and drugging Dora's drinks. This sort of thing is permissible with red herrings, but not with actual guilty parties. It doesn't help that the idea of a body buried in the basement has been so well covered in literature, and in the cinema, since Poe's *The Black Cat* and *The Cask of Amontillado* . . . or that the mortaring of the brick wall looks so amateurish as to rouse the viewer's immediate suspicion. An inconspicuous brick wall would have been a far more effective point of revelation. (One suspects that Bruno's "layover in Baltimore" during his flight to New York might be another covert *hommage* to Poe.)

David Colin Jr. makes a more complicated impression. He is quite good at suggesting a mature presence in a child's body; he can work his face into some nicely sinister expressions, and he exhibits many of the diverse moods to which children of Marco's age are prone. Unfortunately, his performance suffers in English from awkwardness and over-aggression, which make it impossible to accept him as a happy-go-lucky child. This is equally the fault of the scripting, as Marco's dialogue, his doll-laden bedroom décor and Oshn-Kosh clothes seem more befitting of a 4–5-year-old, than the 8–10-year-old Marco would have to be, in order to have any memories at all of his biological father. As with Nicolodi, Colin's performance is kept in much firmer, more likeable register in the original Italian dub, where Marco comes off as believably boisterous, yet also sensitive and capable of speaking quite beautifully about the mysteries of life and death. In Italian, his performance is surprisingly effective. Colin appears to have spoken his lines mostly in English, with some specific lines in Italian (*"Porco! Porco! Porco!"*).

There are a couple of scenes that don't come off quite as planned. The most noticeable case is the sequence in which Dora is lured downstairs by the sound of someone playing the piano. The piano is seen covered with dust in the film's opening moments, but the film never connects Carlo with the instrument. Secondly, rather than have Dora hear a unique piano piece, the film simply replays a piano track from the I Libra musical soundtrack, and because it is just as loud upstairs as it is when Dora stands beside the piano, the viewer never reasons that it was meant to be anything other than the movie soundtrack until the piece ends and we, along with Dora, trace the music to a record on the downstairs turntable. In this case, the film's own sound man doesn't seem to have understood the point of the scene.



There are also some unusually careless continuity gaffes. When Marco is shown clipping Bruno from a photograph of his mother, the photograph is the same shot, but not the same photo as is found stolen from a vertical 8x10 frame in a previous scene; it is a larger, 11x14 horizontal shot. Likewise, Marco proceeds to cut Bruno's head from the photograph, later affixing it to his swing to exert a voodoo-like control over Bruno's transatlantic flight. However, when the image of Bruno's head is shown attached to the swing, it is a completely different shot of actor John Steiner. Lastly, though the sequence of Marco cutting the voice mechanism out of his doll's throat is disturbing (especially the shot that shows his small hands ripping lengths of red fabric from the "wound"), it ultimately fails to convince because the device extracted from the doll is not a voice-box at all, but a toy familiar to everyone in the audience: a Slinky. It also obvious from the action that the doll's voice was meant to be mistaken by Dora for Marco's cries, but it doesn't sound anything like Marco's voice.

Regardless of such errors, there is no question that *Schock* mines the most disturbing territory of child/parent relationships to be found in Bava's filmography. Its depiction of incestuous desires—e.g., Marco going through the motions of sexual intercourse atop his mother when she falls in the yard, his fondling her sleeping body with the putrescent hand of his dead father—remain unsettling decades later, even if they do follow similar scenes in *Night Hair Child* by several years. There is nothing intrinsically horrible about a child innocently imitating an act he has observed or overheard, or in touching the body of the person who represents his closest human relationship; what is horrible in this context is the malignant spirit of a vengeful ghost using an innocent agent to dole out sexual aggression and murderous hatred.

Asked if Carlo's ghost was really responsible for these transgressions, or if they were all in the mind of his mentally ill heroine, Lamberto Bava chuckles and says, "This should be left unanswered . . . ambiguous." That *Schock* works regardless of its interpretation, and that it achieves a sense of ambiguity that is satisfying and pleasingly mysterious rather than frustrating, is a testament to its ultimate success.

Today, both Daria Nicolodi and John Steiner point to *Schock* as their finest work in the horror genre. "Oh, it's my favorite of those kinds of movies," Steiner declares. "Some people like *Tenebrae,* but I much prefer the one I did with Bava. I had a meatier part in it, and I loved working with Daria."

"I love very much the film I shot with Bava," Nicolodi says warmly. "It was an incredible adventure, you know? Five weeks together with Mario Bava, from 6:00 in the morning till almost midnight . . . His presence was really something."[26]

For Bava, the feeling was mutual. He would reserve a place of honor for Nicolodi in his next and final directorial effort, *La Venere d'Ille*.

26 Daria Nicolodi.

Star Wars all'italiana

The field of special effects entered into an exciting new evolutionary phase in 1977, when George Lucas' *Star Wars* was first released. It was a matinee that Mario Bava attended with his grandchildren.

"He was amazed when he saw *Star Wars,*" Roy Bava remembers. "He had a lot of fun watching that movie. He thought the story was just an adventure, kind of simplistic, but he really liked the special effects a lot. He was also pleased to see the recognition of special effects technicians that took place after that. He considered that film a quantum leap in terms of the development of that area."

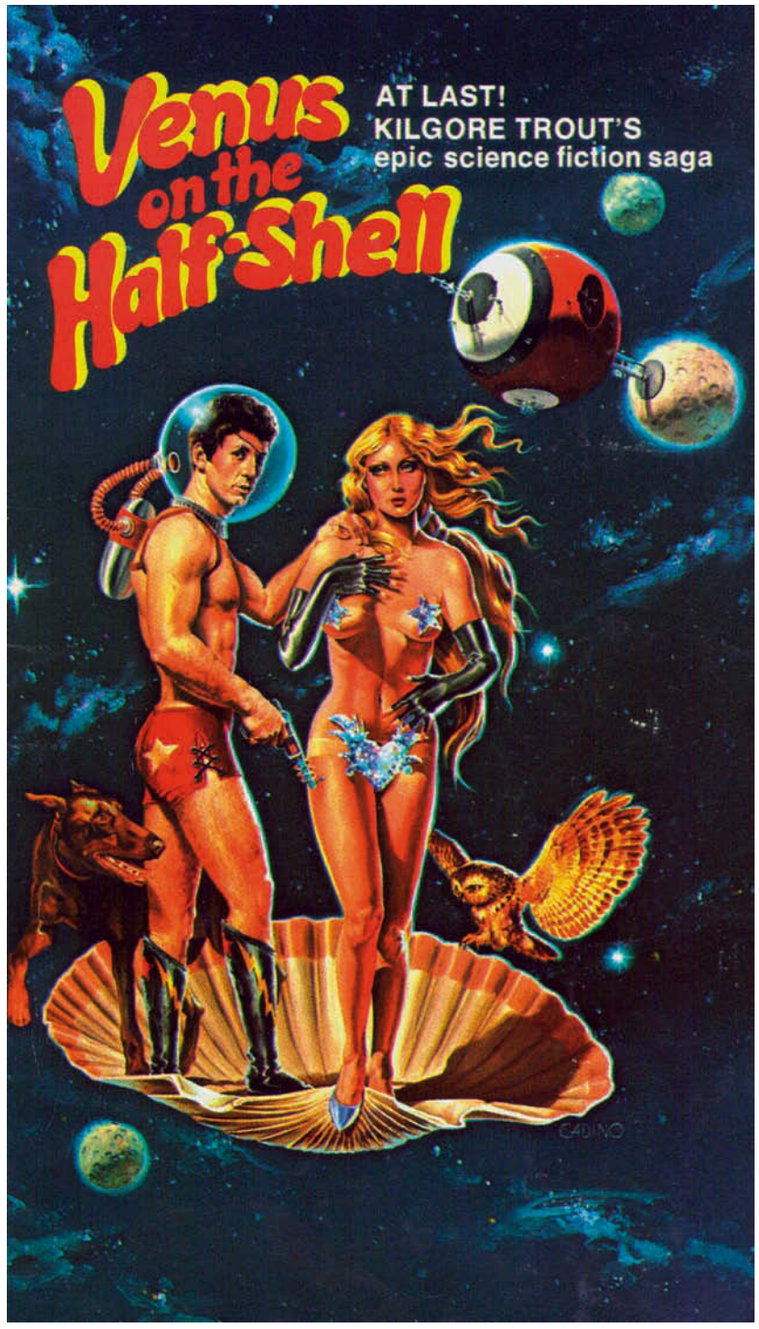
Although there had been various attempts in the 1960s—some of them quite commendable—neither the Italian film industry, nor the Italian public, had embraced science fiction as a national genre. Bava, as well as people like Ernesto Gastaldi and Luigi Cozzi, had been trying to interest producers in science fiction projects for many years, without success. But overnight, the extraordinary success of *Star Wars* changed everything because, if the Italian film industry had any rules at all, Rule #1 was "Imitate What is Successful."

Luigi Cozzi, who had once interviewed Bava as a teenage admirer, had since advanced in the business from acting as Dario Argento's assistant to becoming a film director in his own right with two *gialli*: the TV thriller *Il vicino di casa* (1973) starring Laura Betti and Mimmo Palmara, and *L'assassino è costretto ad uccidere ancora/The Killer Must Strike Again* (1975), featuring George Hilton and *Lisa and the Devil*'s Eduardo Fajardo and Alessio Orano. A true science fiction enthusiast, Cozzi had two proverbial irons in the fire at the time the *Star Wars* kettle came to a boil—a pair of screen treatments entitled *Stella Starr* (which became the film *Starcrash,* 1979) and *I cavalieri delle stelle* (which literally means "The Star Knights," but was provisionally called *Star Riders* in English).

Cozzi explains: "In the beginning, *Stella Starr* was being produced by Sam Arkoff at AIP. Arkoff came to Italy and I met with him. At the same time I was writing *Stella Starr*, I wrote

another treatment called *Star Riders* for Fulvio Lucisano. But being in Italy, Lucisano lost some time in sending that screen treatment to Arkoff. When I gave the screen treatment for *Stella Starr* to Nat Wachsberger,[27] he just flew to LA and met Arkoff and made the deal. A couple of weeks later, Arkoff got the other treatment from Lucisano. He liked it very much and would have loved to make that picture, but he had already made the deal for *Stella Starr*, which was going to be AIP's one big science fiction exploitation picture that year. So I started shooting *Stella Starr,* which became *Starcrash*, and when Arkoff next came to Italy, he decided to go ahead and make *Star Riders* with Lucisano anyway. Fulvio asked Mario to direct it, so he came to the set where we were working and met Armando Valcauda, who was creating the special effects for my film. Valcauda was an old acquaintance of Bava's, but they hadn't met each other in years. After seeing Valcauda's work, Mario invited him to be in charge of the special effects on *Star Riders*."

Valcauda recalls how he came to work for Luigi Cozzi, and the day Bava visited his workshop: "In 1976, while I was doing some work with animated puppets and cartoons in my home studio, I read about Cozzi in a magazine. He was releasing some rare old fantasy films in the most important town in Italy. I wrote to him about my interest in the movies of Ray Harryhausen and the not-so-happy state of my career. He called me one day and visited my studio, and I showed him some shots combining some animated skeletons and live action, which he liked. We talked about producing a test reel for his next project. We made some interesting sequences involving spaceships and monsters, in a sort of imitation of [Harryhausen's stop-motion process] Dynamation. In 1977, Luigi got the money to produce *Starcrash* and called me for another test reel. It was successful, so I set about building some spaceships in Turin. About a month later, I went to Rome and production began in September. In October, the executive producer visited my workshop with two electricians to see my spaceships and robots—and with them were Mario Bava and his son



FIRST *US paperback edition.*

Lamberto! I was surprised to meet Bava on this occasion. He told me that he and Fulvio Lucisano were preparing a similar kind of movie. Bava liked my materials and promised to visit me the following week. We subsequently met three times, always at Cinecittà and always after lunch, because he was scared to death of his wife and wanted to be certain that she was sleeping soundly before he left the house! We always talked about effects, about painting on glass or applying cut pictures to glass. He was moved to nostalgia by the DeBrie camera I used for my stop-motion photography, because he still had the DeBrie he once used."

"Mario began to work in the preparation of the screenplay," Cozzi continues. "I am sure that he must have done some sketches. I gave the option to Lucisano, but I really don't know what happened after that, because I was working on my own picture. All I know is that, a few months later, I was called by Fulvio. He said he wanted me to write a script for *Star Riders* and also to direct, because the deal with Mario had fallen through. I don't know why."

Luigi Cozzi's *Starcrash*—its direction credited to "Lewis Coates"—was eventually distributed in the United States not by AIP but by Roger Corman's New World Pictures. Thanks to its modest budget, it enjoyed a considerable commercial success, but despite this, for reasons no one cares to remember, *Star Riders* was never made, though Cozzi claims that his script was novelized by A. E. van Vogt and published under that same title in America. There are several Internet websites devoted to the writings of van Vogt, but none of them list such a book in his bibliography.[28]

Another science fiction project that Bava and Lucisano envisioned during this period was *Il vagabondo dello spazio/The Space Bum*, based on the American science fiction novel *Venus on the Half-Shell*, which first appeared as a two-part serial in the December 1974 and January 1975 issues of *The Magazine of Fantasy & Science Fiction;* it was published simultaneously in mass-market paperback by Dell. The author, Kilgore Trout, was a pen name adopted by the renowned American science fiction novelist Philip José Farmer, who, suffering from writer's block, sought to alleviate it by writing under a liberating pseudonym. The name "Kilgore Trout" was derived from the works of Kurt Vonnegut Jr., who first mentioned Trout—a fictitious science fiction novelist doomed to commercial failure but exercising tremendous influence on a select few readers (not unlike Bava himself)—in his 1965 novel *God Bless You, Mrs. Rosewater.* (The name was inspired by that of science fiction novelist Theodore Sturgeon.) Trout's phony galaxy of work was also referenced in Vonnegut's 1969 novel *Slaughterhouse Five,* and the character eventually took centerstage as the main protagonist of

Vonnegut's 1973 novel *Breakfast of Champions*.

Farmer obtained proper authorization from Vonnegut (with whom he shared a publisher) to use the name, and reportedly wrote the entire book in ninety days. *Venus on the Half-Shell* contains no references to Vonnegut, but is preceded with a short biographical sketch that provides the following overview of Trout's work: "As of 1974, Trout has written 117 novels and 2,000 short stories. Yet until recently he was little known. This regrettable situation is due to Trout's extreme reclusiveness and his indifference to the publication of his stories. He was ill-advised in his choice of publishers, the chief one, World Classics Library, being a firm specializing in pornographic novels and magazines." [29]

Vonnegut was not pleased by the novel, especially after reading published reports that it had become Farmer's best-selling work to date: "This Farmer wanted to forge on and write a whole series of books 'by' Trout—and I understand he's capable of knocking out a pretty decent Vonnegut book every six weeks. I hardly know Mr. Farmer. I've never met him and most of our contacts have been indirect, so I asked him, please, not to do it. And I asked my publisher, please, not to publish any more of his Trout books because the whole thing had become very upsetting to me. I understand he was really burned up about my decision. I heard he had made more money in that one 'Kilgore Trout year' than he had ever made before . . . In case you're too polite to ask, I didn't get any of the money."

According to Farmer, who responded to the reprinting of these remarks on a now-defunct Kilgore Trout webpage in 1999, *Venus on the Half-Shell* was a success but less so than the volumes of his renowned *Riverworld* series. He also avowed that he did not receive quite as much money as his publisher asserted in press releases, and that he had intended to write only one more Trout novel (*The Son of Jimmy Valentine,* mentioned in the biographical sketch) before retiring the byline. So, at Vonnegut's behest, there were no more Kilgore Trout novels. Vonnegut later restaked his claim on the character in 1997 with the publication of *Timequake,* another novel positioning Trout as protagonist.

Venus on the Half-Shell was published in Italy as *Venere sulla conchiglia*, translated by Angela Campana, in Mondadori's science fiction monthly *Urania* 93, 28 March 1976, which is undoubtedly where Bava discovered it. It is easy to see what attracted Bava to the novel; it is pulp science fiction—more accurately, a caricature of pulp science fiction—and also a Swiftian satire of human yearnings and fallacies, written with humor and mythic underpinnings. It's the story of Simon Wagstaff, a one-eyed, banjo-playing immortal of Earth whose longterm companions are a dog named Anubis, an owl named Athena, and a female robot named Chworktap (whom he meets stepping out of an alien ocean, a dead ringer for Botticelli's Venus). While having postcoital conversation about art and poetry with a young woman atop the great Sphinx of Giza, Simon is astonished when, in a flash, Earth is covered by great destructive tidal waves, washing away all human life and accomplishment. Making his way back to his spaceship, the Hwang Ho, he embarks on a voyage with his fellow travellers to search the universe for a definitive answer to the ultimate question: "Why are we created only to suffer and die?"

Each chapter of the novel takes Simon to a different planet, allowing Farmer/Trout to design alternative creatures who live alternative lifestyles, but all of the planets on the Space Bum's itinerary have one thing in common: a monolithic structure in the shape of a giant valentine heart, which each planetary culture remembers was placed there, countless eons ago, by a race known as the Clerun-Gowph. After surviving countless love affairs with extraterrestrials, and tens of thousands of years of prison sentences for thoughtlessly broken alien laws, Simon sets interplanetary sail for Clerun-Gowph, where the eldest living creature awaits him to answer his question. The interview, needless to say, is disappointing.

The rollicking narrative is inexhaustibly inventive and scholarly, tackling existential and humanistic issues directly and in metaphorical guise, yet Farmer/Trout always uses his erudition in the service of down-to-earth wisdom like "Immortality is a pain in the ass." The novel's meticulous attention to detail, its mythological parallels, its Rabelaisian stew of philosophy and human plumbing, and its combined wit and lack of pretentiousness, all would have made the book immensely appealing to Bava—though one cannot begin to imagine how he could have pulled it off.

After reading the novel, Bava pitched it to producer Fulvio Lucisano, and before long, trade ads announcing *Il vagabondo dello spazio/The Space Bum* began to appear. The film was supposed to have starred comedian Paolo Villaggio (then under exclusive contract to Lucisano) and a screenplay was going to be written by Lucio Manlio Battistrada, author of the effective Italian thrillers *L'etrusco uccide ancora/The Dead Are Alive!* (1972) and *Macchie solari/Autopsy* (1973). It was Bava's idea to have Villaggio play the lead not as Simon Wagstaff, but as his recurring, all-purpose character of Ugo Fantozzi (introduced in 1975's *Fantozzi/White Collar Blues* and revisited as recently as 1999's science fiction spoof *Fantozzi 2000—la clonazione*) who, in the year 3000, wanders through the farthest reaches of space looking for the meaning of it all. "There were going to be a lot of alien creatures, but I would have kept them all offscreen," Bava said. [30]

Lamberto Bava: "My father wanted so much to make this picture that he drew many set sketches, and also several storyboards. It was going to be a science fiction story about a future society in which the universe had achieved a state of absolute entropy and degradation, when everything had gone down the tubes . . . It was a galaxy populated only by beggars and street people, with very few spaceships that still flew because nobody knew how to repair them any more or how to make them go. Against this evocative setting, the rest of the film was developed as a kind of space version of the classic Christie thriller *Ten Little Indians*." [31]

Though the setting of the film sounds very promising, the prospect of reducing Farmer's flamboyant satire to yet another variation of *Ten Little Indians,* with the myriad weird life forms of the novel kept offscreen, makes one vaguely grateful that the picture wasn't made. There is also good reason to believe that the project never actually progressed very far beyond the point of nebulous discussion. When I corresponded with her about this project, Philip José Farmer's wife Bette—who has kept track of all her husband's professional sales throughout his career—was unable to remember, or find any record of, the film rights to *Venus on the Half-Shell* ever being sold to Fulvio Lucisano, Italian International, Mario Bava, or anyone else.

Despite Bava's failure to get *Il vagabondo dello spazio* off the ground, his young admirer Armando Valcauda landed a job as a special effects designer on another Paolo Villaggio comedy set in outer space, entitled *Tre tigri contro tre tigri* ("Three Tigers vs. Three Tigers," 1977). Working on one particular sequence of this picture provided Valcauda with an unexpected opportunity to renew professional contact with his mentor.

"It was a comic sequence involving some spaceships and monsters," Valcauda recalled. "For four months, I lived and slept at Cinecittà to create this sequence. In the end, the director [Sergio Corbucci], the producer [Fulvio Lucisano], and the editor [Amadeo Salfa]—none of whom was an expert in this type of material—refused to accept my work! They gave me many long and complicated reasons why my work would have to be redone. Then I remembered Lucisano's friendship with Bava, and I asked for them to let my work be judged by Bava. I told them that I was prepared to redo everything, if Bava agreed it was necessary. Mario came in and watched my reel, gave a little applause, and suggested only one improvement. The others sat there with green faces!" [32]

27 Nat Wachsberger (1916–92), producer of numerous European co-productions since 1955, whose most recent work at this time included the legendary unreleased Jerry Lewis film *The Day the Clown Cried* (1972) and Val Guest's *Killer Force* (1975).

28 Nor does the book appear to have been published pseudonymously. A novel by Josephine Pulleine-Thompson, entitled *Star Riders of the Moor*, was published in the UK in 1976, making it a bit too early, and a later novel, *The Star Riders of Ren* by Calvin Miller, was published in 1983 but was the second volume in Miller's "The Singreale Chronicles" series.

29 Kilgore Trout (Philip Jose Farmer), *Venus on the Half-Shell* (New York NY: Dell Publishing Co. Inc., 1975).

30 Alberto Abruzzese, et al., *La città del cinema—produzione e lavoro nel cinema italiano 1930–70* (Rome, Italy: Napoleone, 1979), 83–89.

31 Lamberto Bava interview, "Mario Bava, Mio Padre" in Luigi Cozzi, *Il Cinema Gotico e Fantastico Italiano Vol 1—Mario Bava, I Mille Volti Della Paura* (Rome, Italy: Mondo Ignoto/Profondo Rosso, 2001), 155.

32 Armando Valcauda, letter to the author, April 27, 1990.





FAUSTO DI BELLA *as Alphonse, who foolishly places a wedding ring on the finger of* LA VENERE D'ILLE.

La Venere d'Ille

MARIO BAVA MADE his final film as a director for Italian television. Once again, the opportunity came about due to the industriousness of Lamberto Bava, who again co-scripted and co-directed, this time sharing the directorial credit with his father for the first and only time.

Based on an 1829 short story by Prosper Mérimée (1803–70), *La Venere d'Ille* was shot in 16 mm, on a very tight budget and schedule, with a crew consisting largely of friends and family; it thus represents a near-complete return to the basics of cinema that were at Mario's disposal when he photographed his first shorts at the side of Roberto Rossellini, forty years earlier.

Mérimée's story was not exactly an original, but one of those legendary tales that writers throughout the centuries have told and told again. In a preliminary note to his comic novella *The Eve of Saint Venus* (1950/published 1964), which follows very similar narrative lines, Anthony Burgess traces its history thusly: "This is based on a tale told by [Robert] Burton (*The Anatomy of Melancholy*: Pt. 3, Sec. 2, Mem. I, Subs. I), which he got from Florilegus, *ad annum* 1058 . . ." [1] Burgess does not mention Mérimée's contribution to this chain of events, though as a musician he must have been aware of it; Mérimée was most famous for writing the original story upon which Bizet based his world-famous opera, *Carmen*. An early master at the melding of horror and eroticism (one of his story collections bears the title *Tales of Love and Death*), Mérimée considered *"La Vénus d'Ille"* (the story's French title) the finest of his many short stories. In addition to the Bava version, the story has been twice adapted for French television: first in 1957 by writer Jean-Claude Youry and director Pierre Badel, and again in 1980 by the writing/directing team of Jean-Jacques Bernard and Robert Réa.

The teleplay by Lamberto Bava and Cesare Garboli follows Mérimée's story faithfully, with the minor exception of replacing the story's original narrator (Mérimée himself) with a fictional observer named Mathieu.

Synopsis

While uprooting a dead tree from the grounds of the De Peyrehorade estate, a pair of workmen uncover a human hand. M. De Peyrehorade, the landowner, arrives on the scene and helps them unearth an ancient Greek bronze statue of Venus, the Goddess of Love, which dates from before the birth of Christ. Its beauty astonishes him. As the workmen lift it from the ground with ropes, it falls, crushing the leg of one of the workers. De Peyrehorade believes the find to be important and summons Mathieu—an accomplished artist and "authority on all beautiful things"—to verify the statue as a masterpiece. Mathieu's arrival coincides with the marriage of De Peyrehorade's son Alphonse to Mlle. Clara De Puygarrig, who recently inherited a vast fortune following the death of her aunt.

Mathieu is immediately sensitive to Clara and sees that Alphonse, an empty-headed athlete and ladies' man, is marrying her only for her money. ("My woman isn't made of bronze," he boasts, "She's made of gold . . . lots of gold.") Alphonse is also proud of his wedding ring, a family heirloom of two interlaced hands inscribed with the words "Yours forever," which he has augmented with $2,000 worth of diamonds. On his first night, from his bedroom window, Mathieu sees two local boys daring one another to touch the "unlucky" idol; when one of them throws a stone at the statue, the rock bounces off and strikes the offender, scaring the children away. Mathieu's attempts to capture the Venus in a drawing are likewise thwarted, as he finds himself drawing Clara's likeness instead.

On the morning of the wedding, Alphonse is lured into a game of pelota (badminton) and, for safekeeping, slips his wedding band onto the ring finger of the nearby Venus. He is pulled out of the game by his angered parents and dragged to the ceremony, forgetting the ring and placing a humble substitute instead on his bride's finger. That night, a drunken and carousing Alphonse confides to Mathieu that, when he returned to the statue to retrieve the ring, he was unable to pry it from her finger. Mathieu ventures outdoors to retrieve the ring himself and finds Clara in the garden, her mood darker and more solicitous than usual. "You still don't know who I am," she taunts him. They kiss, but Mathieu is reserved. "You're just like all the rest," she criticizes. "You don't know how to surrender yourself to love." Mathieu returns inside, leaving Clara in the garden, but finds her inside at the party.

That night in his room, Mathieu hears heavy footsteps walking down the corridor toward the wedding chamber, and imagines Alphonse drunkenly heading for bed. Clara waits timidly for her groom in a veiled four-poster bed, but jumps out and crouches in fright on the floor as a towering silhouette intrudes. The floorboards groaning under its weight, the shadow disappears behind the veils of the bed. Clara watches, too aghast to speak, as Alphonse arrives and undresses for bed, only to be pulled behind the veils into a spine-crushing bronze embrace. The next morning, the De Peyrehorades discover their son's broken, bloody body sprawled across the bed, his flesh and blood bride reduced to a state of madness. On the floor, Mathieu finds the wedding ring which Alphonse had placed on the finger of Venus.

Some time later, Mathieu receives a letter from M. De Peyrehorade, informing him of Mme. De Peyrehorade's death, and the fact that he will be named as a beneficiary in his will, as the recipient of his art collection—with the exception of the Venus, which he has sent to a church to be melted down and recast into a bell.

Production & Cast

La Venere d'Ille was filmed as an episode of a projected RAI-TV series entitled *I giochi del diavolo: storie fantastiche dell'800* ("The Devil's Notebook: Fantastic Tales of the 19th century"), which adapted supernatural tales from classic (read: free-for-the-taking) literary sources. While the production itself went without a hitch, the finished product suffered the same indignity as the other films made during Bava's unluckiest decade. Incredibly, RAI shelved the entire series for three years, until RAI-2 dusted it off for a six-week run in May-June of 1981—over a year after Mario Bava's death.

The series consisted of only six episodes: Giulio Questi's *L'uomo della sabbia* (5/20/81), based on a tale by E. T. A. Hoffmann; *La Venere d'Ille* (5/27/81); Marcello Aliprandi's *La mano indemoniata* (6/17/81), based on a story by Gérard de Nerval; Piero Nelli's *La presenza perfetta*, based on Henry James' *Sir Edmund Horne*, and Tomàso Shermàn's *Il diavolo nella bottiglia*, from a story by Robert Louis Stevenson (both aired 6/23/81); and Giovanna Gagliardo's *Il sogno dell'altro* (6/24/81), an adaptation of H. G. Wells' *Mr. Elvesham*. Those who caught the entire run of episodes agree that the Bava episode was the series' finest achievement.

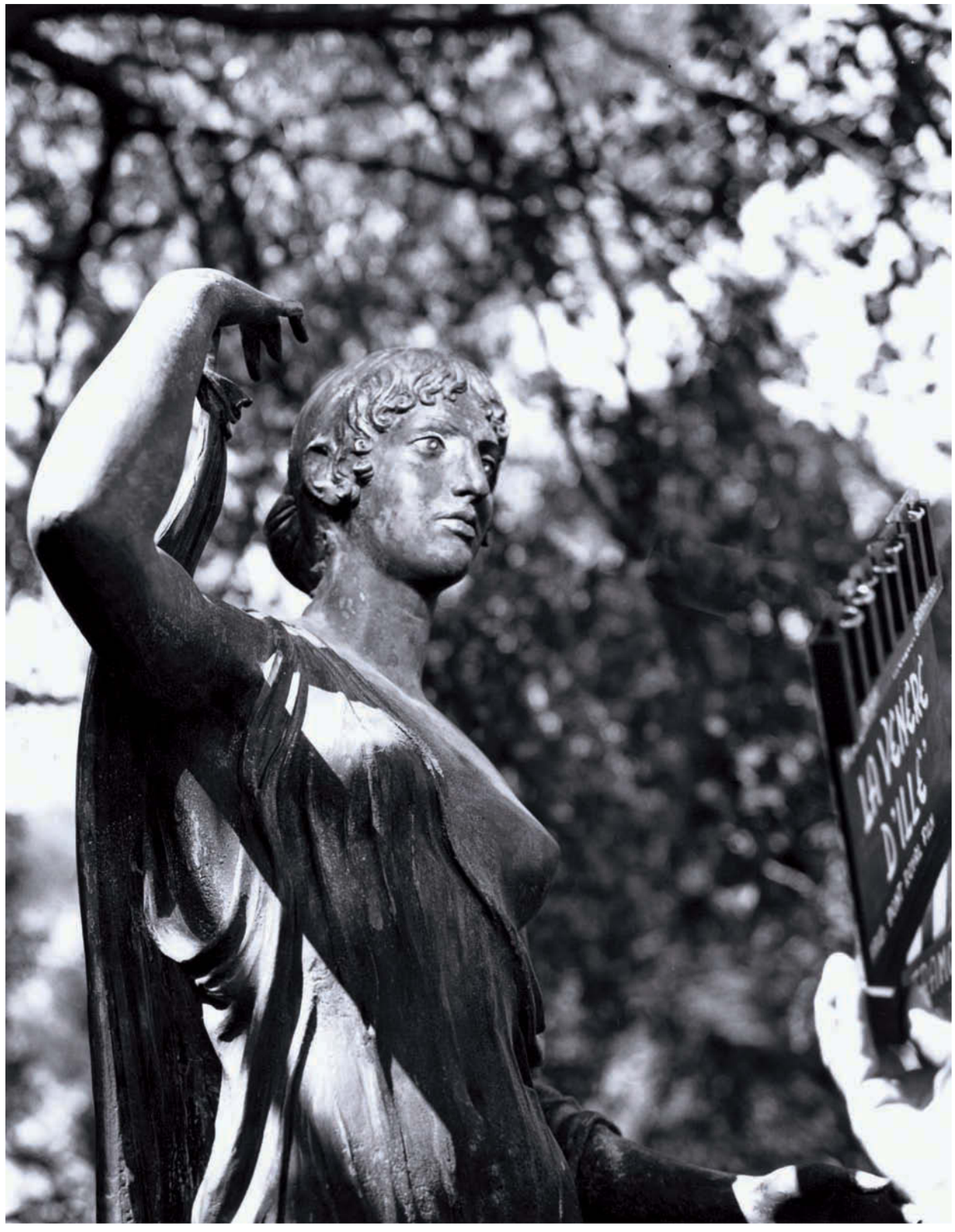
Lamberto Bava admits to directing the greater share of *La Venere d'Ille*. "Here, as in *Schock*, I took care of most of the pre-production. I chose the cast, spoke with the architects . . . then my father came in and, if he didn't agree with something, we talked about it. He and I divided the scenes between us: 'I'll do a part of this and you do another part.' Sometimes two heads are better than one. I directed all the kitchen scenes, which have a more realistic touch; I don't think my father would have filmed them the same way. I had the good fortune of having, as my writing partner, the great Cesare Garboli. I wrote the first part, he wrote the second, and then we put it together. We had already talked so extensively about all the really essential

La Venere d'Ille

"The Venus of Ille"
Filmed at Castello Giuliano and on location
June 1978
First broadcast: May 27, 1981.
16 mm, Color, 1.37:1, 60 minutes

Production: Pont Royal Film TV, RAI-2. Producers: Franco Franca, Carlo Tuzii. Directors: Mario Bava, Lamberto Bava. Screenplay: Lamberto Bava and Cesare Garboli, based on the story by Prosper Mérimée. Continuity: Rosanna Rocchi. Director of photography: Nino Celeste. Camera operator: Fabio Conversi. Art direction: Sandro Dell'Orco. Wardrobe: Sandro Bellomia. Makeup: Massimo Giustini. Hairdresser: Corràda Cristofori. Production manager: Bruno Ricci. Production assistants: Massimo Alberni and Gianni Federici. Editor: Fernanda Papa. Music: Ubaldo Continiello. Sound engineer: Raffaele de Lucas. Sound dubbing: Pierangelo Livera.

Marc Porel (Mathieu), Daria Nicolodi (Mlle. Clara De Puygarrig), Mario Maranzana (M. De Peyrehorade), Fausto Di Bella (Alphonse De Peyrehorade), Diana De Curtis (Madame De Peyrehorade), Adriana Innocenti (Maria, the servant girl), Fabrizio Bava (boy under table), Francesco De Federico (Giovanni).



THE BRONZE *statue unearthed on the property of M. De Peyrehorade.*

things, that the first draft was approved and there were very few things left to fix. We're talking about a TV movie, about a statue that kills someone, so we couldn't show much, but in its basic characteristics, even if it was a Gothic, it was a step in a different direction from my father's other films."[2]

Lamberto recalls that the film was shot in summertime. "I remember that Daria Nicolodi wore a perfume that attracted wasps and bees, so definitely summer, and the leaves of the trees were large, so it was surely June," he deduces.

Giving a fine, understated performance in the lead role of Mathieu is Swiss actor Marc Porel. Born Marc Landry in Lausanne on January 3, 1949, he broke into French films while still a teenager. His dark, romantic, sincere look echoed the appeal of another young achiever, Jean-Pierre Léaud, but could also convey the insolence of Alain Delon. Some of Porel's earliest appearances were in Costa-Gavras' *Un homme de trop/Shock Troops* (1967), Henri Verneuil's *Le Clan des Siciliens/The Sicilian Clan* (1969), and George Lautner's *The Road to Salina* (1970), the last film to star Rita Hayworth. In 1972, after appearing in Luchino Visconti's *Ludwig*, Porel played a homicidal priest in Lucio Fulci's *Non si sevizia di paperino/Don't Torture the Duckling*, generally considered to be the finest of the *shreckmeister*'s thrillers. After this success, Italian films became the norm for Porel, including one last collaboration with Visconti in *L'innocente/The Innocent* (1976), a film for the great director's nephew (Eriprando Visconti's *Una spirale di nebbia*, 1977, another thriller in which he played a deceptively handsome killer), and some attempts at type-smashing like his turn as a detective in Fulci's *Sette note in nero/The Psychic* (1979) and a series of trashy erotic films, including Enzo Milioni's *La sorella di Ursula* ("Ursula's Sister," 1978) and Cesare Canaveri's *Delitto carnale* ("Carnal Crimes," 1981). Porel was also a writer; his screenplay *Un Officier de Police sans Importance/A Police Officer Without Importance* was filmed by Jean Larriaga in 1972. Porel shocked his coterie of fans when meningitis cut his life short in Casablanca, Morocco, on August 23, 1983. He was only 34 years of age.

In the role of Clara, Daria Nicolodi gives a markedly different performance to the one she gave in *Schock*, breathing life into a somewhat cipherish character that speaks volumes

1 Anthony Burgess, *The Eve of Saint Venus* (New York NY: W. W. Norton & Company, 1970).

2 Manlio Gomarasca and Davide Pulici, "Il Talento di Mr. Bava," *Nocturno Dossier* 24, July 2004, 6–32.

about this timid woman and her small town lack of choices for a suitable mate. The chemistry between herself and co-star Marc Porel is delicate and well-sustained, making the viewer implicitly aware from the outset that their mutual, unspoken attraction is doomed, at the very least, to be a missed opportunity.

"They were both controversial films," Daria Nicolodi says of *Schock* and *La Venere d'Ille*. "Personally, I love them, but I know that Dario [Argento], for example, doesn't particularly like either of them. Looking back now, I feel a great nostalgia . . . although we had to work with very limited means, working with Mario Bava was a wonderful experience."[3]

After completing *La Venere d'Ille*, Nicolodi worked once again with Bava—after a fashion—by appearing in Dario Argento's *Inferno* (1980), the second of the "Three Mothers" films she had inspired, for which Bava devised several effects shots. Minor roles followed in Sergio Citti's *Il minestrone* (1981, starring Roberto Begnini) and the miniseries *Verdi* (1982), and Nicolodi eventually renewed her rocky relationship with Argento, resulting in a secondary role in *Tenebrae* (1982) and after breaking off again, a downright insulting one in *Phenomena* (1984), in which she admits to "being 30, playing 50, and being made to look 60," while delivering lines like "These are the things that can happen in a woman's life." In 1985 came perhaps her biggest break, being third-billed under Jack Lemmon and Marcello Mastroianni in Ettore Scola's *Maccheroni/Macaroni*, but the role was not really creative enough to be worthy of her, or to liberate her image from its close alliance with Argento. She worked one last time with Argento in *Opera/Terror at the Opera* (1987, in which she was given one of the most memorably staged deaths in his *oeuvre*), and then worked twice for Lamberto Bava, in the sex thriller *Le foto di Gioia/Delirium* (1987) and his excellent TV movie *Il gioco* ("The Joke," 1989). Also in 1989, she played a supporting role in the terrible *Paganini Horror*, directed by Luigi Cozzi, with whom she shared credit for the screenplay. Acting only sporadically through most of the 1990s, which she spent mostly by raking over the past in various documentaries about Argento, Nicolodi recently started accepting mother roles, as in Mimmo Calopresti's *La parola amore esiste/Notes of Love* (1998) and *Scarlet Diva* (2000), in which she plays the mother of its star (and director), her real-life daughter Asia Argento. In the fall of 2006, it was announced that Nicolodi would be joining her daughter in the cast of *The Mother of Tears*, Dario Argento's long-awaited climax to the trilogy begun with *Suspiria* and *Inferno*.



DARIA NICOLODI *as Clara.*



ALPHONSE *introduces his fiancee Clara to visiting artist Mathieu (Marc Porel).*

Mario Maranzana gives a touching performance as the exuberant, yet sensitive and ultimately tragic M. De Peyrehorade. Maranzana first achieved popularity on Italian television, playing the regular role of Lucas on a series devoted to Georges Simenon's detective hero, Inspector Maigret, which ran from 1964–1972. He acted opposite Steve Reeves in his final film *Vivo per la tua morte/A Long Ride From Hell* (1968, co-scripted by *Operazione paura*'s Roberto Natale), and opposite Franco and Ciccio in their Spaghetti Western parody *Ciccio perdona . . . Io no!* ("Ciccio Forgives, I Don't!" 1968); he won plum roles in the English-language *Goodbye Mr. Chips* (1969) and *Lady Caroline Lamb* (1972); and he paid his dues in various Italian exploitation films and comedies of note, including Armando Crispino's *L'Etrusco uccide ancora/The Dead Are Alive!* (1972), Lucio Fulci's *La pretora* (1976), Walerian Borowczyzk's *Interno di un convento/Behind Convent Walls* (1977), and Ruggero Deodato's *Concorde Affaire '79/The Concorde Affair* (1979).

Fausto Di Bella, who plays Augusto, had previously appeared in a dozen or more pictures in minor roles, including Sergio Martino's violent *giallo, I corpi presentano tracce di violenza carnale/Torso* (1973), *Emanuelle nera orient reportage/Emanuelle in Bangkok* (1976), and Pasquale Festa Campanile's thriller *Autostop rosso sangue/Hitch Hike* (1977). He had previously worked with Mario Bava on *Moses the Lawgiver* in 1974.

La Venere d'Ille also marks the screen debut of the fourth generation of the Bava family to work in the cinema. For a scene requiring a young boy to crawl under a table during the wedding feast and steal Clara's garter to the uproarious amusement of the room, Mario recruited Lamberto's son Roy, who is billed under his birth name of Fabrizio Bava.

"It's the movie of Mario's that I remember best," he says. "I used to go to the set quite often, when they were shooting in Castel Giuliano, near Rome. Lamberto and Mario found a lot of nice, supportive people to work with them. There was a wonderful atmosphere on the set; in all the years since, I've never known such a nice atmosphere on a movie set."

Cinematography & Special Effects

The film's special effects are few, but highly inventive. The startling trick-shot of the Venus bouncing a hurled rock back at two abusive boys was created in the editing; the three shots in the montage are a long-shot of the rock being thrown, a medium close-up of the rock bouncing off the statue, and another long-shot of a rock being thrown at the children. Only when one studies the montage frame-by-frame does one notice that the rock is thrown in the last shot from slightly *above* the Venus.

In the film's penultimate shot, M. De Peyrehorade watches the Venus staue being carted away on a wagon. At first glance, the shot seems to have been achieved by placing a small camera aboard a wagon; on closer inspection of the frame, it becomes evident that there was no wagon at all. The shot—quite possibly the most convincing of all Bava's matte shots—is composed of an extreme low-angle shot of the Venus, its back wreathed in hay, receding from a background view of actor Mario Maranzana. The statue was in fact photographed from below, with hay arranged about its shoulders; the photo was then mounted on a sheet of glass that was attached to a makeshift dolly and wheeled away from Maranzana, with the sound effect of a wagon dubbed in!

Commentary

What is most remarkable about *La Venere d'Ille* are the ways in which it brings Bava's directorial career full circle, back to elements of his debut *La maschera del demonio*. Both films are based on classic short stories of the fantastic, both are set in the 19th century, and both focus on the exhumation of a female character, a link with the distant past, whose allure is manifest in the form of a double. The evil Princess Asa, a disciple of ancient pagan religion, and her virginal descendant Princess Katia, are mirrored in *La Venere d'Ille* by the Greek statue of Venus (described as "dating back before the birth of Christ") and by Clara De Puygarrig. Clara is not a literal lookalike to the statue, but a subjective one. After seeing Clara at a distance, Mathieu's nascent feelings for her seem to crystallize as he sits to sketch the statue. He finds he cannot draw a proper likeness because his attempts to draw the statue always turn out looking like Clara.

"I can't seem to capture her expression," he complains to M. De Peyrehorade (from whom he conceals his attempts). "Look at those lines . . . the way the mouth is fixed . . . the empty gaze of her eyes . . . her inflection . . . her contrasts. It is as if the artist sought to accentuate her wickedness. There is something ferocious in this Venus. If such a woman truly existed, she would take your breath away."

The two men proceed to haggle over an inscription found on the base of the statue, which De Peyrehorade interprets as meaning "Take care of those you love," speculating that it may have been dedicated to a woman who suffered in love. Mathieu, of the opinion that the inscription was engraved later as a baleful warning, perhaps by a past owner, translates the words to mean "Beware of those you love." Humorously, De Peyrehorade responds by saying, after a beat, that he thinks he will stand by his own interpretation. In this exchange, Bava seems to be declaring his own final decision in the matter, after twenty years of contemplating the two faces of Woman as a director, and as a man. The film's sweet air of gentle resignation may be Bava's own, deciding to take care, rather than to beware, of the woman in his own life.

Women are the chief protagonists in Bava's filmography, even when his male characters take the apparent lead (e.g., *Operazione paura*, *Roy Colt & Winchester Jack*), and *La Venere d'Ille* offers his final thoughts on the complexities of womankind, and also their vexing simplicities. In Bava's mind, this dichotomy may also encompass the gulf between art and reality. In one of Mathieu's first conversations with Clara, Bava dramatizes the very real pain of an artist confronted with a woman whose soul is shallow compared to the depths of her beauty:

MATHIEU
Why did you pick Alphonse to be your husband? A man so unlike you. You're sensible, delicate—not . . .

CLARA
Look at him. Take a good look. I like him. Is it true you're going to draw my portrait?

MATHIEU
Who told you that?

CLARA
Alphonse.

MATHIEU
No. I don't believe I shall. There's something strange about you . . . something I don't understand. No, I don't think I could draw you.

CLARA
But why? I'm not such a difficult subject. What's wrong with me?

MATHIEU
I don't know . . . I can't get a fixed image of you. There's something about your eyes. You're like two people.

CLARA
You're complicated. That's why I prefer Alphonse.

The reference to Clara's eyes is complemented with a brief, concentrated burst of montage unlike anything else in the Bava canon, as the camera captures isolated details of her face noticed fleetingly by the artist: an eye looking up through a spray of long lashes, soft lips parted in surprise and almost mocking amusement. The changeable quality of her eyes, noted by Mathieu, is also a characteristic of the Greek statue, mentioned earlier by Giuseppe, the workman who escorts Mathieu to the De Peyrehorade home: "Her eyes stare vacantly . . . sometimes, they gleam like gold; other times, they're as dark as dirt." The scene also leaves us pondering Clara's own name, which suggests a level of clarity or simplicity that may be enviable in some ways, while also carrying certain bovine associations.

If the schism that exists between Asa and Katia can be reduced to a diagram of the Madonna/Whore complex, that which exists between Venus and Clara is a diagram of Woman as art and reality. The women of flesh and blood in *La Venere d'Ille* are superficial; it is the woman of bronze who has infinite depth. Clara is introduced as a mysterious, Brontëan figure on horseback, lovely and heroic and inscrutable, seemingly worthy of comparison to the Venus. Later, however, when Mathieu witnesses how Alphonse ignores and abuses Clara by carousing with other women at the wedding party, making no secret of his intention to betray her with them, he dares to confront her with the question of why she has settled for such a man, and she responds by accusing him of being overly complex and stating her preference for simpler types like Alphonse.

There is something universal in this form of rejection, which surely every artist has experienced at one point or another, when an expression of empathy, thoughtfulness, or simple candor has been thrown back in their face by someone who regards depth as an repugnant quality. As this film shows, personal complexity may well make life more difficult, may even make personal happiness more elusive, but it is only by cultivating a complex view of the world that we can hope to avoid the various traps which life puts before us. Clara, one feels, has chosen to marry Alphonse due to a lack of available options in her small village. When Mathieu arrives, he is obviously better suited to her, and would have been capable of bringing out her better qualities, but he arrives in her life too late; Clara's predisposition to offense may well arise from the feelings of disappointment in her choice, which Mathieu's presence makes known to

3 Luca M. Palmerini and Gaetano Mistretta, *Spaghetti Nightmares* (Rome, Italy: M&P Edizone, 1996), 215.





CANDID *shots of Mario Bava (with ever-present pack of Marlboros) and Daria Nicolodi conversing on the set.*

her. In other words, Mathieu provides the counterpoint to Alphonse that the Venus provides, in his eyes, to her.

In his boorish simplicity, athletic and amorous, Alphonse also proceeds through life incautiously, giving no thought to his actions or their consequences. He marries Clara only to gain access to her fortune, making no pretense of loving her. The truth of his feelings is expressed by the careless gesture of placing his bride's wedding ring on the statue's finger for safekeeping, which is a conscious act only in terms of his concern for the value of the ring (which he covers with his coat), but not in its symbolic value, which would take a more "complicated" soul like Mathieu to properly appreciate. Alphonse is thus not truly married to Clara (on whose finger he places a ring given to him by a past indiscretion) but to the Goddess of Love, in all her pagan variety. The wedding is furthermore held on a Friday, the day consecrated to Venus, which arouses the superstitions of some villagers, while M. De Peyrehorade responds, "What *better* day for a wedding?"

The figure of earthly woman is also criticized via the supporting characters. Mme. De Peyrehorade is a comic figure, forcing food onto a courteous but resisting Mathieu; the servant girl, Maria, does the name thing figuratively by making a display of her breasts, barely concealed by her low-cut dress, to every man in sight. By extension, the film depicts food as something repugnant, foisted by women on men from the cradle to the grave; we see it in various stages of preparation, all framed in a deliberately revolting way, as hogs are gutted, hares are skinned, and paws and trotters are hacked from meaty limbs with befouled cleavers on the butcher's block. The camera observes these details with such a jaundiced eye that they look less like parts of an appetizing meal than like the predigested form of feces.

Food never claimed much attention in Bava's earlier work, but *La Venere d'Ille* is smothered in it. In the 1960s, Bava loved to go to restaurants, to drink wine with fine food, but in the late 1970s, all that had changed. He no longer took much pleasure in food, lost a great deal of weight, and seemed to have aged dramatically. "Mario was super-skinny," his friend Andrea Piazzesi confirms. "He would never eat anything; you could invite him to the best restaurants in Rome and he would order nothing. And he didn't care for people who liked food, either; he accused them of having a pig's mentality. He felt that an egg was a sufficient meal."

Daria Nicolodi, who had by now known Bava for several years, also noticed this change in his character: "When I first met him, in the early 1970s, he ate and drank normally. Later, he ate very few things, and he didn't drink at all. Yet he smoked a great deal and sometimes, he complained of cramps in his legs—like a waiter in a restaurant, or a director who spends a lot of time standing on their legs without rest."

Considering the way that *La Venere d'Ille* equates food and marriage, one cannot help but suspect that Bava may have been punishing himself, starving himself, denying himself, in response to his sublimated anger and frustration over his wife's obesity. The relationship of food and marriage is given direct comment in an exchange between Maria and an older cook during the preparations of the wedding feast:

> MARIA
> We'll remember this day for years to come! I've never seen so much food!
>
> COOK
> This is nothing. I can remember the wedding feast of the De Peyrehorades. We cooked for forty-eight hours, without sleeping! Those were the days . . .
>
> MAN
> Go on, get back to work! When we finish—then you can cluck like hens!

Curiously, Alfred Hitchcock's penultimate feature *Frenzy* pays similar emphasis to the subject of food. Hitchcock himself was a life-long *gourmand* whose father worked in a London produce market, and Donald Spoto remarks in *The Art of Alfred Hitchcock* that, "Food, in *Frenzy*, is a basic visual metaphor for the devouring abuses of man-against-man."[4] In contrast, Bava

always inverted the subtext of man's inhumanity to man to be his main text; his subtext could usually be reduced to a common thread of greed—the most material urge of a material world.

In *La Venere d'Ille*, greed lay at the heart of Alphonse's cold-blooded marriage, but more carnal forms of avarice are evident in his infidelities, as it is in the women's attitudes toward food—a form of pleasure that 19th century women governed. Art and beauty, the loves that enter us through the eye, are treated as the only sources of true spiritual nourishment. Had Bava made this film when he was a younger man, he might have invested his vision wholly in such a latitude—but as *La Venere d'Ille* was made at the end of his life, he was experienced enough to understand that art and beauty serve different functions when a man is in his 20s, like Mathieu, or in his 60s, like M. De Peyrehorade.

Mathieu's absorption in the Venus, like his reaction to his first glimpse of Clara, is silent and stoic because it is deeply personal. When we see him wrestling with the task of sketching a likeness of the Venus on paper, we understand that he is in fact dredging the depths of his inner self, tracing the feelings awakened by the Venus. We never learn where he comes from (perhaps Rome, given M. De Peyrehorade's mocking description of him as a "tiger from the capitol") or about his past relationships; we are only told that his pocketwatch, which Alphonse admires, was "a gift . . . a gift from Venus." Thus, this is not a first encounter for Mathieu, just as the deliberate past burial of the idol indicates this is not the first time this unhappy story has unfolded on the De Peyrehorade property. History repeats itself, as one replays the details of a trauma in an effort to exorcise it of its power.

In the case of M. De Peyrehorade, who has outgrown the primarily sexual phase of life and marriage, the Venus is a less complicated thing. It is something to be admired, purely and simply; it does not represent anything deep within his soul, nor does it represent his doom. Even when it does



destroy his son, he stands incredulous, unable to comprehend how such a thing could happen. Perhaps because he is an art collector, rather than an artist, he takes art materially rather than personally. Though the story's postscript is handled elliptically, it is nevertheless tragic to see the once-robust M. De Peyrehorade parting with his Venus, after it has laid waste to his entire family, because we remember how its discovery brought him such joy—perhaps the last jolt of sexual joy he will know in his lifetime. The fact that he sends it to a church, with orders that it be melted down and recast as a bell, recalls the central sequence of creation in Andrei Tarkovsky's epic film *Andrei Rublyov/Andrei Rublev* (1969), which details the painstaking process of casting a bell and is considered by many to be the greatest film ever made on the subject of what it means to be an artist.

The opening of the film, with the groundskeepers discovering the Venus buried underground, also hearkens back to *La maschera del demonio* by suggesting an entire backstory that is never told and doesn't need to be. The attentive viewer will intuit at once that the statue was deliberately buried by an earlier generation of landowners as a means of banishing its evil, and the inscription found on its base (engraved later, as Mathieu theorizes) stands as a warning to anyone who would resurrect it. Once again, also, we have an example of (in context) the present resonating with the past, as with Princess Katia's resemblance to the painting of her evil ancestor; not only does Mathieu perceive a resemblance between the statue and Clara, but when the statue briefly assumes human form to be romanced by him in the garden, Venus is played by Daria Nicolodi—in a more poised and stylized manner than she plays Clara. Whether this encounter really takes place with Clara or Venus personified remains ambiguous—but not too ambiguous. The introduction of Nicolodi in the garden is filmed with a telling, tracking camera move that seems to deliberately recall an earlier shot of the statue, in which it was moved apace with the camera, tightly framing its face and illuminated eyes, in an example of how its gaze seems to "follow" its admirers.

La Venere d'Ille puts the final piece to the puzzle of Bava's career and makes explicit that which has been implicit in his *oeuvre* all along. The degree of stylization which Bava brought to his earlier films was, consciously or not, his expression of the spiritual dimension he knew to exist in life—the internal, eternal truth that can be externalized only through expressions in art. It is always there, unseen by his carnal characters, mocking their butchery as they murder for money, as they prey upon the blood of lovers and family, and it is there to receive them all at the moments of their deaths. As such, *La Venere d'Ille* functions as a much more satisfying summation of intents than *Schock*.

The impressive quality of *La Venere d'Ille* contradicts the supposed dishonor of concluding one's directorial career with a shared credit on a made-for-television movie. From a technical standpoint, it is one of Bava's most perfectly realized creations; from a creative perspective, it is a remarkable distillation of everything he chose to express, directly or indirectly, in his twenty-year career as a director of motion pictures. In addition to everything else it achieves, it boasts an impeccable recreation of 19th century rural life and its people. It contains more warmth, heart, and romantic yearning than any other Bava film, and it feels like one of his most autobiographical pictures, with Bava himself twinned between the characters of Mathieu and M. De Peyrehorade. Coming after the similar disclosures of *Lisa and the Devil*, which approached them in more furtive fashion, one feels the impact of *Cani arrabbiati* on his art—Bava can now speak less obtusely through his art and embrace his characters without stylizing them to abstract degrees. It is a tantalizing sample of a sensibility he would have brought to subsequent projects, had he lived and been able to continue making films, horror or otherwise, despite the increasingly moribund state of the Italian cinema.

Here is Mario Bava again once among the statues, pursuing art and beauty through the eyes of "a romantic artisan," and loving not wisely but too well, from afar.

4 Donald Spoto, *The Art of Alfred Hitchcock* (Garden City NY: Dolphin/Doubleday, 1976), 436.



INFERNO



DETAIL *of the rare UK quad poster, picturing Mater Tenebrarum's triumphant transformation into the spectre of Death.*

AFTER *LA VENERE D'ILLE*, Mario Bava returned to semi-retirement and odd consultation jobs, hoping that the forthcoming broadcast of his film would bring more opportunities to direct. In the meantime, he stayed at home, read a lot—and smoked a lot.

During this listless period, circa 1978, Bava's beloved dog Centi finally died, succumbing to advanced age and renal failure. "Mario and Centi were absolutely close," says Georgia Bava. "He refused to buy another dog, but my aunt Elena [Mario's daughter] had a female dog called Tappo, who had three puppies. Elena kept two females from the litter and gave away the male. One of the two females, the one called Isotta, was given to Mario—and returned to Elena after his death."

Bava's professional activities during this period are generally unknown, even to his son Lamberto, who was then preoccupied with his own burgeoning career as an associate in film and advertising at Ruggero Deodato's production company. Triestene film critic Lorenzo Codelli remembers trying to reach Bava by telephone in 1979, and finding him uncharacteristically out of town. Bava returned his call from Spain, where he may have gone to meet with director Frank Agrama, who had invited him to create the special effects for his forthcoming film *Dawn of the Mummy*. Bava may have given Agrama some technical advice, but he did not work on the picture, which ultimately did not go into production until later in 1980, after Bava's death.

It was also in 1979 that the young special effects designer Armando Valcauda met Mario for the last time when he and Fulvio Lucisano surprised him by visiting the set of Aldo Lado's *L'umanoide/The Humanoid.* [1]

BAVA *photographed with Dario Argento on the set of INFERNO.*



"Bava was also in this place, always with Lucisano, but their science fiction project [*Il vagabondo dello spazio*] never got off the ground," recounts Valcauda. "When Mario saw me, he would cry '*Ciao, Armando!* My nephew!' and I cried, 'My dear uncle!' Lucisano was not very amused . . ."

Though Bava was obviously tiring of the actual job of directing, he held onto the illusion of being a director, occupying his mind with stories and busying his hand with sketches for films he would never make. It was during this fallow period that he renewed his acquaintance with *I tre volti della paura* screenwriter Alberto Bevilacqua, who was in the process of writing an essay about British author D. H. Lawrence.

"One day, I told Mario about this essay, and that, strangely enough, the last thing written by Lawrence—and I say 'strangely' because it's not well known—was *Apocalypse*. At the end of his life, with a devouring illness, hated by the critics, Lawrence arrived at the point of being betrayed by his wife, who cheated on him with his most abusive critic; and, on top of all this reality, there was his madness. I told Bava there was this extraordinary story by Lawrence, and I gave it to him to read, together with [other material by] the apocalyptic writers of the 14th and 16th centuries. The apocalyptic tradition is rooted in this: a man, all of a sudden, is forced to see the contradictions of his life; he sees it happening through the rebellious forces of nature . . . through a billion-year-old sun that suddenly explodes . . . through the appearance of strange, non-human characters. This thing excited Mario, and he asked me, always looking for something new, as he used to do when he spoke about things that were important for him: 'If the Apocalypse were to come, would it also come to an ordinary house?'—he was a maniac for houses—and I told him, 'Yes, sure.' 'Why don't we do a film set in a common house,' he proposed, 'with ordinary people, with ordinary habits, and all of a sudden, this terrifying event of the Apocalypse happens?' I replied, 'It sounds to me like an extraordinary film, and one that you could do very well!' But unfortunately, this idea coincided with the dwindling of his career, and I think he no longer had the clout to get a film rolling. And so our *L'apocalisse* remained no more than a treatment, which we developed over the course of a few months." [2]

Inferno

Filmed at INCIR–De Paolis and Elios Studios,
and on location in Rome and New York City
Summer 1979
First released: February 7, 1980
Technicolor, Technovision, 1.85:1, 107 minutes

Production: Intersound Productions. Producer: Claudio Argento. Director: Dario Argento. Assistant directors: Lamberto Bava, Andrea Piazzesi. Screenplay: Dario Argento. Director of Photography: Romano Albani. Art direction: Giuseppe Bassan. Special effects: Mario Bava (uncredited), Germano Natale and Pino Leoni. Editor: Franco Fraticelli. Music: Keith Emerson, Giuseppe Verdi, conducted by Godfrey Salmon. Distributor: 20th Century-Fox in all territories unless otherwise noted.

Leigh McCloskey (Mark Elliot), Irene Miracle (Rose Elliot), Eleonora Giorgi (Sara), Daria Nicolodi (Elise Stallone Van Adler), Sacha Pitoëff (Kazanian), Alida Valli (Carol), Veronica Lazar (Nurse/Mater Tenebrarum), Gabriele Lavia (Carlo), Feodor Chaliapin (Varelli), Leopoldo Mastelloni (John, the butler), Ania Pieroni (musical student/Mater Lacrimarum), James Fleetwood (Cook), Rosario Rigutini (Man), Ryan Hilliard (shadow), Paolo Paoloni (music teacher), Fulvio Mingozzi (cab driver), Luigi Lodoli (bookbinder), Rodolfo Lodi (old man), Lamberto Bava, Andrea Piazzesi (passersby).

France: *Inferno*, 4/16/80
Germany: *Horror Infernal, Feuertanz der Zombies*, "Hellish Horror, Fire Dance of the Zombies," 9/12/80
Turkey: *Cehennem*, "Inferno"
UK: *Inferno*, 4/80, 106m 15s, Certificate "X," passed with cuts
US: *Inferno*, Key Video, 10/86 (video only)

As Mario floundered about in search of the right energizing idea, Lamberto decided to offer his services as assistant director to Dario Argento, who was preparing to make *Inferno*—the hotly anticipated follow-up to the internationally successful *Suspiria*. Argento enthusiastically accepted his proposal. Then, as the demands of the movie came into clearer focus during preproduction, Argento suggested that Mario join them, too. "I knew we were going to have big problems on *Inferno*," Argento recalls, "because, at that time, it was before the digital age, so we would need glass shots, mattes, and so forth to recreate New York. It would be difficult, very complicated—and I thought Mario would be good to have around, because he was the father of this. He was tired and not working. So I asked Lamberto if he might help us, and he asked him."

Mario joined the production for two or three weeks, to the best of Argento's recollection, working with a small crew of three people. He agreed to supervise the film's matte and maquette effects on the condition that he would receive no screen credit. "He didn't want a credit," Argento explains. "He said, 'I'm a director, I don't want to be [known as] a special effects designer.' He was there because he liked to work with his son and with me. He liked to be out of the house, working."



IRENE MIRACLE *as the poetess Rose Elliot, about to be plunged into the mysteries beneath the soles of her shoes.*

Since his initial success with *L'uccello dalle piume di cristallo*, Dario Argento had become a major force in Italian film production. His second feature, *Il gatto a nove code* (which, like its predecessor, copped ideas from Fredric Brown's novel *Screaming Mimi*), was again visibly steeped in the influence of Michelangelo Antonioni, but with *Quattro mosche di velluto grigio/Four Flies on Grey Velvet* (1971) and *Profondo rosso/Deep Red* (1975), Argento succeeded in finding his own voice. He began rewiring the *giallo* for a younger, thrill-seeking audience. He achieved this by saturating his fragmented, cubist imagery with exaggerated color, violence, and style, and by choreographing these images to the compelling beat of progressive rock music—whose volume in the mix was guaranteed to repel anyone old enough to also be repelled by his graphic brand of violence. It was a formula that enabled Argento to achieve the kind of local success that always eluded Bava himself. Argento's films were huge in Italy and throughout Europe, but ironically, after *L'uccello dalle piume di cristallo*, they did not perform well in America, where they were acquired by small distributors and often heavily truncated for release. More than half an hour was trimmed from the American release of *Deep Red*, which was exhibited in some areas under the crass title *The Hatchet Murders*.

American audiences rediscovered Argento in a big way when 20th Century-Fox acquired the international rights to his first true horror film, *Suspiria* (1977), a tale of witchcraft at a German dance academy conceived by Daria Nicolodi. If *L'uccello dalle piume di cristallo* was influenced by Bava's *La ragazza che sapeva troppo*, *Suspiria* used an antiquated three-dye Technicolor process to resurrect the eye-popping, saturated color lighting techniques of *I tre volti della paura* and *Sei donne per l'assassino*, as well as the look of the film which had most influenced Bava and Freda in evolving the look of the earliest Italian horror films: Walt Disney's *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs*. *Suspiria* achieved worldwide success, though it was an embarrassment to the executives at 20th Century-Fox, who sent the picture out carrying the logo of a hastily invented sub-division company, International Classics.

Argento and Nicolodi decided to exploit the keen interest in the picture by announcing that *Suspiria* was only the first segment of a projected series, which they dubbed "The Three Mothers Trilogy." The first sequel, entitled *Inferno*, was scripted by Argento and Nicolodi—but the actress was finally uncredited. Working from Nicolodi's central concept, Argento began writing the script in New York City in a small hotel room overlooking Central Park. While directing the film, Argento was stricken with hepatitis and actually directed some of the picture lying down. Though the film is a favorite with Argento's admirers, *Inferno* is cited by the director himself as one of his least favorite pictures because his memories of the filming are colored by the memory of his deathly illness.

When Argento's brother Claudio secured co-production funds from Italian and German consortiums, as well as from 20th Century-Fox in America, *Inferno*—budgeted at $3,000,000—was ready to roll.

Synopsis

April in New York.
A knife.
A brooch attached to three keys.
A book—*The Three Mothers, by E. Varelli.*

Rose Elliot, a poetess living in Manhattan, uses the knife to cut the pages of the book, which she has acquired from a lame antique bookseller named Kazanian, and prepares to translate the Latin text. Varelli, an architect living in London, writes that he met the Three Mothers of all earthly sorrows and built for them three houses from which they would rule the world with sorrow, tears and darkness: Mater

1 The English-language version of this film, which starred Richard Kiel, Barbara Bach and Arthur Kennedy, is credited to Lado under the pseudonym "George B. Lewis."

2 Manlio Gomarasca and Davide Pulici, "Il Talento di Mr. Bava," *Nocturno Dossier* 24, July 2004, 6–32.

ROSE *immerses herself in a subterranean pool to retrieve a fallen brooch.*



Suspiriorum (the Mother of Sighs, the oldest) lives in Freiberg, Germany; Mater Lachrimarum (the Mother of Tears, the most beautiful) rules from Rome; and Mater Tenebrarum (the Mother of Darkness, the youngest and cruellest of the sisters) resides in New York. The land where the houses are built, Varelli warns, will eventually become vile and plague-ridden, making the air around them reek horribly; this, he instructs, is the first key to their discovery. The second key can be found hidden in the cellars under these houses: a picture and the name of the Mother living in that house. "The third key," the book says obliquely, "can be found beneath the soles of your shoes."

Inside the book, Rose finds a sketch of one of Varelli's houses that looks exactly like the apartment building in which she resides. She writes a fretful letter to her brother Mark, a musicologist studying in Rome. After mailing the letter, Rose visits Kazanian to discuss the book he sold her. He scoffs at her curiosity, and when she asks about the strange, sickly sweet smell of the neighborhood, he explains it as an emanation from a nearby cake factory. Unsatisfied, Rose leaves and, seeing an underground entrance in the alley beside her building, remembers the line, "The second key is in the cellar." She descends, and while examining a watery hole in the floor, her brooch drops in, lodging on what appears to be a submerged chandelier. Unable to return home without her keys, Rose lowers herself through the hole and swims down to retrieve her keys, finding a fabulous underwater ballroom adorned with the Latin names of the Three Mothers. She retrieves her keys, but is frightened away from continued study of the room by a floating corpse. She swims up and out. In the wake of her departure, a black gloved phantom steps out of hiding.

In Rome, Mark reads Rose's letter in music class, while listening to Verdi's "Va piensera" from Nabucco. As he reads, he is troubled by a beautiful woman, who stares at him, whispering urgent words he cannot hear, while stroking a cat. An immense wind blows through the music room, and Mark puts Rose's letter away, unread. When he looks up, the beautiful stranger and her familiar have gone. Mark pursues her, leaving Rose's letter behind. It is read by Sara, Mark's girlfriend and fellow student, its content attracting her female curiosity.

While riding home in the rain, Sara asks her taxi driver to take her to Via Dei Bagni 49, the Biblioteca Filosofica Fondazioni Albertini—a library of mystical books in a neighborhood with a pungent, sickly sweet smell. She finds a copy of Varelli's book, just as the library announces its closing time. Trying to abscond with it, she uses a different exit, which leads her to an alchemist's laboratory, full of sinister, bubbling pots. The alchemist spies the title of the book in her hands and pries it from her hands before she escapes.

Returning home, Sara meets Carlo, a sports writer, in the elevator and pleads with him to accompany her to her apartment. He agrees. While entertaining him with a record from her collection—"Va pensiero"—Sara phones Mark and urges him to come right away. The lights begin to flicker in Sara's apartment. Carlo is murdered while attempting to repair the fusebox, and Mark arrives in time to find only fragments of his sister's letter . . . just before Sara falls through a screen . . . stabbed to death by a black-gloved hand. As he exits the building, Mark sees the beautiful girl he saw earlier in the music room, driving by in a taxi.

ROSE'S *brother Mark, played by Leigh McCloskey.*



A heavily distorted telephone call from Rose prompts Mark to go to Rome. Before he can get there, Rose is chased from her apartment by two intruding silhouettes. She cuts her hand on a broken doorknob, leaving a trail of blood as she descends the stairs to the floors under her building. There she is grabbed by two demonic hands—the same scaly, taloned hands as seen on the alchemist in Rome—which pull her under a broken window, whose pane is used as a makeshift guillotine.

Mark arrives at Rose's New York apartment building and notes a plaque on the outside, stating that the philosopher G. Gurdjieff lived there in 1924. Inside, he greets the concierge, Carol, who quickly covers several pounds of fresh meat before he can see it. Taking the elevator to Rose's apartment, he meets the mute Prof. Arnold and his garrulous nurse. Arnold scratches the word "Mater" into his leather portfolio case, Mark notices later. He makes the acquaintance of Rose's friend and neighbor, Elise Delombre Adler, a Countess who has lived alone in the building for 5 years, her husband a constant traveller. She is a drug addict, administered by her sinister butler Gian.

That night, the black gloved phantom enters Kazanian's shop and steals three copies of The Three Mothers from his shelves. Investigating the theft, he is attacked by a cat, who destroys a valuable antique. Meanwhile, Elise has sneaked back next door to tell Mark about Rose's interest in the Three Mothers. She explains what she knows of their legend, and her disclosure is overheard by a presence within the building. She and Mark discover Rose's blood trail, which Mark follows downstairs. In the depths of the building, he is overcome by the smells of the "cake factory," and dragged away by the phantom—who leaves him when he spies Elise watching. Fleeing the scene, Elise is attacked by cats and stabbed to death by the black hand.

Mark is discovered by Carol and the nurse, and he complains of a severe heart ailment. They give him heart medicine, and he dreams of the sea. He awakens in Rose's apartment, apparently recovered, and notices a profusion of ants crawling over his woodwork. He tries to contact Elise, and finds that she has disappeared. He speaks to Kazanian about the three keys, but finds him uninterested. He tells Mark that there is going to be a lunar eclipse that night, the first in forty-six years.

As the eclipse approaches, Kazanian catches a cat and bags it, along with many others. He takes the bag to Central Park under the dark of the eclipse and drowns the cats in the lake. His crutch slips in the water and he falls face-down in the lake, and is attacked by rats. He screams for help as they begin to devour him alive, and a nearby butcher hears and races across the lake in his direction. When he arrives, he uses his knife to hack at the nape of Kazanian's neck, and kicks the gimp's body into an open sewer pipe alive with rats. The eclipse ends.

Elise's butler Gian, ignorant of the Countess' death, discovers her hidden jewels and delivers them to Carol, with whom he plans to run away. He is soon after seized by the alchemist's hand and killed. When Carol discovers his body, she inadvertently starts a fire, catches fire herself, and tumbles through a glass stratum to her death deep in the bowels of the building.

As the inferno gathers momentum, Mark finally makes sense of the third clue and tears up the floorboards of Rose's apartment to explore the realm "beneath the soles of his shoes." He finds a scroll of paper, written in Italian, signed by Varelli. He follows the crawlspace under the floor to the apartment where Prof. Arnold lives with his nurse. Speaking to Mark through an electrical device, Arnold reveals that he is, in fact, Varelli. He wants to be forgotten. Varelli pleads with Mark to come closer, so as not to be overheard by the Mother of Shadows. He lunges out, tries to inject Mark with a chemical, which Mark succeeds in sucking out of his arm before it can take effect; Varelli, however, falls over in the scuffle and is strangled by his voice synthesizer. He apologizes for the attack, explaining that he has become the slave of Mater Tenebrarum.

Mark follows Varelli's dying directions to another chamber, where he faces the diabolical taunts of Mater Tenebrarum—the woman who has posed as Varelli's nurse. She reveals herself to Mark as the spectre of Death, just as the house begins to collapse and disintegrate around them, granting Mark an opportunity for escape.

Production & Special Effects

Though Mario Bava's involvement in the production of *Inferno* was uncredited, it did not remain a secret for very long. Over the years, much confusion has been generated by his affiliation with the film, and Bava has been credited by the fan press with many scenes in which he had no actual involvement. The breakdown of responsibilities among *Inferno*'s special effects units is actually quite simple. The film's two credited special effects workers—Germano Natale and Pino Leoni—supervised the film's many on-set effects (fire, breaking glass). Meanwhile, as always, Bava worked as a unit unto himself, devising the film's "in camera" effects.

Though the two men were rivals of a sort before they met, Bava and



LAMBERTO BAVA, *producer Salvatore Argento and his son Dario on location.*



FRENCH *actor Sacha Pitoëff as Kazanian, venturing into Central Park at night to drown a sack of cats.*

Argento got along well, by all accounts—perhaps because Bava had now resigned himself to his fate. "There was a very gentle feeling between them," observes Andrea Piazzesi, who worked as *Inferno*'s second assistant director. "If you were to ask Mario about Dario, he would say that Dario was very smart, that Dario was a much better director than he, had many more successes than he, that Dario was one of the few good directors in Italy. If you spoke to Dario about Mario, he would say that Mario was a *Maestro*, that everything he learned came from Mario and, that if Mario had *wanted* to become famous, he *would* have become famous. You see, Mario was incapable of jealousy. He may not have respected the work of some other artists, but he would always say they did the best they could, that it was their business. He would never express any negative energy toward anyone."

Bava focused on his work and didn't concern himself with the film's direction or cinematography. One of his principal tasks was to create the illusion that *Inferno* had been filmed in New York City. Despite appearances to the contrary, very little of the movie was actually shot on location. The New York apartment building where Rose Elliot resides and disappears was based on an actual building that stands on Riverside Drive, in Manhattan's Upper West Side. However, the building itself was never filmed; it was still-photographed and recreated on a sound stage at INCIR–De Paolis Studios in Rome.

"At no time when the camera is facing the building do you see New York City," explains William Lustig, who worked on the film as a production coordinator. "But when you face away from the building, *that's* New York City." In other words, the mailbox across the street from the apartment complex, where Rose deposits the letter to Paul, is the real mailbox at the edge of Riverside Park, with the West Side Highway visible in the background. The view out the window of Rose's apartment was shot, at Argento's request, from the window of the New York hotel room where he conceived the storyline, and shows scenery that isn't visible from Riverside Drive: New Jersey's Palisades Park, across the Hudson River.

The building seen in the movie is a brilliant illusion consisting of a two-story facade built by Giuseppe Bassan's talented art crew, which Mario Bava extended to a fuller height with the use of a hanging maquette. This was then optically inserted into an equally illusory, surrounding cityscape, an angled glass reflection of an adjacent tabletop arrangement of boxes and milk cartons covered with photographs of prominent New York buildings. Bava's hanging maquette—a large scale miniature—was also utilized by the other effects unit for the climactic shots of the building in flames.

Lamberto Bava brought his son Roy to the set on occasion to visit his grandfather, who lost no time in putting the boy to work. "I helped him when he was creating the whole skyline of New York with the big fire," Roy remembers. "He used pictures of the city to recreate the skyline. I was helping him to draw around the buildings with ink, with light coming through from the back. He also did matte paintings, and he was always retouching the one he was working on. I think he regarded it as a hobby, because he always had fun doing this kind of thing. The thing that he used to tell my father—and also to me since I was 10 years old and became interested in these types of things—was, 'The best solution to a problem is usually the easiest.' And as I watched him work, I began to see he was right, that even the thing that appears crude on the set will look perfect on the screen."

Another of Bava's duties was to create a series of glass matte paintings of the moon—in its fullest phase, and in various stages of eclipse. It was a trick that dated back, in Bava's own filmography, to *Ercole al centro della terra* and Giacomo Gentilomo's *Maciste e la regina di Samar*. In *Inferno*, Argento presents the moon as a kind of Greek chorus, subtly appearing in the background of the earliest scenes (e.g., over Irene Miracle's shoulder as she opens the celler grate) and slowly evolving a mystic significance, culminating in the eclipse that heralds the death of the man responsible for spreading the truth about the Three Sisters, the lame bookseller Kazanian. The moon had not been portrayed in such an inspired way since the "moonstruck" scene in David Lean's *Hobson's Choice* (1954). Bava was also responsible for two shots of the moon, framed by two different windows—one occurs immediately prior to the shot of Gian preparing Elise's bath, the other immediately follows the shot of Carol's fiery demise.

Andrea Piazzesi cites this moon as a valuable index to Bava's personal character and his thorough knowledge of the camera: "What was incredible about Mario was that he was never cautious about revealing his professional secrets. He would talk about them openly with anybody. In the film, a moon appears behind many of the scenes, and he made this moon himself. Mario took a piece of glass and designed this moon, which did not look so good on the actual glass but, on the screen, becomes—believe me—a



MARK *flees danger through a portal flanked on either side by glass matte paintings of stone carvings, executed by Mario Bava.*

perfect moon. As Mario told me many times, when actors are wearing their makeup, they look awful in person but, on film, they look beautiful! So it was a matter of knowing what colors and designs would result in something that would look real *only on film*. So he had no need to keep trade secrets; his secret was not a secret of knowing how to bring them to life. He was not like an illusionist in the circus who takes rabbits out of his hat—this was an expression he liked to use—because, even if he were to reveal his secrets to you, you would need a lifetime of experience before you could take his job.

"Mario always maintained that the best way of achieving an effect was to shoot something directly, rather than with a lot of artificial superimpositions," Piazzesi continues. "Putting pictures on glass looks very easy, but the tough part is balancing the lights. If you measure the quality of light with instruments, it can change in a second. Mario had two lamps and balanced the light by sight. This can come only from a very great sense of experience."

A notable instance of Bava's masterly manipulation of light is the trick shot in which Mater Tenebrarum stands before Mark and beside a mirror in which she is reflected, and vanishes into thin air, while her reflection remains visible in the mirror. This was a simple matter of projecting actress Veronica Lazar into the shot by capturing her off-camera, illuminated reflection on a pane of angled glass. By dimming her lights with a smooth accustomed movement, Bava caused her to vanish from the shot—exactly as he caused Javutich to materialize out of thin air in *La maschera del demonio* twenty years earlier, on the other side of his directorial career. Lazar's mirror reflection was in fact her stunt double, standing on the other side of an empty frame, outside the set.

Though Bava was responsible for the special effects of the lunar eclipse, he was not present during the actual filming of the eclipse sequence, which was filmed on location in New York City's Central Park. In the summer of 1979, Dario Argento brought the production (including cast members Irene Miracle, Leigh McCloskey, Sacha Pitoëff, and Daria Nicolodi) to New York City, where several scenes and insert shots were filmed. Filmmaker William Lustig—later the director of such films as *Maniac*, *Vigilante* and *Maniac Cop*—worked on the New York shoot of *Inferno* as a member of Andrew Garroni's Cinerex Associates, the production service company that arranged the film's locations, hotels, and crew.

"It was a ten-day shoot," Lustig remembers. "Basically, what was shot was most of the Central Park sequence, all of the shots *looking away from* the apartment building (like the shot of Irene Miracle crossing the street to the mailbox), some helicopter footage of the roads—some of which ended up in *Maniac*, I can admit, now that the statute of limitations has expired! Also, the shots of Leigh McCloskey looking out the window of his apartment at the city, and the stuff of the Fire Department arriving at the end of the film. Those exteriors were all shot on Riverside Drive, but no apartment was shot. Yes, there were apartments there, but not the one you see in the movie—that only existed on the set back in Europe. Mario Bava was not there, but I remember Dario and Daria, the cameraman Romano Albani, and also Lamberto Bava, who was working as Dario's assistant."[3]

Lustig has vivid memories of the Central Park sequence. "That shoot lasted all night," he reports. "We had to rent just about every piece of lighting equipment from all the equipment houses in town, to illuminate all the buildings adjacent to the park! You can do that kind of lighting nowadays with one large, basic light, but we didn't have that kind of equipment available to us then. It was a big, big production, with tons of union crew all around. The camera was locked off, with a glass matte of the moon in various stages of eclipse, positioned between the buildings. They would shoot one matte, then replace it in the frame with another. It took an entire night to get that one shot! I can remember Dario's brother—Claudio, the producer—going nuts. Dario and Daria were sitting on a park bench, and he turned to me and said, 'I love working at night—I *love* it!'

"They filmed the actor [Sacha Pitoëff] carrying a bag that contained some kind of moving mechanism," Lustig continues, "to make it look like it was full of cats. He walked into the lake, pushed the bag underwater, and fell in. At that point, some phony, mechanical rats were attached to him for close-ups. When the guy at the hamburger stand runs over the lake, apparently coming to his rescue, that actor was actually running on a plexiglass bridge under the water; it made it look like he was actually running across the surface of the lake. All of the stuff with live rats was shot back in Europe."

Argento himself cites the rat sequence as a tribute to Lamberto Bava's gifts as an assistant director. "Lamberto was great! He was the *strongest* assistant director . . . very cruel. The best I

3 William Lustig, interviewed by the author, April 21, 1998.



BOOK *dealer Kazanian is attacked—first by cats, and then by rats.*

ever had. He would say, 'If you don't do this, I'll *kill* you!' I remember a story from the time when we killed the gimp in the park. We shot only the close-up in Rome; we had shot everything else before in New York. When we were in Rome, this actor [Sacha Pitoëff] was drinking all the time, and never acting very well; it was very disappointing. We were shooting the scene where the butcher runs across and kills him with the knife. It was Take One, Take Two, Take Three . . . and Lamberto was grumbling, 'This cocksfucker [*sic*] . . . !' I told him, 'Lamberto, he's terrible; we may have to get a stuntman to do this, because this actor is just too drunk.' Lamberto told me, 'Dario, leave the set for a while. Go to the bar or something, leave this to me.' I went to a bar in the middle of the square, and as I was sitting there, I heard *'Aaaaaarrrrrggggh!'* I ran back to the set and Lamberto was standing over the actor, telling him, 'This is going to be the last shot of the picture!' and he hit him as hard as he could on the head. The man was screaming *for real!* It was good, it was good . . ."[4]

Roy Bava has his own memories of this sequence: "Dario and Mario hated the small size of the rats for the Central Park sequence, so they did some research and found out that there was a breed known as the Chinese Fighting Rat (or something like that), which were big and vicious. They decided that this was the rat species they wanted, so they imported 1,500 of them from Asia! They were huge with slim noses. I was on the set that day with French actor Sacha Pitoëff. There was Lamberto, Dario and Mario holding the rats by their tails between their fingers ready to let them drop on Pitoëff's body. The details were done at INCIR–De Paolis, as well as the underwater scene. It took ages to get a response from Pitoëff, so in the end, Lamberto told everyone to leave the set. And then they heard this enormous scream from Pitoëff, but Lamberto refused to tell anyone how he managed it. *It was better not to ask!* Some of the rats escaped and then,



one day, Dario met Marco Bellocchio in the courtyard. He was in the studio filming *Salto nel vuoto* and he said, 'You know, this place really must do something about its rat problem—they are everywhere!' Dario pretended he knew nothing and agreed with him. It turned out that the Chinese rats had mated with the local population and bred a strain of super rat that took De Paolis years to exterminate!" [5]

For the shot in which Mark discovers the cavernous sanctum of Mater Tenebrarum, bursting through a door framed between a pair of enormous gnarled sculptures, Bava sculpted tiny models of the stone sentries and reflected them on angled glass into the viewfinder. After looking through the camera, he remained unconvinced by the shot. Andrea Piazzesi, who was present during the execution of this effect, recalled Bava's solution: "He said that the sculptures looked somehow false, as if they were hovering just off the ground. Then, to everyone's surprise, Mario found a few brown paper bags, which he crumpled up and arranged in two piles along the studio floor. It filled the gaps perfectly, creating the illusion of the sculptures resting on the ground. It was impossible to tell where the matte stopped and the bags began!"

Another Bava matte painting of pivotal importance depicted a pair of ferocious, cat-like eyes peering forth from the darkness. They flash onscreen, very briefly, underlined by a musical sting, as Rose is pursued by a demonic assailant. The effect is unmistakably Bavian, recalling the balefully staring eyes on the painting of Otto von Kleist in *Baron Blood*.

When Argento was briefly hospitalized during the production, second unit photography continued in his absence. Some of this was entrusted to Mario, who filmed the sinister slow zooms into the apartment's air vents as Mark is overcome with noxious fumes. These shots recall similar images in *Terrore nello spazio*, when the air is sucked out of the derelict alien spacecraft through the compression vents in its walls.

Bava has often been erroneously credited with the execution of the sequence in which Rose descends into the submerged ballroom below the basement floor of her apartment building. In fact, the sequence contains no optical or in camera effects whatsoever. The ballroom set was furnished inside a dry aquarium set at DePaolis, which was then filled with sea water. The sequence was photographed by Gianlorenzo Battaglia, who had started his career as a camera assistant on Bava's *Il rosso segno della follia*, and later distinguished himself in underwater photography—which he provided for *Ecologia del delitto*, among many other films. Battaglia worked alone, and later with actress Irene Miracle, filming the sequence in accordance with Argento's storyboards. If one watches the sequence carefully, it becomes apparent that the two inserted close-ups of Miracle's hand retrieving her keys from the carpet were not shot underwater at all. Considering their illusory aspect, Bava may have had something to do with the filming of these close-up inserts.

Commentary

The only collaboration of the two greatest names in Italian horror, *Inferno* is hypnotic, powerfully imagined and choreographed, with a visual beauty that burns with demonic intensity. It is also a very slow-moving, entrancing picture; even when one fast-forwards through the film on video, it moves with dreamy deliberation.

Thematically, *Inferno* is very much in the tradition of the 1943 Val Lewton production *The Seventh Victim*, in which a young woman's search for her missing sister in New York City, gradually uncovers her sibling's secret alliance with a Satanic cult. [6] *Inferno* aims to recreate *The Seventh Victim*'s New York City, in which a seemingly normal world is discovered, on closer look, to be thoroughly contaminated by the malignance of evil—note the scene in which Mark meets Carol, who rapidly covers the meat she's cutting in the kitchen as if to conceal a hideous secret (could it be prime cuts of Rose's body?)—but this requires a subtlety that is at odds with Argento's more important stylistic purpose. That purpose is to visually depict the different ways in which men and women perceive the world around them.

More than once, the film's dialogue points to women as being the primary consumers of occult literature, and by extension, the purveyors of all worldly misfortune. "Some people think of these books as sheer fantasy," Kazanian tells Rose. "Others believe every word. Women are usually the worst readers of such stuff—or the best, if you prefer. They want so very badly to believe." Accordingly, all of the film's evil symbols are female or feline, and the film's wildest color gel lighting is manifest only when a scene is built around the supernatural intuitions and curiosities of a female character. When Mark or Kazanian or Varelli take center stage, the lighting becomes flatter, more earthy—natural, as opposed to supernatural. This supposedly fundamental difference between men and women is pointedly addressed in the scene between Sara and Carlo, when her conversation prompts him to smirkingly disavow any belief in "spooks and that sort of thing."



ROSE *is assaulted and guillotined by demonic hands—a role played by her mischievous director.*

4 Dario Argento, interviewed by Alan Jones, January 2001.

5 Roy Bava, interviewed by Alan Jones, April 2003.

6 Kim Hunter, the star of *The Seventh Victim*, was subsequently cast by Argento in his American film debut, *Two Evil Eyes* (1990).



MARK *comes face-to-face with Mater Tenebrarum (Veronica Lazar), whose stand-in provides a false mirror image in this Mario Bava trick shot.*

"Well, what do you believe in?" Sara demands, almost spitefully.

"Only what I can see and touch," Carlo says, smugly. A moment later, he is seeing his murderer and feeling a knife lodged in his neck.

The film also suggests that women with artistic sensibilities—poets and musicians—are more disposed to supernatural influence, because their sensibilities are creative rather than procreative. (After accusing Rose of having strange habits, Prof. Arnold's nurse laughs, almost condescendingly, "Poetry—a pastime *especially* suited to women!") In Argento's mythos, creativity allies women to the Three Mothers, whom Varelli's text describes as "so-called mothers . . . [who] are actually wicked stepmothers, incapable of creating life . . ." The sexual barrier is even evoked by Mater Tenebrarum at the end of this film as she jeers Mark: "Haven't you understood? Mater Suspiriorum! Mater Lachrimarum! Mater Tenebrarum—but *men* call us by a single name . . . a name that strikes terror into every heart . . . They call us Death!"

It could be said that *Inferno* is the story of a man's discovery of his female side. Mark—a student of musicology, and thus predisposed to "sensitivity"—arrives in Rome to investigate the disappearance of his sister, but instead of finding an answer to that question, he discovers the answers his sister was seeking . . . and is baffled, and ultimately awakened, by them. When he bungles into Prof. Arnold's apartment after intuitively exploring the area beneath the soles of his shoes, the pseudonymous Varelli greets him with, "You found the way down, I see. And now I suppose you know who I am."

"No, I don't," answers the hapless hero, who has not even been able to read more than scraps of the letter that brought him to Rome. But as he later flees the blazing building, surviving his literal brush with Death, Mark exits into a whole world of saturated colors that have never touched him before—the magic that is all around us, to borrow a celebrated line from *Suspiria*.

At times, one wishes that Argento was as sensitive to matters of logic as he is to the worlds of magic and color. As with many other Argento films, there is a consistent failure of internal logic about *Inferno*, which is an effect that he courted deliberately, instructing his actors to react in scenes only as they would not normally react. While intriguing in theory, it tends to dilutes the film's overall potency in terms of execution. Even if one accepts a story in which characters willingly lower themselves into watery holes in cellar floors or torn-up floors teeming with ants, the details sometimes reveal a screenwriter not paying enough attention to his own mythos. "Is that story just made up, or is there some truth to it?" Rose asks Kazanian, but in a later scene, we see that the book's own Foreword (which Rose must have read) emphasizes, "This is neither fictional nor a work of the Imagination." It renders her whole visit to the antique dealer pointless, except to gratuitously introduce him and his macabre little shop.

Argento also fails to observe some of the most basic cinematic rituals—for example, identifying his characters. In the *Biblioteca Filosofica*, Sara hears someone whisper her name . . . which would be dramatically permissible if the viewer had previously been told her name; consequently, the viewer does not know what the whisperer is saying. Likewise, when Sara retreats to her apartment with the sportswriter, she calls him Carlo before they have made their introductions . . . which somehow never get made.

Some points of fascination are slyly concealed just below the surface of the narrative. For example, the addresses of the New York City apartment building and the *Biblioteca* share the same number—49—whose only significance would appear to be that it was also the year of Gurdjieff's death. Other important points, buried in the dialogue, are not adequately stressed on the soundtrack—at least not in the dubbed English version. For instance, the opening narration by Varelli (dubbed by Brett Morrison, whose distinctive voice graced many an Italian *peplum* film in the '50s and '60s) overwhelms the viewer with too much information too soon, and its cadence is so complementary to Keith Emerson's piano score that one almost listens to the narration musically, rather than to absorb its meaning. Varelli's mention that the Three Mothers are also known by another "wicked yet terrifying name" tends to go unnoticed, depriving the film's finale of the opportunity to resolve this mystery, which would appear to be a significant measure of its purpose. Also, unless someone is hanging on every spoken word in the film, it is unlikely they will understand Mater Tenebrarum when she tells Mark, "It's all going to burn down, just like before." But in this case, the ambiguity is useful—is she referring to the way her house previously fell, before it was rebuilt by Varelli, or is she referring to

the blaze that consumed the Tanz Akademie at the end of *Suspiria*?

An indirect sequel to *Suspiria*, *Inferno* contains several references to the previous film—not as elements that previously happened, but as signposts of ritual. They begin to manifest during Sara's rainy taxi ride to the *Biblioteca Filosofica*, which in terms of its exaggerated color palette and editing is nearly identical to Susy Banyon's (Jessica Harper's) opening taxi ride in *Suspiria*; in fact, the Freiberg and Rome taxis are both piloted through the rain by the same cabbie (Fulvio Mingozzi). As if the decor of Rose's New York building was not sufficiently similar to Freiberg's Tanz Akademie, the concierge is played by Alida Valli (dubbed by Carolyn De Fonseca), who was in residence as Miss Tanner (a role which Valli dubbed herself) in *Suspiria*. The earlier film's flesh-eating dog is complemented here with flesh-eating cats, its Black Forest is complemented by Central Park, and both narratives depend entirely on relocated artists and students who become engrossed in the mystery of their new residence, penetrate its secrets, and are punished by the very information they seek—natural curiosity crushed out by supernatural death. A metaphor, perhaps, for the risk taken by artists who would dare to look upon the face of their Muse.

The performances are competent, but largely decorative—one is struck, for example, by Irene Miracle's flawless manicure in the opening shots—which is perfectly in keeping with Argento's preference of *mise en scène* over characterization. The characters are largely two-dimensional, and when they speak, Argento's discomfort with English and his obliviousness to American humor are sometimes painfully apparent. (When Sara asks Carlo if he's ever heard of "The Three Sisters," he answers, "You mean those black singers?"). For all its grandiosity and pretentiousness, the film also contains some very basic, inside humor, such as the moment when Mark and Kazanian are passed by two pedestrians during their sidewalk conversation—those pedestrians are assistant directors Andrea Piazzesi and Lamberto Bava. Nevertheless, when the film shuts its mouth and moves forward, at a somnambulent pace, into the unknown, few horror films are quite as harrowing and spellbinding.



ITALIAN *due-foglia.*

Summary

Despite an impossibly loose narrative and its characters' often illogical behavior, *Inferno* is an absorbing mood piece and one of the most stylistically inventive horror films of the 1980s. After the horrendous, career-thwarting problems that beset Mario Bava during the 1970s, *Inferno* was a blessing that allowed him to sail his career to port on a grace note—a major motion picture for 20th Century-Fox, a film that resonated with his own signature touches and proved, beyond a doubt, that his own humble efforts had left a lasting impression on the next generation of Italian filmmakers.

It would seem that some of the bad luck that attached itself to Bava's later years also rubbed off on *Inferno*. The film encountered some unexpected resistance to three brief shots prior to its release in foreign markets. When Mark successfully cuts an opening in the floor of Rose's apartment, a cat enters the apartment and darts through the hole. Moments later, as Mark makes his way through the crawlspace, the scene cuts away three times to shots of the cat devouring a mouse. The third shot ends with the mouse's severed leg falling from the cat's mouth. As Andrea Piazzesi notes, "It's a fact of everyday life that cats eat mice, and everyone is grateful for this. But when you show it on the screen in a movie, suddenly it becomes a scandal!" The cutaways were censored in literally every world market in which the film played, and the sequence remained incomplete until the film's belated arrival on American video. In England, a shot of Kazanian brutally slamming a (stuffed) cat's head against a tabletop, knocking it unconscious, was also deemed unpresentable.

The film's difficulties continued after it was submitted to 20th Century-Fox. The Fox executives who green-lighted the film in 1979 were no longer in office when Argento delivered his final cut. The new regime was unenthusiastic about the picture and declined to release it in the United States. Argento fought very hard to change their minds, but without success. The Internet Movie Database lists a US premiere date of April 2, 1980, but if true, this was a limited booking and not indicative of an actual release. Supporting this view is the fact that no US posters for the film appear to exist. So intensely did American fans of *Suspiria* await the release of *Inferno* that, when it appeared in a 16 mm film catalogue sometime in the early 1980s, it was eagerly pounced upon. One of these excited customers was Chris Steinbrunner, the author of two excellent reference works, *Cinema of the Fantastic* and *The Encyclopedia of Mystery and Detection*, who organized a party around the unofficial "US premiere" of the film in his Manhattan apartment. Unfortunately, the party came to an early end when the print delivered turned out to be a 1953 Fox release of the same title, starring Robert Ryan and Rhonda Fleming!

Dario Argento's *Inferno* did not have its actual US premiere until October 1986, when Fox released it straight to home video on their subsidiary Key Video label. Though the packaging listed a running time of only 83 minutes, the Key Video release was intact, complete with the mousing scene forbidden in so many other countries.





Last Days

"There is only one possible conclusion to a man's life,
and Death is the only subject that punishes those
who are bold enough to contemplate it."
—Mario Bava



LAST PROJECTS

AFTER COMPLETING his work on *Inferno*, Mario Bava returned to the mostly uneventful life he had been living before. Effectively retired, he occasionally advised young colleagues on the art and science of special effects, but most of all he continued to read—especially science fiction, because the international popularity of George Lucas' *Star Wars*, Steven Spielberg's *Close Encounters of the Third Kind* (both 1977) and Ridley Scott's *Alien* (1979) had convinced him that the time was right for an Italian science fiction revival. Indeed, these films had been such boxoffice smashes in Italy that a number of the older Italian sci-fi pictures had been dusted-off for quick reissue, including Antonio Margheriti's *I criminali della galassia* [1965], Pietro Francisci's *2+5: Missione Hydra* [1966], and Bava's own *Terrore nello spazio.*

◀ **BAVA** *strikes a medieval iconic pose, haloed by a lighting scrim, on the set of* ECOLOGIA DEL DELITTO.

Thanks to the local success of these films, Italian producers were becoming more receptive to science fiction proposals. In 1977, for example, Luigi Cozzi was able to mount *Starcrash* (released 1979), an adaptation of the "Stella Starr" comic strip starring British model/actress Caroline Munro, which he directed under the pseudonym "Lewis Coates." The special effects for this film were provided by Bava's "honorary nephew" Armando Valcauda, who in an era of highly expensive effects photography, was proving himself an able successor to his "dear uncle's" brand of economical and imaginative camera trickery. Twenty years later, the special effects seen in major productions are beginning to look so dated that George Lucas felt compelled to "update" his *Star Wars* Trilogy with additional CGI (computer generated imagery) when preparing their theatrical re-release in 1997, while Valcauda's work—admittedly not in the same league—has lost none of its original, naïve, handmade charm.

Bava's problem with finding similar opportunities was not that his ideas were unworkable, but that he was now of retirement age, not terribly motivated, and had not directed a successful picture in nearly a decade. Furthermore, the men and women who had been his colleagues for the past forty years were either retired, dead, or in a different league, so these contacts were now of little use to him.

Bava's work crisis had effected noticeable changes in his overall personal character and habits. The few photographs taken of Bava during this period show a man who looks much older than 65 years of age. When Martin Scorsese arranged to meet him during a trip to Rome, he came away from the encounter convinced that Bava was "like 80." He was no longer the humorous, *bazzica*-loving connoisseur of food and wine described by his colleagues of the 1960s. Bava appears quite healthy and normal in photos taken during the filming of *Cani arrabbiati* in 1974, but a shot of Bava taken on the set of *Inferno*, only five years later, shows him looking gaunt, with dark circles under his eyes, his belt drawn to its tightest notch. When he wasn't working and living amid the camaraderie of his crew, he lost all appetite and seemed to shrivel as he abstained from all earthly pleasures save reading and smoking.

Bava had also developed the bitterness of a creative artist who believes that his career has accomplished nothing. In 1979, he told an interviewer: "I'm convinced that everything I've done is just so much bullshit. I'm an artisan. A romantic artisan, the kind you don't find any more. I made films like I was making chairs . . . As far as their aesthetics are concerned, when I look at one of my films, I feel like throwing up. In my films, you hear dialogue like, 'I am an unconscious psychic.'" [1]

An astounding self-portrait dating from this period shows a wizened Bava, working as a sculptor, using a mallet and chisel to chip a large, triangular block out of one of his own grotesquely swollen testicles.

During this period, Mario found himself inhabiting a situation which mirrored that of his father Eugenio, twenty years earlier. His son Lamberto was about to become a film director in his own right.



BERNICE STEGERS *isn't the type to let something like decapitation stop a beautiful relationship in Lamberto Bava's directorial debut* MACABRO.

In 1979, writer–director Giuseppe "Pupi" Avati and his brother Antonio had an idea for a new horror script, inspired by a 1965 newspaper account of a New Orleans woman who had been discovered preserving her decapitated lover's head in a refrigerator. The question was, What to do with the idea? After directing two horror films that were among the most frightening of the decade—*La casa dalle finestre che ridono/The House With the Laughing Windows* (1976) and *Zeder/Revenge of the Dead* (1983)—Avati suddenly announced, "I don't want to be categorized as a director of thrillers or horror films," and withdrew from the genre. There had also been a personal reason for this retreat: Avati admitted to finding it difficult to live with the horrific scenarios that his imagination was dredging up.

"That whole project started off by chance," Lamberto recounts of his directorial debut, *Macabro/Frozen Terror* (1980). "I received a call from Pupi Avati, whom I didn't know at the time, and he asked me if I would like to make a film with him. I assumed that he was asking me to assist him, but then it slowly dawned on me that he was asking me to *direct* this film!" (Lamberto and Avati were not personally acquainted, but Lamberto had previously served as assistant director to Mario Lanfranchi on the 1974 film *Il bacio*, which Avati had co-written.) "We sat down at a desk together and wrote the script 'Avati-style'—very quickly." While writing the screenplay with the Avatis, Lamberto independently came across another newspaper account that influenced him: "I read about a distraught mother who had taken her dead baby into the garden to play, until the police were alerted," he told interviewers Mike Childs and Alan Jones. "It was the psychology of this sort of obsession that I wanted to deal with in the film." [2]

When the script was completed, Lamberto gave a copy to Mario, seeking his advice. Bava liked the script, but he refused to counsel his son in any way, or to visit the set while he was working. "I'm not saying anything," his father told him, "because this is your picture. I'll see your movie when you finish it, and not before." [3]

Like *La Venere d'Ille, Macabro* was shot in 16 mm, filmed partly on location in New Orleans (which at the time had enticed other Italian horror filmmakers to shoot there, including Lucio Fulci) and in the Roman house of the film's producer. Lamberto worked with a small ensemble cast consisting of Bernice Stegers (a British actress who had received much attention for her appearance in Fellini's *La città delle donne/The City of Women*), Stanko Molnar, Veronica Zinny, and Roberto Posse. Lamberto's relationship with Dario Argento was tapped for a blurb that was prominently featured in the film's promotional campaign, which proclaimed that *Macabro* was "The Film That Frightened Dario Argento, Master of Terror!"

About two months before its official release, in February 1980, Lamberto screened a print of *Macabro* for his father. "He only saw the film when it was completely finished," Lamberto said. "After the screening, he said something to me that I will never forget. He said, '*Maestro*, now I can rest in peace!'"

Macabro was released to Roman theaters on April 17, 1980.

Eight days later, Mario Bava ceased to exist outside the realm of his art.

Fortunately, Mario Bava's last weeks of life were creative and optimistic. While Lamberto was directing *Macabro*, Mario was inspired by talks with Fulvio Lucisano to make some production sketches for their project, *Il vagabondo dello spazio*, which was ultimately never made. It was during this fallow period that he happened to bump into Dardano Sacchetti.

"We met one day by chance," the screenwriter remembers. "Mario had been trying unsuccessfully to make *Il vagabondo dello spazio* for a couple of years, and he really wanted to make a science fiction film, so he asked me if I had any ideas. I had a rough idea and wrote about five or six pages, which he liked and showed to Fulvio Lucisano. Lucisano was in contact with Roger Corman at that time, so he sent him the project. Corman approved it, and Lucisano suggested we start the screenplay." [4]

The script was entitled *Anomalia* ("Anomaly"), a literary title that would never have survived in the event of an American release through Corman's New World Pictures. (One of the science fiction projects green-lighted by New World in 1980—*Mindwarp: An Infinity of Terror*—was ultimately retitled *Galaxy of Terror* for general release in 1981. However, the story of *Anomalia* was beautifully geared to Bava's unique grasp of mystical subjects, otherworldly atmosphere, and visual effects.



SPANISH *one-sheet poster art by Francisco Fernandez Zarza Jano—endorsement by Dario Argento.*

Sacchetti: "The 'anomaly' was at the center of the universe. A team of astronauts goes to find out what is wrong and they discover a wall. The wall is just like the Great Wall of China, dividing the universe in half. All along the wall there are raised engravings of figures, like the Gothic figures of demons and devils and people sick and suffering—and there's a door. The astronauts pass through the door and enter into a world of darkness, a world full of spirits, ghosts, and demons. When the astronauts flee, the figures adorning the wall come to life and pursue them, invading the universe!"

The mind boggles, and the mouth waters, to imagine the kind of movie Bava could have made from such a fantastic premise. Sacchetti wrote the first draft, which Corman is said to have returned with his enthusiastic approval and a few marginal notes. "Mario died a few days later, so the film was never made. After that, Corman was no longer interested in co-producing the film, and [Lucisano] had no intention of producing a science fiction film by himself."

Anomalia eventually *was* made, in a manner of speaking. Sacchetti's synopsis reads like a science fiction metaphor for one of his own later horror scripts: *Demoni*/*Demons*, which Lamberto Bava directed for producer Dario Argento in 1985. In this film, set in the walled city of Berlin, the audience attending a midnight horror show at the Metropol theater find themselves trapped inside, as the monsters onscreen rip their way out into reality, killing some and infecting others with a virulent contagion that turns its victims into demons. (Sacchetti takes credit only for the first, superior half of the film, disowning the second half that was the contribution of Argento's favorite screenwriter, Franco Ferrini.) When *Demoni* was released in the summer of 1985, it became Italy's highest grossing film of the year and made Lamberto Bava a wealthier and more successful filmmaker than his father had ever been. [5] With the similarity of *Anomalia* and *Demoni* in mind, it is tempting to see Lamberto's professional turning point as a kind of *oltre tomba* gift from Mario.

While Dardano Sacchetti was busy writing *Anomalia*, Bava became involved in yet another science fiction project. Anticipating renewed interest in science fiction with the forthcoming release of the *Star Wars* sequel *The Empire Strikes Back*, producers Italo Zingarelli and Roberto Palaggi approached Bava to direct a movie called *Star Express*—which also went by the more enticing Italian title *Il pianeta degli ermafroditi* ("Planet of the Hermaphrodites"). Lamberto Bava describes it as "a science fiction film that was also a kind of thriller . . . It took place in an unknown universe [on another planet], and there were astronauts . . . The thriller aspect was that one of the astronauts had something that would eventually save a planet from destruction." [6] Roy Bava particularly remembers Mario working on "a wonderful drawing of a landslide on an alien planet, and all around the landslide there were the wrecks of spaceships of the strangest shapes; the atmosphere suggested a ghost town in the Old West. It was like the outpost of the stars."

As Bava's ideas for *Star Express* began to crystallize, Fate teased him one last time when another older project, *Radici di paura*, was suddenly green-lighted by Turi Vasile of Laser

1 Dante Matelli, *L'espresso*, May 1979.

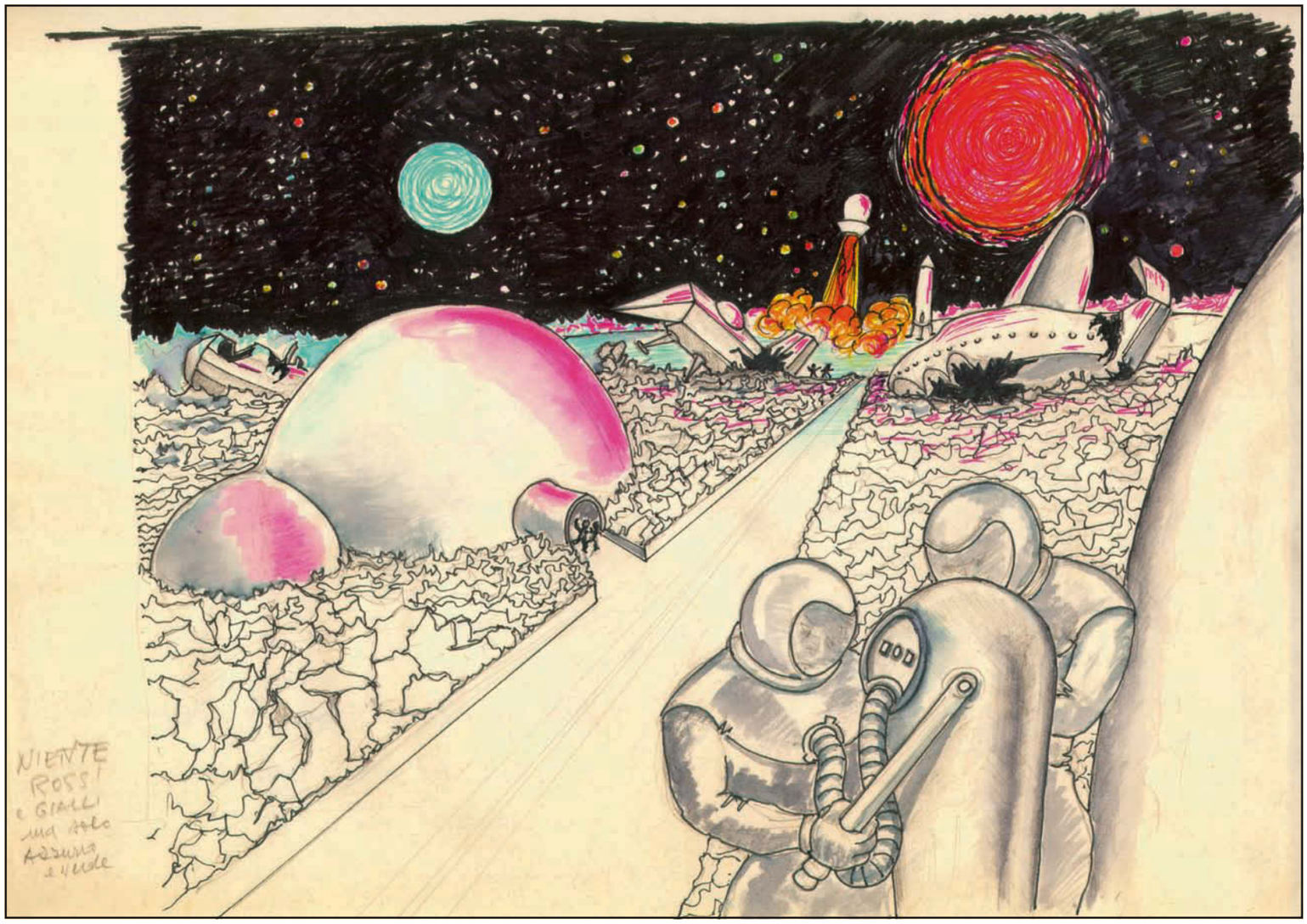
2 Mike Childs, and Alan Jones "Macabre," *Cinefantastique* 11:1, 1980, 8.

3 Lamberto Bava, *Mario Bava Maestro of the Macabre* interview transcript, 2000.

4 All Sacchetti quotes pertaining to *Anomalia* are from Dardano Sacchetti, *Mario Bava Maestro of the Macabre* interview transcript, 2000.

5 Curiously, New World Pictures had nothing to do with the American theatrical release (which was distributed by Ascot Entertainment Group), but when the film first came to home video, it did so under the New World banner.

6 Lamberto Bava.



CONCEPTUAL SKETCH *(pencil, ink, and colored pen) by Mario Bava for the unmade sci-fi adventure STAR EXPRESS.*

Film. "It was going to be a movie about living plants—like *Day of the Triffids*, you know?" remembers Luigi Cozzi. "He was going to do that for Laser Film, a good company, the same company responsible for *Schock*. The producer of *Schock*, Turi Vasile, was also the producer of my film *Alien Contamination* [1980], so he was close with Mario and he also knew the people at Laser. While we were preparing *Alien Contamination*, two blocks away was the Laser office and he met Mario there and they would often talk. It was just going into preproduction."

Due to his age, Bava was required by the production's insurers to have a complete physical examination before he could be permitted to direct. Bava did not tell his doctor about the recurring cramps he had been feeling in his legs and feet (which he attributed to smoking too much) but no matter: he was given a clean bill of health. For the first time in three years, Mario Bava was going to direct a new feature film.

Lamberto and his family visited Mario's house on the afternoon of Friday, April 24, on their way to a weekend outing at the beach house of their friend, Carlo Tuzii. Lamberto: "I remember saying goodbye to my father as I was getting into my car. He said, 'See you on Monday'—and then I never saw him again. That was the last time I saw him alive. Even though it was many years ago, it still feels like yesterday."

Mario Bava died—absorbed into the mystery he had spent so much of his life pondering—in the early morning hours of April 25, 1980, at the age of 65.

Roy Bava: "I had seen him on Friday and he was in great shape, both physically and mentally. We had a lot of fun—told a lot of jokes, as usual. I went with Lamberto and [his wife] Rosanna to spend the weekend at Carlo Tuzii's house in Sperlonga, a house on the sea close to Rome. The ex-husband of my aunt Elena called, and he told Rosanna that something had happened. She told Lamberto that Mario had suffered a heart attack and was very ill; we all had to go home right away. As we were heading back to Rome in the car, Lamberto suddenly said, 'Look, I don't want to get to Rome and find out that he's dead. If he's dead, I want to know now.' Rosanna pulled over to the side of the road and she told us that, yes, Mario was dead."

Without saying anything, Lamberto stepped outside the car and spent some time alone at the side of the road, as the Rome-bound traffic sped by in the night.

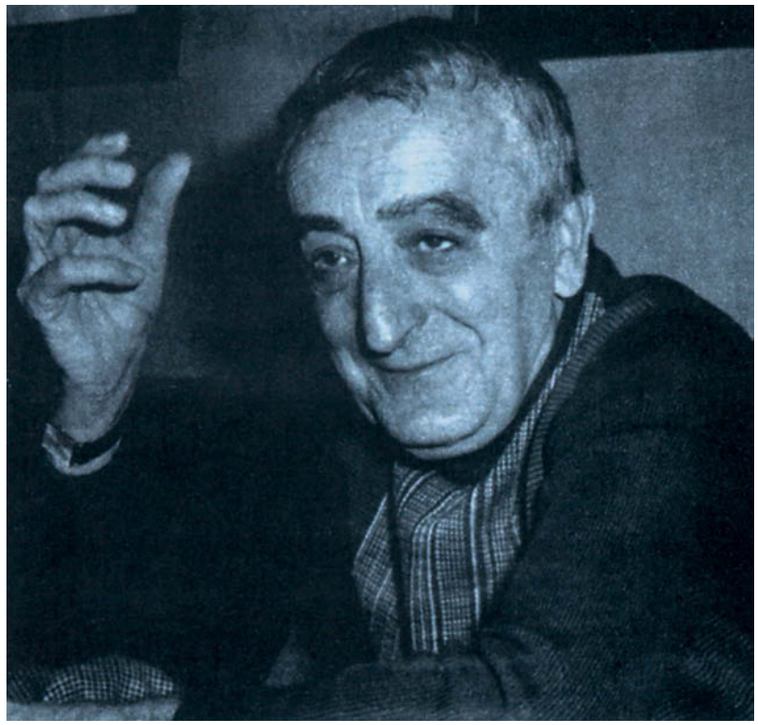
"Mario died on a Saturday night," Roy continues, "and it was the only

Saturday out of 10,000 when I wasn't at home with my grandparents, because I always spent the weekends with them at their house. What my grandmother remembered is, she went to sleep . . . Mario usually stayed up very late to read, and he complained that he had an upset stomach, so he went down to get a bicarbonate from the kitchen. Then he came to bed and went to sleep and my grandmother found out, when she woke up, that he had died. It was very sudden. He must have had the heart attack while he was sleeping."

Through much of their marriage, Mario's wife Iole suffered from heart palpitations and she had tormented him with a morbid fantasy that her excessive weight might someday induce her to have a heart attack. As Andrea Piazzesi puts it bluntly, "She was the kind of person who thought she was having a heart attack constantly, until the other person had the heart attack." Iole apparently spent much of her life envisioning her own death, and Mario came to share this morbidity with her, to the extent of expressing, exploring, enshrining it in his work. Echoes of Iole can be found everywhere in Bava's filmography: jovial, bed-ridden Aunt Ethel dropping dead in *La ragazza che sapeva troppo* . . . dead, vindictive Mildred haunting her husband in *Il rosso segno della follia* . . . the skeleton of Elena in her bridal gown, hidden away from the world in a cloistered room in *Lisa and the Devil* . . . the twinned women of *La maschera del demonio* and *La Venere d'Ille*, half Madonna and half monster. The funereal atmosphere of his films, the way that they entwine fear and death with sexuality, romance, and nostalgia, form an oblique love letter from Bava to his wife. Now the dead lover at the heart of Bava's filmography was revealed to be Mario himself, and Iole would have to live with the memory of that irony.

As Lamberto Bava later pointed out to Alfredo Leone, Mario died on the day which Italians celebrate as "Liberation Day"—an appropriate exit for a man who, first of all, had been born as the first World War was declared, and who, secondly, had been a devoted but less-than-happy husband.

"I think it was the best way for him [to go]," Lamberto says, "since he died still young, full of strength and life. He was the sort of man who would have suffered a great deal in old age, I think. He died as he lived—'without pestering anyone,' as he would have put it."



***MARIO BAVA** photographed during a 1975 PHOTON interview.*

"The last time we met, I asked him, 'Where would you like to go after you die?'" remembers Daria Nicolodi. "Obviously, we weren't expecting him to die, because of a heart attack you die suddenly . . . but part of him was a Greek part that was always attracted to thoughts of Death, which is very near to the Mediterranean culture, this constant thought. He wasn't thinking any negative thoughts about himself, because he was so full of projects. Anyway, he told me that he would like to disappear into the desert like Simon Magus, who vanished into the desert with a prostitute, a woman he found in a bordello, whom he was convinced was the personification of Sophia, the incarnation of Divine Wisdom. It's a strange idea, but definitely good . . . We also talked about how gardening was beautiful, like a kind of alchemy, and I mentioned that I had never done it myself, in reality. He encouraged me to try—and a flower grew. It was the first flower that I had planted myself—I don't know the name in English, a red flower—and my first idea was to bring it to him. It was then that I learned he had died. The family let me sit with him for half an hour. He was buried with my flower."

Andrea Piazzesi was another who came to the house to pay his respects. "We heard that Mario had died and we ran to the house. Who should open the door for us but a nun . . . *with the same exact face as Mario!* Mario had a sister who was a nun, and she looks like him. For a moment, it looked very funny because, well, Mario was such a nice person, we didn't want to believe that he was dead. So, for a moment, we hoped that it really was Mario playing a trick on us! And he was the kind of person who would play such a trick, you know?"

Mario Bava was interred at the Prima Porta necropolis in Flaminio, an hour's drive north of Rome. "There weren't many people present at his funeral," recalls Daria Nicolodi. "There were very few people from the film community—only a producer [Italo Zingarelli], Lamberto, Dario Argento, and myself were there as representatives. His sister arrived with forty nuns. Mario, however, wasn't very religious."

His sister alone represented the women of the Bava family at the funeral. Iole Bava was too distressed to attend her husband's funeral; neither did their daughter Elena go, nor did Mario's much-adored granddaughter Georgia, who was away at a boarding school in Dublin, Ireland. Georgia's alma mater—St. Raphaela's Secondary School for the handmaidens of the Sacred Heart of Jesus, in Stillorgan County—may seem an odd and distant choice of school, but as she explains: "That school was chosen simply because I had gone to the Handmaidens of the Sacred Heart of Jesus Institute in Rome since I was 5 years old. The teachers were nuns of the same order as Mario's sister. When the time came for me to go to secondary school, I wanted to learn English, but in England this order had only a convent, not a school—and I did not want to become a nun myself! So it was decided that I would go to Ireland, where the order had a school." Before Georgia left Rome, Mario sat down with her and told her how lucky she was to have this opportunity, and he made her promise him that she would learn to speak English. He confessed that his own failure to master this second language was one of his greatest personal regrets. If he could live his life over again, he told her, he would learn English and perhaps move to America.

The relationship between Georgia and her grandfather was so close that the family kept the news of Mario's death a secret from her until she returned to Rome from school at the end of June, two months later.

"She was far away and had no relatives around," Roy explains, "so they waited for her to come back before telling her. She told me later that she had an intuition of what had happened, while she was in Dublin. She knew that something had happened to Mario, because he used to call her maybe once every ten days. He would call to see how she was feeling, if everything was all right, and suddenly, the calls stopped coming. So she had a feeling."

"I did have the feeling that something had happened," Georgia elaborates. "I thought maybe to Mario, maybe and more possibly to Iole, my

grandmother, but never, in any case, that I would not see either of them for the rest of my life . . . I imagined someone must have been in hospital. Mother Margareth, one of the head nuns of my school (an enlightened woman whom I really liked), took me aside one day, just before school ended, and told me that life cannot always be the way we'd like it to be, that people we loved will always keep loving us from above. I did not want to ask what she meant; I did not want to know . . . I only had the certainty it was Mario, when I saw my dad at the airport, his eyes still red and wet . . ."

Mario Bava's funeral was small and intimate, in keeping with the wishes of his family. He had worked with virtually everyone in the Italian film industry, and surely more people would have attended had the news of his passing been released. One of Bava's many friends who passed the day unknowingly was his former producer and friend, Alfredo Leone.

"I'll never forget the day I heard that Mario had died," Leone says. "I met a fellow in a production office in Rome, and it came up in conversation that he had worked with Carlo Rambaldi. I said, 'Oh, Carlo! Mario Bava and I used Carlo on several of our pictures together!" And his expression changed and he said, 'Oh, Mario Bava, yes . . . I was so sorry to hear that he died.' I said, 'What?' He said, 'Yes, about three weeks ago.' It knocked the wind out of me. I went numb. The more I thought about it, I felt grateful that we had ended on good terms, that we had our reconciliation, but I also kicked myself because we didn't make use of it to continue working together. And now that chance was gone."

The press was not informed of Bava's passing until April 29, when—ironically—the front page of every newspaper in the world announced the death of the world's most famous film director, the recently knighted Sir Alfred Hitchcock. Hitchcock's passing effectively eclipsed any mention of Bava's death in the newspapers, which "the Italian Hitchcock" might have taken as a great personal favor. Furthermore, when the American show business newspaper *Variety* finally got around to reporting Bava's death, their eulogy gave him short shrift and credited him with movies not identified with their proper American release titles, but with rough translations of the Italian originals—movie titles which had never appeared on any screen.

Less than a week later, on May 1, American director Henry Levin—who had co-directed *Le meraviglie di Aladino* with Mario Bava, and followed that assignment by co-directing *The Wonderful World of the Brothers Grimm* (1962) with Hungarian director and animator George Pal—also died of a heart attack. The level of coincidence became macabre when, on the very next day, May 2, Pal himself also succumbed to cardiac arrest. The director of such films as *The Time Machine* (1960), *7 Faces of Dr. Lao* (1964) and *Doc Savage, the Man of Bronze* (1975), Pal had spent the majority of his last decade, like Bava, trying unsuccessfully to get a number of promising science fiction projects off his sketchpad and onto the screen.

Three months later, on August 1, British film director Terence Fisher—whose 1958 Hammer film *Dracula/Horror of Dracula* had been the Italian boxoffice success responsible for jump-starting the moribund horror genre in Italy, making the financing of Bava's *La maschera del demonio* possible—died in England. He had spent the last seven years of his life similarly inactive, looking ahead to films he would never make.

In a span of only three months, four of the most important names in cinematic horror and fantasy—Hitchcock, Pal, Fisher and Bava—were no longer of this earth.

Daria Nicolodi penned a touching memoir of Mario Bava which appeared, two months after his death, in the Italian magazine *L'Europeo* 26 (June 24, 1980). She wrote movingly about his importance as an artist, as a personality, and as a friend:

"In my opinion, no cinematic culture can be complete when so many people remain unfamiliar with the works of Bava. Among these, I include those newspaper critics who dismissed him with three worn-out words—'modest,' 'artisan,' and 'pioneer'—and never condescended to see Bava's films themselves, sending their second-stringers instead. For me, and many others more important than I, it was educational beyond words to work with this 60-year-old gentleman, as animated as a boy, and rather like a fairy godfather, in that he was able to maintain a perfect command of his set, with no more forceful trait than his own gentleness.

"Once in a while, during the break between *Schock and La Venere d'Ille*, I would visit him—never for very long—and he would describe to me incredible lighting tricks, lightning bolts made from stripes of phosphorous and sheets of blue glass, 3-dimensional miniatures, fires . . . all episodes from a younger era, evoking from the abyss of time an impression of untold secrets about the miracle of cinematography.



DARIA NICOLODI *as she appears in Lamberto Bava's film LE FOTO DI GIOIA.*

"He behaved with a friendly simplicity, trying amuse us all—workmen, technicians, actors—like children with toys: and everything moved along so quickly, we were sometimes afraid that his efforts wouldn't succeed. We all felt like children—like *amazed* children, but at the same time, full of liking and admiration for this conscientious, attentive, older child in whose creation we were all involved.

"If Bava is still far from achieving a position of respect, it is doubtful that his genius will be forgotten because, like no other in the play of light and shadow, here everything was the doing of one mysterious *Maestro*. New devices, special effects achieving any number of objectives, all kinds of crazy tricks continually sprung from Bava, who was motivated by an indefatigable search for perfection and often worked with very little means or assistance. An inborn acumen, a deep familiarity with the laws of optics, and a tremendous intensity of concentration resulted in original and unique achievements. Some of the things I'm reminded of are the cardboard cutouts that, in his golden hands, became the dreadful shadow figures of *Schock*, or his gigantic glass paintings of New York for Dario Argento's *Inferno*, or the spectre of Death from *Operazione paura*, which looked like a little girl with blonde hair."

One month after Bava's death, the French leftist newspaper *Libération* published an interview which Bava had granted back in the spring of 1977. Perhaps because he understood himself to be addressing a different audience in this interview, Bava spoke about his work in an unusually sober, unembarrassed, even intellectual fashion.

"The whips, the masks, and the knives you see in my films allow me to have some fun with the idea of death, the amusement of conveying the smell and taste of it," he said. "The Beyond—which I don't see as any sort of consolation, which is a complete unknown, which *allows* us to continue to live—is such an enigma that we would rather not ponder its possible consequences . . . The monsters in my films don't exist; they are the twisted visions of people on the brink of mental illness and sexual aberration, who are striving for sanity . . . Barbara Steele had the perfect look to be a necrophilic star, but not to be a damsel in distress. The cinema's great murderers have never been able to escape themselves. You remember Lon Chaney Jr. and his tragic attachment to his father; Bela Lugosi, who slept in a coffin; and Boris Karloff, whose health I probably ruined when we were making *I tre volti della paura* together, not being a very good nursemaid . . . Generally, my films don't reflect an outgrowth of the tradition. They stand independently of a technocratic society founded on progress and science; they appeal to the devotées of the Inexplicable, who find delirium stimulating and therapeutic. Look at the American counterculture, hooked on drugs. Today, they say the counterculture no longer exists, but this is only because it has become so fashionable and, with astonishing speed, has become the culture itself. On the other hand, my films are not scientific and reflect no particular belief in science. They are more closely allied to romanticism and preoccupied with the mysteries of nature (much like the ecologists), with visions and religious epiphanies, with sects . . . The girl's frigidity in *La ragazza che sapeva troppo*, the incest *in La maschera del demonio*, and the masochism in *La frusta e il corpo* are, to me, very reminiscent of Greek mythology. I'm very Greek for an Italian—heretic, rather than Catholic. It's my dream to someday attain the esoteric knowledge of Basilides, Valentinus, Carpocrates, or that marvelous vagabond Simon Magus, whose constant companion was a woman from a brothel in Tyre, in whom he recognized the reincarnation of Sophia—the Divine Wisdom predating God." [7]

Basilides, Valentinius, Carpocrates, and Simon Magus were all figureheads of Gnosticism in the Alexandria of the second century, A.D. Bava's familiarity with these names shows that his reading had a reach far exceeding Russian and pulp fiction, and also proves that the mysticism of his films was not just decorative, but rooted in deep and serious study of alternative faiths. The last part of this quote is also intriguing because it shows that Bava identified with "that marvelous vagabond" Simon Magus, who was in fact the basis for the character of Simon Wagstaff in the Kilgore Trout novel *Venus on the Half-Shell*, which Bava had intended to film as *Il vagabondo della spazio*.

Naturally, the impact of Mario's death was most devastating to his son, Lamberto. "You have to realize, he was not only my father, but also my best friend," he explains. "After his death, I did nothing for a year but try to deal with my emotions. The death of one's father is a painful ordeal for anyone; but to lose a talented and considerate father is a greater ordeal still."

Though critically well-received and somewhat profitable, *Macabro* did not result automatically in a directorial career for Lamberto Bava. The grieving son did as his father had done after his own directorial debut, by returning to the safe haven of work that was most familiar to him—working as Dario Argento's assistant director on *Tenebrae* (1982), in which he also made a short onscreen cameo as an elevator repairman. Lamberto returned to directing in 1983 with *La casa con la scala nel buio/A Blade in the Dark*, a sometimes effective *giallo* that starred Andrea Occhipinti as a film composer scoring a horror picture at a friend's apartment house, which happens to be stalked by a transvestite serial killer (played by Lamberto's assistant, Michele Soavi).

Next, Lamberto travelled to Miami, Florida to direct the first of two films starring model Michael Sopkiw, *Oceano rosso/Devilfish* (1984), about attacks on swimmers by a prehistoric strain of carnivorous fish. The second, an action film titled *Blastfighter* (1984), was filmed in Atlanta, Georgia. Both jobs were taken for the money, and Lamberto had no illusions about their quality. I spoke to him by telephone when he was on location in Atlanta, and when I asked if these films were going to be good, he laughed self-deprecatingly and said, "Noooooo." For both films, he adopted the sentimental pseudonym, "John Old Jr."

Lamberto's career took a startling change in fortune with his next picture, *Demoni/Demons*, based on a script by Dardano Sacchetti that was a sort of earthbound rewrite of the unfilmed script *Anomalia*. Produced by Dario Argento and shot partially in (then West) Berlin, the film—about a virulent virus, communicated by a horror film at a midnight screening, that turns its audience into vicious demons—surprised everyone by becoming the top-grossing Italian feature of 1985. The film's success raised Lamberto's star as a filmmaker to such an extent that his next movie, *Morirai a mezzanotte/You'll Die at Midnight* (1986, another of his "Noooooo" pictures), was released with the curious legend, "Lamberto Bava Presents . . . a film by John Old Jr." In 1986—the centenary of Eugenio Bava's birth—Lamberto directed a sequel to his great success, *Demoni 2: L'incubo ritorna/Demons 2: The Nightmare Continues*, which marked the addition to his crew of his son Fabrizio as second assistant director.

As it became increasingly difficult for Italian directors to fund theatrical features, Lamberto moved into television, where he shot some dramatic segments (called *Turno di notte*) for Dario Argento's short-lived television show *Giallo*, followed by a number of mostly weak-tea, but still elegantly designed horror films in 1987. One of these pictures, *La casa dell'ogro/The Ogre*, received limited theatrical release under the title *Demoni 3*. (Michele Soavi's *La chiesa* was undertaken as *Demoni 3* before deciding to dissociate itself from the franchise. Finally, Umberto Lenzi directed the official *Demoni 3* in 1991.) In 1987, Lamberto directed a quartet of TV-movies for the Italian showcase *Brivido giallo: Una notte al cimetero/Graveyard Disturbance*, *Per sempre/The Changeling 2: The Return*, *La casa del ogro/House of the Ogre*, and *A cena col vampiro/Dinner With a Vampire*. Each of these films was robustly designed by Massimo Antonello Geleng (a former art director for Fellini, subsequently allied to Michele Soavi and Dario Argento), but only *Per sempre* stood out, demonstrating greater directorial confidence and subtlety than Lamberto had shown before. The following year, Lamberto joined forces with Andrea Piazzesi to form ANFRI S.r.l., a production company under

7 Levin Safao, *Libération*, May 5, 1980.

which banner he directed four horror/suspense films for the proposed Reteitalia TV-movie series *Alta tensione*. These included *Testimone oculare* ("Eyewitness"), *Il principe del terrore* ("The Master of Terror"), and two outstanding pictures that represent his finest solo work to date, *Il gioko*[8] ("School of Fear") and—a film of particular interest—*L'uomo che non voleva morire* ("The Man Who Didn't Want to Die"), based on the Giorgio Scerbanenco story which Mario had unsuccessfully tried to film in the early 1970s.

"Mario wrote a script together with Rafael Azcona," Lamberto remembers. "It was supposed to be a big movie, but it didn't get made. Many years later, I took the unfilmed script and made a TV movie out of it."

Azcona, a novelist and screenwriter since the late 1950s, is best remembered for writing the Marco Ferreri films *Una storia moderna/The Conjugal Bed* and *La donna scimmia/The Ape Woman* (both 1963), *La Grande Bouffe* (1973), and *Ciao maschio/Bye Bye Monkey* (1978), and Fernando Trueba's *Belle Époque* (1992). The unrelenting, darkly ironic quality of Azcona's work makes it most regrettable that his collaboration with Mario was never realized. Working from a script by Gianfranco Clerici (Lucio Fulci's *Non si sevizia un paperino/Don't Torture the Duckling*, Ruggero Deodato's *Cannibal Holocaust*), Lamberto rose to the occasion and produced an excellent, hard-hitting crime thriller worthy of comparison to *Cani arrabbiati*. Unfortunately, the *Alta tenzione* series never made it to air, and the four films that ANFRI produced for it, including *L'uomo che non voleva morire* and *Il gioko*, were given scant television release at best.

Lamberto's next project found him moving onto hallowed ground: a color remake—in name only, really—of *La maschera del demonio* (1988), scripted by Massimo De Rita. The Reteitalia production was more faithful to Gogol's "Viy" than Mario



DARIO ARGENTO, *Lamberto Bava, and cameraman Gianlorenzo Battaglia film the air vent sequence of DEMONI with actress Fiore Argento.*

Bava's version had been, but critical reaction to the film was harsh, overlooking the power of some well-staged horror sequences involving the special makeup effects artistry of Sergio Stivaletti.

The commercial failure of these ventures, coupled with Lamberto's opting out of the *Demoni* franchise, created obstacles in his career and he worked in commercial and industrial films until 1991, when he succeeded in pitching an original script (co-written with Teodoro Agrimi) to P.A.C.: *Corpo mosaico/Body Puzzle* (1991). Thanks to the casting of Joanna Pacula and Tomas Arana, this ferocious giallo succeeded in scoring international theatrical distribution—a first for Lamberto since *Demoni 2*—though the family luck returned to form when American prints credited the film's direction to "Larry Louis." *Corpo mosaico* also encountered post-production problems when the family of composer Carl Orff objected to its use of Orff's "*Carmina Burana*" and demanded its removal, which took some of the bite out of its horror sequences.

Lamberto Bava regained his popular niche with *Fantaghirò/Cave of the Golden Rose* (1991), a winning, three-hour television fantasy inspired by the writings of Italo Calvino that scored enormous ratings. Its success prompted six epic-length sequels, again bringing Lamberto greater wealth and success than his father had ever known. Starring Alessandra Martines and Kim Rossi-Stuart, *Fantaghirò* scored enormous ratings and proved popular throughout Europe, especially in Germany, prompting four epic-length sequels that Lamberto directed between 1992 and 1996. During this time, and after, he branched out into other sword-and-sorcery epics for Italian television, including *Desideria e l'anello del drago/The Dragon's Ring* (1994), *Sorellina e il principe del sogno* (1996, with Christopher Lee), *La principessa e il povero/The Princess and the Pauper* (1997, with Anna Falchi and Max von Sydow), and the miniseries *Caraibi/Pirates of the Caribbean* (1998, with Mario Adorf and Anna Falchi), which was inspired by the Disneyland ride and subsequently inspired Disney's own big-budget film version in 2003, starring Johnny Depp.

Now divorced from his second wife Rosanna, Lamberto Bava divides his time today between homes in Rome and Cuba. As this book goes to press, Bava is making his long-awaited return to the horror genre with two new features: *The Torturer* (2005) and *Ghost Son* (2006). While *The Torturer*, shot on digital video, is described as a savage horror film about entrapment and tests of cruelty in the vein of the American hit *Saw* (2004), *Ghost Son*—co-scripted by Bava and Silvia Ranfagni—is about a widow (Laura Harring) who gives birth to a child that is the demonic reincarnation of her late husband, a more explicit return to themes previously explored in *Schock*. Italian critic Lorenzo Codelli, who saw both films at the 2006 Puchon International Film Festival in South Korea, praised Lamberto's latest offerings: "*The Torturer* is a modest but amusing DV movie, with a lot of gore and some black humor," he told me. "And I liked *Ghost Son* very much, one of his best efforts. The script might be a mix of *déja vus*, but the direction is really subtle, the scope camerawork superb, and all the performances well above standards. Korean audiences were thrilled by the movie."

As incredible as it may seem, Lamberto Bava's forty-plus year career in the cinema now embraces a longer time span and a greater number of films than were ever signed by Mario Bava. Despite this, his work continues to be overshadowed by his father's legacy and he is naturally aware of this fact. "Whenever my work is mentioned, I am always remembered as the son of Bava," he acknowledges. "This used to irritate me, and I fought against it, wanting to be myself, but now I accept it—I accept who I am—and I take every reminiscence of my father as a very great compliment."

In a sense, Lamberto has achieved something in his own career that his father was never able to do. With over thirty films to his credit, he is recognized as an important commercial filmmaker in his own country, as well as internationally. He is also a respected screenwriter and producer, which has empowered him to continue working as a director, and he is widely considered as one of the best assistant directors in the history of Italian cinema. Like Mario, Lamberto rejects any suggestion that he is an artist; he doesn't see himself as working on the same level as his favorite directors (Ridley Scott, David Cronenberg, and Joe Dante, to name a few), but his career has been busy, fruitful, lucrative, and satisfying. It is also worth noting that Lamberto has managed to find a niche in the crowded realm of Italian fantasy that is allied to the work of his father and grandfather, yet completely his own. His fairy tale miniseries—which show the influence of Ridley Scott's *Legend* (1985)—are a unique contribution to a family legacy that is now well into its second century. If critical appreciation has eluded Lamberto Bava, this is because it has been his aim to entertain audiences rather than please critics, and because his best and most serious work has not been widely seen.

THE NEXT *Generation: Georgia Bava poses with her son, Mario.*



After working as an architect in Venice for more than a decade, Elena Bava returned to Rome with her husband, whom she married at the age of 27. "She lived away from Rome for a few years, until she was 32 or 33," says her niece Georgia. "Then she and her husband bought a house near my grandparents, so she could be nearer to her family—to her father, mostly. She and her husband divorced the same year that Mario died."

In 1980, deeply affected by the death of her father, Elena abandoned her work in architecture and came to terms with her loss by embracing the traditional family business of sculpture. Today, she sculpts primarily in bronze, but also works in Fiberglas and terracotta. Her work has been exhibited several times at the La Pigna gallery in Rome and at the Atelier der Anderen-Art in Basel, and they can be seen and purchased through her website at *http://web.tiscali.it/etiab/index.htm.*

Several months after returning home from Dublin and being told of her grandfather's death, 15-year-old Georgia Bava resumed her education at a school in Rome. It was there, on October 25, 1980, that she met and befriended Alberto Maria Brusco, the young man who would become her husband twelve years later, in October 1992. Alberto never met Mario Bava in the flesh, but Georgia arranged an introduction: "I remember, soon after we met, ditching school with

8 *There is no such word as "gioko"* in the Italian language; the word is here deliberately misspelled—from "*gioco*" (meaning "joke"), in the manner of Stephen King's *Pet Sematary*—as an indication of the children at the heart of its story.



BAVA—*The New Generation: Fabrizio "Roy" Bava on the set of Dario Argento's* IL CARTAIO.

Alberto, taking the number 201 bus and taking him to the cemetery, because I wanted them to meet." After completing secondary school in Rome, she went to college in Paris at La Sorbonne for a year, where she learned French, and completed her education in Rome at the University La Sapienza, majoring in Art History. One year before she graduated, Georgia began working part time for a prominent Roman auction house specializing in fine art, and she has continued to work in this field, she laughs, "since 1989—as they say on good whiskeys!" Although interested in the cinema, her great personal passions are early 20th century art and literature, particularly the abstract paintings of Wassily Kandinsky and the writings of James Joyce, which she discovered while attending school in Dublin. She did flirt with a career in film production, when Lamberto hired her to work as his continuity girl on some television commercials, but she didn't enjoy the boredom of the set experience and happily resumed her life and career in the real world. On July 15, 1995, Georgia and Alberto Brusco became the parents of a daughter named Martina, followed on March 31, 1998, by a son—whom they named Mario.

As is rapidly becoming common knowledge, Georgia's younger brother has continued in the footsteps of his forefathers. "I had many different careers in mind," says Roy Bava, "but I was really crazy about films and the on-set atmosphere. All movies, not just horror. Mario was always giving Georgia and me pocket money to go to the movies. I always liked watching them and decided to become involved. I remember Mario advising me to find a serious job; he wanted me to become a lawyer or a surgeon—but, at the same time, he was always asking me to help him out! Lamberto would never invite me on the set of *Inferno*; he was very busy and didn't want to worry about keeping his eye on a 7-year-old kid. But Mario always took me with him. He'd say, 'You sit there—watch and learn.' The same thing happened with Lamberto: he'd wake up at the same time as Mario, ready to go to school and when they left together, he would say to Lamberto, 'Why are you going to school? They're not teaching you anything special. Come to the set with me instead.' Mario did tell me to do what I believed in, what I liked in life, and I've done that."[9]

At the age of 18, after finishing high school, Roy spent three weeks on the set of *Demoni* in a more serious "watch and learn" capacity, and then graduated to the official position of second assistant on *Demoni 2*. Though he was still very young and inexperienced, not quite ready to fully embrace a career, things began to happen for him. After *Demoni 2*, that film's producer Dario Argento started the preproduction of his next feature, *Opera*. "Dario called me to ask if I wanted to be his third AD, so I started on that with Michele Soavi for a few weeks," Roy recalls. "Then Lamberto started his own series of TV movies—*Graveyard Disturbance*, etc.—so I left *Opera*. Lamberto told me, if I really was convinced the film industry was for me, that I should go and work with him on those. By this time, I had already done five movies with him as a trainee volunteer—I had also worked on the *Giallo* TV show (my father directed the *'Turno di Notte'* segments)—so I asked Dario if I could leave, that it would be best [meaning more experience], and he graciously agreed."

After that series of films ended, Roy continued his education and also served two years of compulsory national service in the Italian army. In 1993, he completed his education at the University of California at Los Angeles, where he perfected his English. "What many people don't know," he reveals, "is that I wrote the very first draft of *La chiesa/The Church* in LA at UCLA. No one knows that or wants to remember. Lamberto was supposed to direct *Demoni 3*, which became *La chiesa*. What's in the movie that came from me was the whole opening with the Knights Templar. After six months, Lamberto dropped out because of scheduling conflicts, and told Dario to let Michele Soavi do it."

Roy later assisted his father on the ambitious *Fantaghirò* miniseries. "We produced 200 minutes of TV, in costume, on location and with special effects in less than eight weeks," he says with pride. "That is when you're the most creative: when you're up against it." More recently, he has branched out to assist other directors, including Vanna Paoli (*Accidental Detective*, 2000), Guido Chiesa (*Il partigiano Johnny/Johnny the Partisan*, 2000), and Dario Argento (*Il cartaio/The Card Player*, 2004). Roy's affiliation with Argento finds the First Family of Italian Fantasy Cinema now entrenched in its fourth generation.

"I've worked with many directors, but the only two I ever really wanted to work for were Dario and [Bernardo] Bertolucci," Roy admits. "So, when Dario called me, I was thrilled. I later found out that he had called me many times before, but I was always away on other movies. The same thing happened with Roberto Begnini; he wanted me for *Pinocchio*, but apparently could never contact me; I didn't even know he had tried! I didn't know anything about *Il*

cartaio because I haven't been in Rome for the past year, really. I knew about *Occhiali neri* ["Black Sunglasses," another planned Argento project] mainly because Dario and Lamberto always get together at Christmas. It's a tradition. I'm always meeting Dario on a family basis, so he never mentioned movies to me, apart from the ones he had recently seen and liked. It never ever got around to, 'Why don't you come and work for me?' or 'Why don't you ever ask me to work with you?' Then, out of the blue, he called me. I asked when we had to start and he said, 'Monday.' There was so much to do! The first time I met Dario for this movie, we met in Tomaso Calevi's office, and I was expecting to go though the schedule. But no! I was whisked off to Franco Ferrini's house to help alter the script. I was really impressed by that, as I didn't expect to become so creatively involved so quickly! But [Dario] really valued my opinion and that was a great feeling. One of his greatest qualities is that he gets you so involved and inspired you want to do the best for him."

Asked to describe what he found most exhilarating about working with Argento, Roy says, "There are so many things about him, but mainly, he's a true genius . . . I can't tell you how many times we've had hour-long phone conversations after a hard day on location. He's this mine field of ideas, creativity and possibilities, and he loves talking them all through to energize and get you on the same page as himself. That's the best way of working and I appreciate that so much. As a person, I see Dario as part of my family. Working with him in such close quarters, I feel our emotional connection in a way that goes beyond the work ethic. That's important to me and it makes my job feel less like work. The worst part is that he's not easy to work with. He changes so mercurially . . . but that can be fun, in a weird way. Many people in his crew, who he has worked with before, know they must be as elastic as possible with him. Anyone who has rigid views and working methods and looks at the clock are not the best people to surround him. He's an organic director and this poses many problems. I struggle to try and make people understand him, and that takes a lot of effort. Sometimes we aren't rowing in the same direction and it's my job to make sure everyone is pulling their weight. You can't work with Dario with your handbrake on; you have to go with the flow. He told me once that fun was something you had at the seaside and on holiday—not while you're making a film! It's stressful, but you know that going in . . . I had similar difficulties with my father. [Sometimes I would wonder] 'Is he mad at me because I'm his son and I've let him down, or is he just mad at my job description?' It's a hard call sometimes. It's usually because he's pissed off with someone else and you are in the closest range; it's nothing personal. I'm Dario's shield. Confrontation is always the best way, though; don't let things simmer. Dario knows it's my job to assist him in bringing his vision to the screen and fights come with the territory. We are comfortable with each other and that's important."

Roy also cites an interesting example to show how close his creative bond with Argento has already become: "I won't do second unit directing now, if I'm the first AD. It's too hard. But the other day, we had three hours to achieve twelve shots because traffic had caused some equipment delays. So we filmed different scenes back-to-back, together. At one point, we called 'Action' at exactly the same time. I would *only* do that for Dario—not even for my father!"

Roy's ease at communicating in English helped *Il cartaio* to become the most naturally and convincingly spoken of Argento's many attempts at English-language filmmaking, and the film itself turned out to be Argento's most effective effort since Lamberto Bava was serving as his assistant in the early 1980s. Roy is presently regarded as one of the top three assistant directors in the Italian film industry, but he downplays any suggestion that he should become a director in his own right, as Eugenio, Mario, and Lamberto did before him. "Perhaps I will become a full time director one day," he allows, "but the only things I've been offered so far have been TV movies. I prefer film and want to be part of a meaningful production. I'm always asked to be the Italian First AD on any big American movies that come to Italy. I turned down *Gangs of New York* because I didn't want to be in the situation of arguing with the American AD crew. That's not challenging to me at all. Often, saying you are a director in Italy means that you are really unemployed. I can't afford that. It's not your film debut that's the problem, anyway. Most people have one film in them, but what about the second and third, when artistic exhaustion sets in? I don't want to put myself in that position. It's a tough profession."

In addition to inheriting Mario's personal library, Roy also inherited his grandfather's devotion to reading. "I have a passion for literature and that came from Mario," he confirms. "He read so much, often a book a day. His thirst for knowledge was contagious. Often, after a long, hard day's shooting, he would stay up until 3:00 in the morning—reading. It relaxed him and nurtured his soul. When I worked on a film with the rock star Luciano Ligabue, it was a tough movie, filmed at night in the summer. But even though I didn't finish until 5:00 in the morning, I would still need to read for a few hours to calm myself down. That's Mario's fault!"

Roy lives in Rome in a church under the second largest dome in the city. A spiral staircase of forty-two steps leads up to the apartment that Mario secured for his grandson when Roy was still a child, in 1974. In the living room, surrounded by some of the original frescos which the entire Bava family helped to restore, hang two pieces of framed art by Mario Bava. One depicts the temptation of St. Anthony, and the other is an original drawing that reflects how Mario saw the protagonist of a book he had daydreamed about optioning and turning into a movie: *The Hobbit*.

It seems that Roy Bava has lived well by the three rules for happiness once proposed to him by his grandfather. Not yet 40, he has already travelled widely, been married and divorced, and isn't at home often enough to keep a pet. His appearance in the *Mario Bava Maestro of the Macabre* documentary shows him to be articulate, charismatic, and undaunted by the prospect of public appearances. His grandfather would be very proud of his talent, his personal charm, and his lack of personal or professional inhibition.

Mario Bava's wife, Iole, survived her husband by more than a decade. According to Roy, whenever he visited his grandmother in the years after Mario's passing, she broke into tears at the sight of him, crying, "You look so much like your grandfather!" She died on July 7, 1994, at the age of 79.

"It happened very suddenly," describes Georgia Bava. "She wasn't sick at all. She was alone and had a very high temperature, and she thought something might be wrong with her heart. She called my father and my aunt and asked them to meet her at the hospital. By the time they arrived, she was dead. The official cause was given as meningitis." [10]

Mario and Iole were not buried together, nor close to one another. Mario's repository (lot 4951) at Prima Porta has two distinguishing characteristics. The first is a medallion-shaped bas relief displayed to the left of his name that depicts Eusebius Sophronius Hieronymus (347 – 420 A.D.), the Biblical translator canonized as St. Jerome. Georgia Bava remembers that the piece occupied a place of pride on the balcony of her grandparents' home at Via Valgardena 3 for as long as she can remember, but she never questioned it and its provenance has been forgotten. The artist of the carving was possibly Eugenio Bava, who was of course known as a sculptor of Saintly subjects. Its relevance to Mario may be purely sentimental, or a nod to his passion for collecting books, as Hieronymus was later named by the Roman Catholic Church as the patron Saint of translators, librarians and encyclopedists. Hieronymus was also responsible for a quotation suggestive of Bava's own work credo: *Be ever engaged, so that, whenever the Devil calls, he may find you occupied.*

The second point of distinction is that the repository is not adorned with the traditional photographic plate. In death, Mario was indulged by his family with the anonymity he always craved.

9 Roy Bava interviewed by Alan Jones, April 2003. All quotes from Roy Bava in this section are from this interview.

10 Georgia Bava, interview by the author, June 21, 1999.


MARIO
BAVA
30·7·1914 • 25·



BURIAL *site at Prima Porta cemetery, in Flaminio.*

Mario Bava Lives

THE DEATH of Mario Bava coincided with what many have described as the death of the Italian cinema.

Screenwriter Ernesto Gastaldi traces the turn of the tide to 1978, when his friend Peppo Sacchi emerged victorious in a trial that brought an end to the public television monopoly in Italy. At that moment, Gastaldi remembers, "I said that our cinema was coming to an end. We never had a very strong industry; our producers were better gamblers than businessmen. [In the wake of that trial], an incredible number of TV stations started showing films for free. We were flooded with free movies, and of course, no one will spend money on what they can have for free. After a few years, after all of the Italian movies had been shown on television, many of the stations failed and a private monopoly was formed by Berlusconi. Then there began a race between the public and private monopolies to buy up all the American films, soap operas, and sitcoms. This left our production rate near zero. Our films were no longer being dubbed in the US; instead, we dubbed all of [the US] productions. There used to be a tax on dubbing, so that the money earned in Italy by American distributors also had to be spent here. Our government was corrupted—I don't know by whom (your guess is as good as mine)—and this dubbing tax eventually disappeared, along with the rules. We used to make 300 films per year, but this diminished to only 60 or 70 per year, most of them *Articolo 28s* [government-funded low-budget fare] . . . usually shit. The great old producers died or retired, and the new ones didn't like to take risks, taking their projects to public or private television and asking for money. If someone gave them 3 million *lire*, they made a film for 2.5 million. Quality became irrelevant."

Actor John Steiner, who had worked in Italy almost exclusively for the better part of twenty years, remembers the sea change in the Italian film industry at this time:

"I actually left Rome in '78, and came back periodically, but I didn't actually go back to work until about 1982. I went to live in London, and during '78 and '79, I really didn't do anything in Italy. The reason for that was, it really was the beginning of the end. The old Italian movies were based in an Italian distribution deal which usually covered the costs of the movie; if they got a deal for the rest of the world, they could make some jam on top of that. Usually, those rights included television rights sold to the United States. In 1972, that was stopped by President Nixon; in other words, in America, you could no longer write off a tax loss by investing in a movie made in Italy, which usually would come back and get sold to American television. That really hurt the Italian film industry, and I think this was the problem with people like Bava. Dario Argento continued to make movies after that, but people on Bava's level got very badly hurt, because there just wasn't the money to make those kinds of movies any more. I know that he died shortly after making *Schock*—what was it, two years after?—and I think his death was probably brought on by lack of work and disappointment.

"The movie business was changing profoundly, and that's really what made up my mind to reconsider about being an actor. I could see it was getting harder and harder to make a living. Then, in 1982, the video market suddenly sprang up and I started working like crazy, from 1982 up to '85. In '86, again, the video market fell out, Cannon went broke and the mini-majors got into real trouble. The idea was, you could put together a low-budget picture at a cost of about $600–700,000, and expect to make about $5–6,000,000 on foreign sales. You could calculate down to the last market, within about $10,000. And that all literally crumbled and disappeared. They were just churning these things out, and the studios got wise to the video market and raised the price, cut down the inventory, and took over the distribution of video throughout the whole world. I can remember that there were really productive distribution companies in Germany and Italy and France that were later squeezed out. It was in 1986 that I said to myself, 'I can't make the living that I used to,' you know? Plus, I think I'd got to an age where I wasn't really interested in being an actor any more. I think that just naturally happens."

Today, John Steiner resides with his wife and children in Sherman Oaks, California, where he makes his living selling real estate. When I interviewed him for this book, he expressed astonishment at the increasing popularity of the Italian cult cinema. "I am personally thrilled—it's very flattering—absolutely amazed at the depth of the cult following that these movies have," he told me. "Even in my present business, I will have a client call me up and say, 'Gosh, you know, when my brother heard that John Steiner was my real estate agent, he asked me to ask you . . . '"

"What was Lucio Fulci really like?" I interjected.

"*Exactly!*" Steiner laughed. "And the interesting thing is, they are *all 25 years old!* There's this enormous culture of Italian B-movies, and I'm absolutely bowled over by it."

When I began researching this book in 1975, Mario Bava and the Italian B-cinema were still alive though not exactly healthy. Bava's films disappeared



AN IMPISH *Bava smiles on the set of ECOLOGIA DEL DELITTO in 1971.*

after their brief theatrical bookings and those of us who were marked by them, whether we encountered them in theaters or on late night television, could replay them only in memory. Today—thanks largely to the efforts of Alfredo Leone—the majority of Bava's once-elusive catalogue is now available on VHS and DVD, and beautifully restored 35 mm prints of most of Bava's films have been struck for repertory bookings and retrospective screenings. The renewed availability of his work, the freedom extended to film buffs and scholars to examine it at their leisure—frame-by-frame, if desired—has resulted in a widespread rediscovery of Mario Bava, as well as a serious critical reassessment of his contribution to cinema.

Of those who preceded him as specialists in the horror genre—Tod Browning in the 1920s and '30s, James Whale in the 1930s, Jacques Tourneur in the 1940s, and Terence Fisher in the 1950s, to pick the truly emblematic names—they are all remembered, but for the most part (with the exception of Tourneur, whose touch was evident in M. Night Shyamalan's 1999 success *The Sixth Sense*), the active influence of these filmmakers has begun to run dry. When the films of Browning, Whale, and Fisher do inspire contemporary directors, the resulting works tend to be nostalgic rather than progressive. In the decades which have passed since Bava's death—since *Friday the 13th*, since the advent of home video—there have been surprisingly few positive or stable innovations in the horror genre beyond his example.

In his own directorial career, Joe Dante—one of the first American critics to pay his respects to Bava's work—has continued to acknowledge Bava as a major source of inspiration, notably in the saturated color lighting schemes of his "It's A Good Life" episode in *Twilight Zone: The Movie* (1983) and *Gremlins* (1984). His 1985 *Twilight Zone* episode "Shadow Man" featured a boogeyman character explicitly modelled on Baron von Kleist from *Baron Blood*.



LOOKING *quite dapper with an umbrella, flowers, and white gloves, circa 1950.*



CLOWNING *on the set of a 1940s production.*

The number of *hommages* have proliferated with each passing year. Pedro Almodóvar's *Matador* (1986) opens with the shocking image of a character masturbating to televised images from *Sei donne per l'assassino.* Martin Scorsese has acknowledged that Melissa Graps, the ghost-child of *Operazione paura,* provided his inspiration for the climax of his controversial film *The Last Temptation of Christ* (1988), in which Satan appears to Christ in the likeness of a young girl.

The work of director Tim Burton contains even more overt references to Bava. *Batman* (1989) contains a brief shot of a mechanical door labelled "Bay 4" whose stylized writing can also be read as "Bava," and in *Mars Attacks!* (1996), the manager of a Las Vegas casino (played by football great Jim Brown) is named Mr. Bava. In *Sleepy Hollow* (1999), Burton paid explicit reference to *La maschera del demonio* in a black-and-white dream sequence featuring Lisa Marie as a witch who emerges from an Iron Maiden with her face riddled with holes. Burton's latest works, the live action adaptation of Roald Dahl's *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory* and the original stop-motion-animation feature *Corpse Bride* (both 2005), show that Bava's influence continues to be a guiding light in his creative endeavors. *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory* is a veritable textbook of cinematic quotations, ranging from *House of Wax* (1953) and *Ben-Hur* (1959) to *Tomb of Ligeia* (1965) and *2001: A Space Odyssey* (1968). In the film's Inventing Room sequence, Bava's *Terrore nello spazio* is paid explicit *hommage* in terms of the room's art direction, which greatly resembles the interior of the derelict alien spacecraft. Production designer Alex McDowell told *Entertainment Weekly* magazine that Burton screened some of Bava's films for him during pre-production for inspirational purposes. *Corpse Bride*, co-directed by Burton and Mike Johnson, goes well beyond decorative influence with an original screenplay (by Caroline Thompson, with John August and Pamela Pettler) about a young bridegroom-to-be who accidentally places his betrothed's wedding band on the skeletal finger of maiden's corpse, reviving her to claim her entitlements—a macabre twist on the Prosper Mérimée story that was the basis of Bava's final film, *La Venere d'Ille.*

In Quentin Tarantino's *Pulp Fiction* (1994), "Bava" is a particularly potent brand of heroin sold by Eric Stoltz. In 1997, when Tarantino formed Rolling Thunder Pictures—a branch of Miramax Entertainment devoted to reviving some of his favorite overlooked films for theatrical release—*Blood and Black Lace* was among the first titles announced in the series. Unfortunately, usable 35 mm English elements could not be located and the re-release never took place. Also in 1994, *Evil Dead* director Sam Raimi (an avowed Bava fanatic) revived the long-dormant *peplum* genre by co-producing *Hercules: The Legendary Journeys*, a syndicated television series lensed in New Zealand. In one of the best episodes of the first season, the show remade *Ercole al centro della terra* as Hercules (Kevin Sorbo) descended into Hell to recover a lost friend, encountering a good deal of Bavian smoke, mirrors, and colored filters along the way.

Since MTV debuted in the early 1980s, rock videos have taken considerable sustenance from Bava's image bank—mystical, cipher-like women, multicolored fog, mannequins, switchblades unfolding in blue light—but this was perhaps a second-hand influence, as the similarly stylized films of Dario Argento came to home video first and became very popular among young people for their flashy visuals and rock-oriented soundtracks. Bava's particular influence was first observed in Laura Branigan's 1983 video "Solitaire," directed by William Friedkin, which featured the singer as a woman pursued by a white-masked stalker modelled on the killer in *Sei donne per l'assassino.* (Friedkin, speaking to the press at the Turin Film Festival in November 2003, singled out Mario Bava and Dario Argento as his favorite Italian filmmakers.) In 1998, the punk/rap group The Beastie Boys paid even more overt *hommage* to Bava in the video for their song, "Body Movin'," which utilized clips from *Diabolik* and recreated its dazzling Pop Art panache.

The Bava renaissance came to a head in 2000, when Image Entertainment launched "The Mario Bava Collection," a series of letterboxed releases on VHS and DVD that made Bava's films available, for the first time in America, in their original director's cuts. The success of this fully annotated series was such that other video companies around the world followed Image's example, including VCI Home Entertainment with their extraordinary multi-lingual DVDs of *Blood and Black Lace* and *The Whip and the Body,* and Fantoma with their breathtaking widescreen presentation of *Hercules in the Haunted World*. More recently, the Italian soundtrack label Digitmovies initiated "*The Mario Bava Original Soundtrack Anthology,*" a welcome and long-overdue project making available on CD the previously unreleased Bava scores of Roberto Nicolosi, Carlo Rustichelli, Stelvio Cipriani, and others.

During his lifetime, when his work was not so accessible, Bava's films were often belittled as exercises in style over content—ironically, at the same point in history when the world of art was abandoning the literal for the colorful abstractions of Pablo Picasso, Jackson Pollack, and Robert Rauschenberg; when popular music began moving away from traditional song structure toward the improvisational explorations of Miles Davis, Ravi Shankar, and the Grateful Dead; and when some of the leading lights of contemporary world literature were Vladimir Nabokov, Alain Robbe-Grillet, Anthony Burgess, John Barth, and Thomas Pynchon—all acclaimed less for the stories they told than for the uniquely personal ways in which they told them. Bava deserved a measure of the critical respect accorded to his

contemporaries, but didn't receive it because his work was habitually retitled, re-edited, re-voiced, re-scored, and subjected to every other indignity that could be visited upon a motion picture—but, even moreso, because he found the ideal vehicle for his self-expression in a ghettoized film genre that no prominent film critic of his era took seriously.

"I've often thought that if Bava's films had been released in America in Italian, with English subtitles, he would have been recognized earlier as one of the world's great directors," Quentin Tarantino has said, and he may have a point. Only now that his work has been restored to its original form and made available in a format capable of showing it to its best advantage, has Bava become properly recognized as one of the horror genre's chief figures. The "Horror" category of Amazon.com—the internet's leading video retailer—includes Mario Bava on a short list of eleven filmmakers designated as "Horror Masters." In the last few years alone, Leonard Maltin's *Movie & Video Guide* has also reassessed much of Bava's filmography, replacing its formerly dismissive ("★" or "BOMB") capsule reviews with 3-star accolades.

The flood of Bava titles on home video resulted in an unprecedented level of notoriety for the late director, as well as a fresh flood of *hommages* and imitations. In the 22nd episode of the popular Japanese animated series *Pokémon*, "Kacy and the ESP" [US: "Abra and the Psychic Showdown"], one of the characters is a little blonde-haired girl with a luminous white ball—a configuration of horror that also appears in Wellson Chin's Hong Kong horror film *Tamagotchi* (1997) and William Malone's *Fear Dot Com* (2002). Indeed, the entire "J-Horror" or Japanese horror movement of the early 21st century revolves around the central image of a dead girl's ghost—something that did not exist in the vocabulary of horror cinema prior to Bava's *Operazione paura*. Alejandro Amenábar's *The Others* (2002) features a memorable recreation of the "family at the window" shot from *"I wurdalak,"* and former cinematographer Ernest Dickerson's *Bones* (2001) is so thoroughly indebted to Bava's visual concepts, particularly those



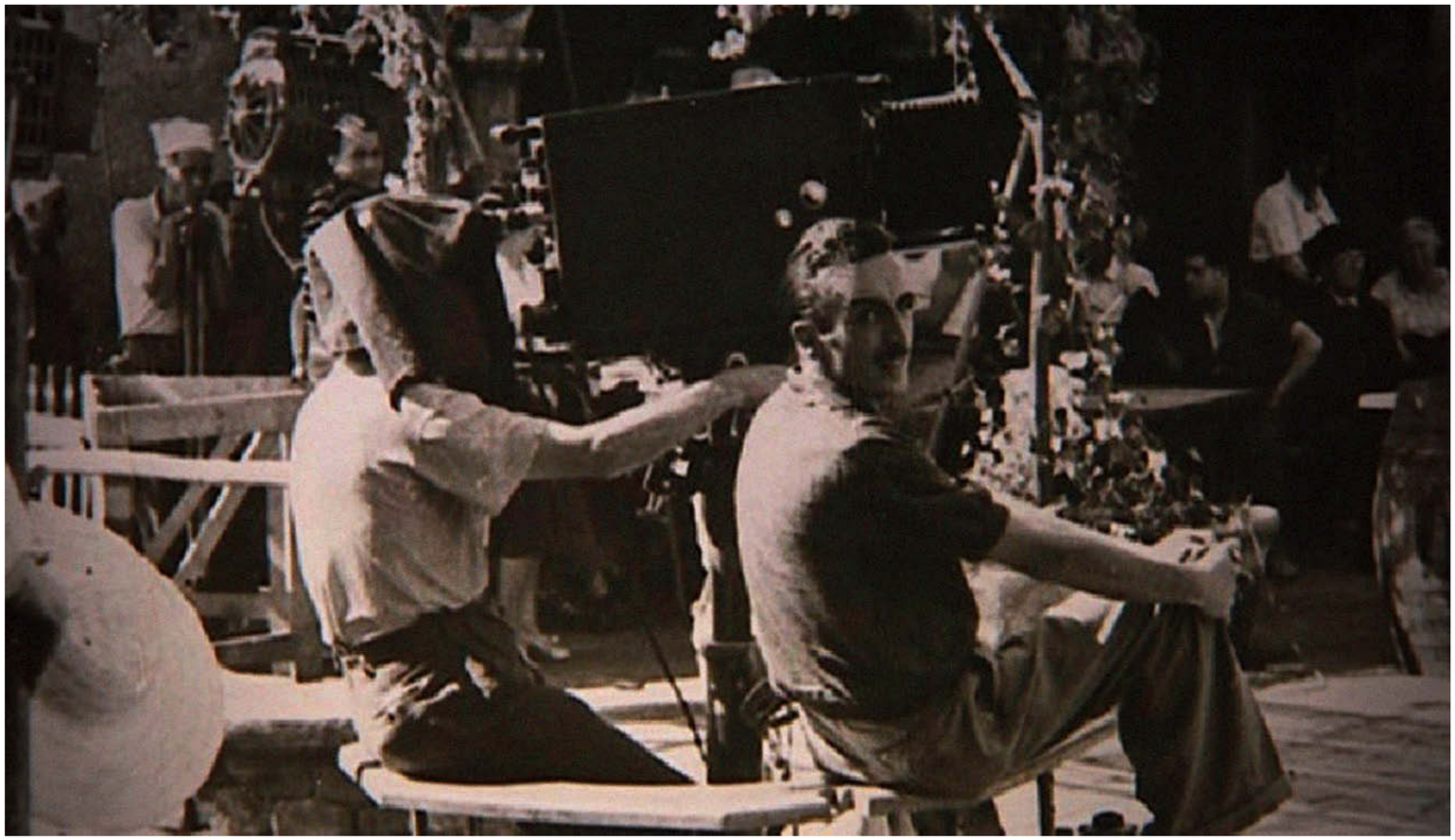
BRINGING *a litter of basset hound puppies to the set of a 1940s production.*

expressed in *La frusta e il corpo* and *Baron Blood*, that New Line Entertainment's DVD release included a short documentary acknowledging these parallels. A 2002 British television commercial for Nokia Electronics depicted a tube station passenger seemingly unnerved by his urban environs, who was ultimately shown to be terrified by a scene from *Black Sabbath*'s *"The Drop of Water"* playing on his tiny handheld TV—an advertisement which not only incorporated Bava footage, but also Bava's conceit (from *Il rosso segno della follia*) of explaining the terror of a given moment with a clip from one of his old movies.

Taking Bava's influence to an altogether higher level was Roman Coppola's directorial debut *CQ* (2001), a film about the making of a movie loosely patterned on *Diabolik* in the Rome of the 1960s. Coppola's *hommages* to *Diabolik* managed to be loving without being directly imitative, and his film succeeded in bringing to the screen some dazzling, innovative visual ideas rooted in the simpler special effects grammar of Bava's era. What made Coppola's film so special is that it did not simply drop Bava's name or quote memorable images from his films; it celebrated the very process of making *Diabolik* and took the surprising step of incorporating aspects of Bava's own life story into his semi-autobiographical protagonist, Paul Ballard (Jeremy Davies). Ballard is a second-unit director working in Paris who is called upon to rescue a science fiction film abandoned by its director (Gérard Dépardieu). Fictionalizing the story of how Bava took over the direction of *I vampiri*, Coppola gave Paul a talent for devising colorful matte and in-camera special effects and set him the task of finishing the assignment thrust upon him in only two days. Most importantly, *CQ* delivered a brand of special effects (courtesy of Gene Warren) which had not been seen on the big screen in decades—naïve, even nonsensical but nonetheless visionary effects, like snowfall on the moon—so that one was ultimately as impressed by its own original artistic sense as by the Bavian sensibility it so ably recreated.

In 2004, Lamberto Bava paid his own *hommage* to *Diabolik* with a music video for the Italian rock artist Tiromancino. "*Diabolik: Amore impossibile*" is a four-minute video that opens with Diabolik (Daniel McVicar) relaxing at home, when Eva Kant (Claudia Gerini) proposes a new heist to him. A speedy drive in their black Jaguar takes them to a museum where they overcome a familiar-looking security guard (a cameo by John Phillip Law) and rob a diamond-studded patroness of the arts. After celebrating their success in a bed showered with cash, Eva absconds with the spoils and picks up her true love Tiromancino, leaving Diabolik behind to curse his misfortune. It's a delightful little film, its direction almost indistinguishable from the direction of the feature film that has now become a cult classic.

Perhaps the ultimate proof of Bava's posthumous celebrity came in October 2001, when it was announced that Harmon Kaslow's Kismet Entertainment Group and Alfredo Leone's International Media Films had formed a new company—Kismet Classics—to market the remake rights to thirteen Mario Bava films. While it is a pleasure to discover that Bava's *oeuvre* is now considered financially meaningful, the notion of remaking Bava's films without Bava is, on one level, absurd. The storylines of his films were not the secret to their success, and the idea of remaking them with studied, big-budgeted elaborations of Bava's economical effects would betray the



KEEPING *watch as Corrado Bartoloni operates under the black drape of the De Brie, on the set of LE BARBIERE DI SIVIGLIA.*

very values that his work represents—those of originality, technical expertise, and economy. Still more preposterous is the notion of ascribing any value to some of these remake rights, as some of Bava's most important titles—*Black Sunday* and *Black Sabbath*, for example—were based on literary material that was in public domain *at the time*, while some of the others (*Cani arrabbiati*, for example) could not be bothered to definitively list their proper literary sources in the first place. These reservations aside, there is also the counter-argument that, if any remakes of Bava's films are actually produced, they can only help to confirm his place in the hierarchy of horror film history, and to qualify his original versions as *bona fide* classics of the form.

Since the first American Mario Bava retrospective at San Francisco's Roxie Theater in April 1993, Bava has arguably been the subject of more retrospectives and festivals in the United States in the following decade than any other film director. In the two-year period of 2002–03 alone, major Bava retrospectives were mounted in Los Angeles, San Francisco, New York City, Chicago, Dallas, New Orleans, and Cleveland. In San Francisco, *Black Sunday* was re-screened at the Yerba Buena Center for the Arts in the wake of their main retrospective as part of a series called "Ten Perfect Moments—A Decade of Film" honoring the "most artistically satisfying" films presented by the YBCA in ten years of screenings. Abroad, Bava's work was also treated to a comprehensive retrospective at London's British Film Institute during their 1998–99 season, and *Terrore nello spazio* was one of a select group of science fiction films screened at the Cannes Film Festival in 2000 in a sidebar entitled *"Le Cinéma Rêve le Futur."*

That Mario Bava should receive so much renewed attention and acclaim in an era of $100,000,000 motion pictures and 10-minute closing credits crawls is more than mere nostalgia; it's a *cri de coeur* from those of us who can remember when cinema was deserving of being called the Seventh Art. Bava's current popularity shows us, from an unexpected quarter, how today's sprawling cinema is starved for culture and wanting for authority. The way his films harp on the theme of greed makes one wonder if Mario Bava didn't feel the future of his chosen art form breathing down his neck. Active in the film business since "the days before specialization," Bava was skilled at direction, cinematography, special effects, editing, art direction, makeup, wardrobe, and scoring pictures with library music—he didn't need millions of dollars and a crew of hundreds to make himself proficient at only one of these tasks. It was his multiplicity of talent, his ability to disguise a meager budget, and his thorough grounding in all realms of art (painting, literature, music) and all the departments of his craft that qualified him to walk onto a film set . . . and improvise. The cinema may have been Orson Welles' train set, but it was Mario Bava's paint and canvas, his magic wand and crystal ball, his confessional.

When I last interviewed Samuel Z. Arkoff, he remarked on Bava's importance to American International Pictures and to the horror genre in general: "We were very fond of Bava. I spread the word about Bava, myself, for many years. His home country was not all that hot on horror pictures. Had he lived or worked in the US or the UK, Bava might have become as well-known as Hitchcock, at least as a prominent horror director. In many ways, I think he was the equal of

Hitchcock. He had a real feel for it. At his best, Bava was first class."

Roger Corman agrees. As he told an interviewer in the Sky TV documentary *Mario Bava Operazione paura* (2004): "There is an old statement: 'A prophet is not without honor, save in his own country.' I think Bava was a brilliant artist, a true artist, and his work was universal; it reflected a European sensibility, but it also resonated with the American audience. I think he would have been a major success, had he come to Hollywood. Bava's legacy is one of brilliant filmmaking under difficult conditions. His genius—and I think it was genius—stands as an inspiration to those who came after him, that, whatever the conditions, one can do excellent work. It has influenced many people. It's still with us."

If there is an element of tragedy in Bava's story, it is in the nature of a post-mortem: though he was a *figlio d'arte*, a true child of the cinema, Bava's kind would not fit easily into the big business cinema of today, which values lavish spending more than the creative stretching of a dollar, and committee thinking over creative autonomy. Even in his own time, the few remaining areas of the film business in which Bava could thrive were actively shrinking under his feet, as his career devolved into a series of retreat maneuvers to ensure his creative freedom and authority.

Beyond this, Bava's story is not one of tragedy but of triumph—a triumph over meager budgets, lack of equipment, actors who could not speak each other's languages, and the aesthetic prejudices of a country he refused to leave. As Alfredo Leone notes in the *Mario Bava Maestro of the Macabre* documentary, "The Italians [appreciate films about] wine, women, and song . . . love and laughter, happiness, family unity. Bava's pictures do not portray that. Horror, murder, thriller. The Italian mentality doesn't accept that, although it's *a serious part of life*." The record shows that Bava was singularly responsible for bringing horror, science fiction, and fantasy—the ability to *dream*—back to the postwar Italian cinema. His fellow countrymen didn't exactly clamor for it, but as the examples of George Lucas and Steven Spielberg show us, the Italian film industry might have survived—even flourished—if they had.

Today, a quarter century after Bava's death, the Italian popular cinema is showing heartening signs of a possible renaissance. Dario Argento has announced that he is finally ready to film the long-awaited finale of his "Three Mothers" trilogy that began with *Suspiria* and *Inferno*, and Lamberto Bava and Michele Soavi are likewise returning to feature filmmaking after long furloughs in television and advertising.

This time of renewed hope follows close on the heels of the 2004 Venice Film Festival, which hosted a program of films under the umbrella title "Italian Kings of the B's: Secret History of Italian Cinema 1949-81." Hosted by Quentin Tarantino and Joe Dante, this retrospective of newly restored films by Lucio Fulci, Sergio Martino, Fernando Di Leo, and others was initially met with great ire and controversy from Italian critics who objected to the introduction of so-called "trash cinema" at the festival. However, the retrospective turned out to be a great success, attracting large numbers eager to celebrate these directors and their stars, and to see the films that inspired Tarantino's *Pulp Fiction* and *Kill Bill*. In early 2006, Venice Film Festival director Marco Muller took the "Secret History" to London, where it ran to great acclaim at the Tate Modern throughout January and early February.

The work of Mario Bava was not included in "Italian Kings of the B's" because it is now so widely available and no longer obscure. Nevertheless, the example of Mario Bava represents the very soul of such a retrospective; his work, which stands at the very vanguard of Italy's once-secret film history, its once-undiscovered cinema, explains the need for such a retrospective.

Whenever a reel of obscure Italian genre film is projected, and an audience sits in the dark, giddy with expectation, they remember where it all began, where their hopes for such material were first raised—and in that moment, Mario Bava lives.



MARIO BAVA, *head to toe, captured in an introspective moment on the set of LISA AND THE DEVIL.*

Appendices



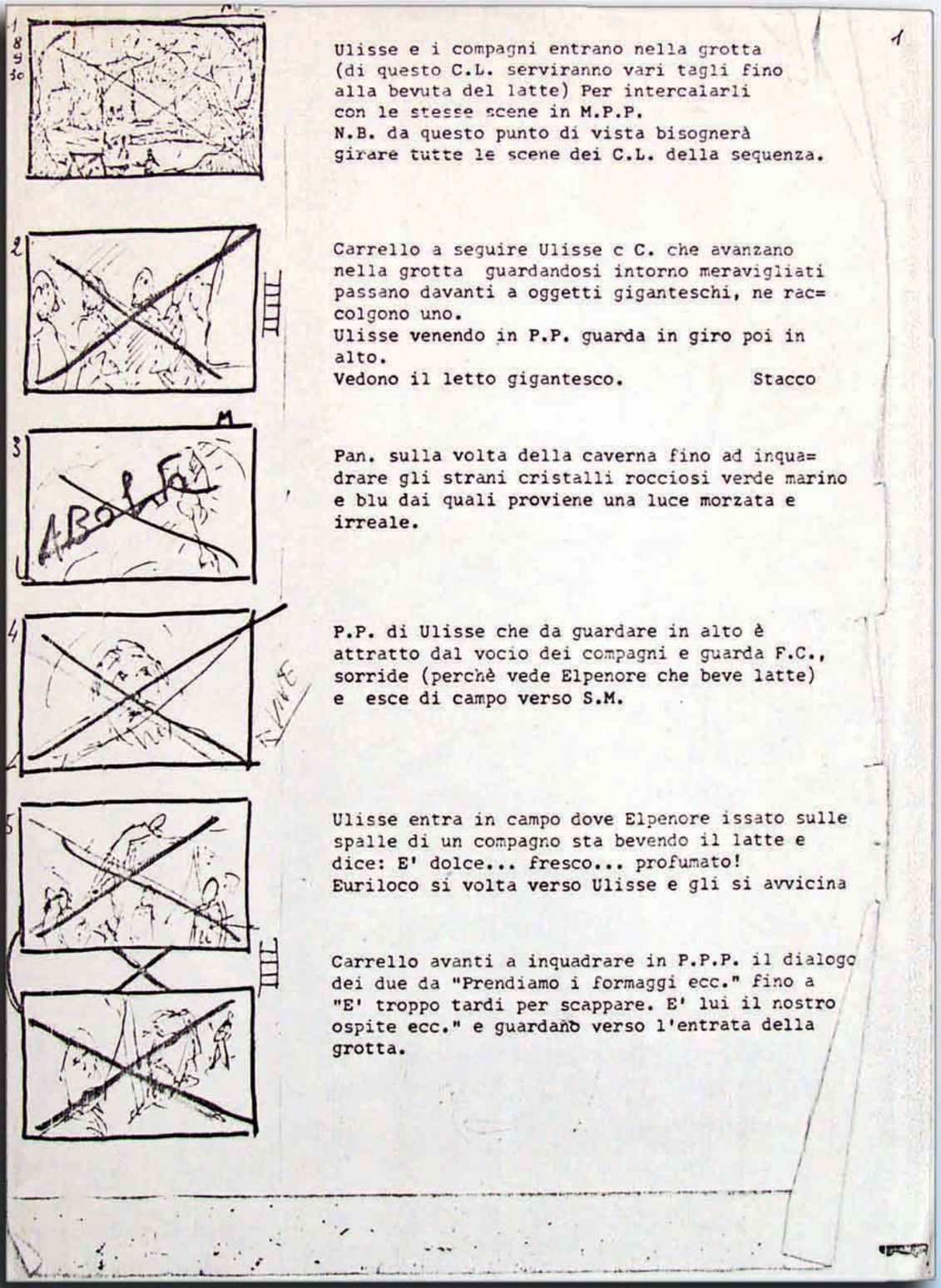
1045 *Storyboards*
1061 *Eugenio Bava Chronology*
1063 *Mario Bava Filmography*
1069 *Mario Bava Videography*
1077 *Mario Bava Discography*
1085 *References*
1089 *Acknowledgments*
1093 *Patrons*



MARIO BAVA *self-portrait circa 1955.*

STORYBOARDS

1046 *Odissea*
1054 *Baby Kong*
1059 *La Venere d'Ille*



Ulisse e i compagni entrano nella grotta (di questo C.L. serviranno vari tagli fino alla bevuta del latte) Per intercalarli con le stesse scene in M.P.P.
N.B. da questo punto di vista bisognerà girare tutte le scene dei C.L. della sequenza.

Carrello a seguire Ulisse c C. che avanzano nella grotta guardandosi intorno meravigliati passano davanti a oggetti giganteschi, ne rac= colgono uno.
Ulisse venendo in P.P. guarda in giro poi in alto.
Vedono il letto gigantesco. Stacco

Pan. sulla volta della caverna fino ad inqua= drare gli strani cristalli rocciosi verde marino e blu dai quali proviene una luce morzata e irreale.

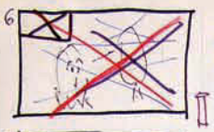
P.P. di Ulisse che da guardare in alto è attratto dal vocio dei compagni e guarda F.C., sorride (perchè vede Elpenore che beve latte) e esce di campo verso S.M.

Ulisse entra in campo dove Elpenore issato sulle spalle di un compagno sta bevendo il latte e dice: E' dolce... fresco... profumato!
Euriloco si volta verso Ulisse e gli si avvicina

Carrello avanti a inquadrare in P.P.P. il dialogo dei due da "Prendiamo i formaggi ecc." fino a "E' troppo tardi per scappare. E' lui il nostro ospite ecc." e guardano verso l'entrata della grotta.

ODISSEA

THE POLYPHEMUS *sequence, with Bava's own handwritten notes.*



Visi che si voltano a guardare.



Elpenore che stava porgendo del latte a un compagno si ferma e anche loro guardano



Medesima inq.della 1 ma più ravvicinata le greggi irrompono nella caverna e vanno nell'ovile a destra M.



Medesima inq.della 1 . Le greggi stanno entrando Ulisse con alcuni compagni vanno verso a vedere altri rimangono fuori



M.P.P. di Ulisse Euriloco e alcuni C. che muovendosi lentamente verso destra guardano



le pecore che entrano in un vano oscuro in parte e parte nel recinto
sulle pecore un boato improvviso (c'è la legna che incomincia a cadere



Un enorme carico di legna piomba all'ingres della caverna rimbalzando da tutti i lati mentre l'ombra si intravede sulla soglia dell'entrata



P.P. legna che cade. Alcuni tronchi schizzano verso S.Macchina uscendo di campo



Ulisse e C. saltano di lato per evitare i tronchi



I compagni che erano rimasti vicino al latte guardano sempre più allibiti mentre vengono oscurati da un'ombra che si muove
(forse quello cade ne latte?)



il fondo della caverna dove sono quelli del latte; l'effetto di luce dell'entrata della caverna si oscura e poi muovendosi lascia vedere un'enorme ombra di uomo



Ulisse guarda verso il fondo della grotta quando una mano enorme entra in campo dietro di loro e afferra il masso.
Loro si voltano di scatto e si gettano a terra.



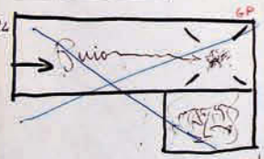
P.P. di Ulisse e C. che dopo aver rotolato guardano in alto a S.M.



Zoom da P.P.P. mano . Lento zoom indietro a scoprire masso (senza mai vedere il corpo)
Il masso è trascinato verso l'apertura e la chiude combaciandosi perfettamente solo all'ultimo sprazzo di luce si panoramicherà verso destra a intravedere per un attimo l'enorme sagoma di Polifemo che piomberà subito nel buio, perchè il masso ha chiuso l'apertura.



Vari P.P.P. di tutti nel buio fondo che guardano smarriti intorno mentre si sentono i tremoli colpi dei passi di Polifemo



Pan.nel buio si intravede solo qualcosa che ci fa vedere che la Macchina è in movimento fino a inquadrare un punto rossastro che aumenta di intensità.
Zoom avanti in P.P.P. scopriamo che è brace che diventa sempre più luminosa (mentre nel sonoro si sente il soffio potente di Polifemo) (ad un tratto le fiamme divampano)



STACCO

DA FIAMME ZOOM INDIETRO E CARR.
a inquadrare l'enorme sagoma di Polifemo inginocchiato stagliata contro le fiamme

N.B. da questo momento tutta la sequenza sarà fotografata gibigianata



Vari P.P. dei nostri che guardano con varie espressioni l'enorme sagoma di Polifemo.
Sui loro volti i bagliori delle fiamme



Come la 1
La grotta intera. Polifemo enorme stagliato contro il fuoco. In P.P. gli ometti e sullo sfondo gli altri



Ulisse che guarda affascinato. Euriloco lo vuol tirare indietro - ma fanno un rumore forse cade qualcosa

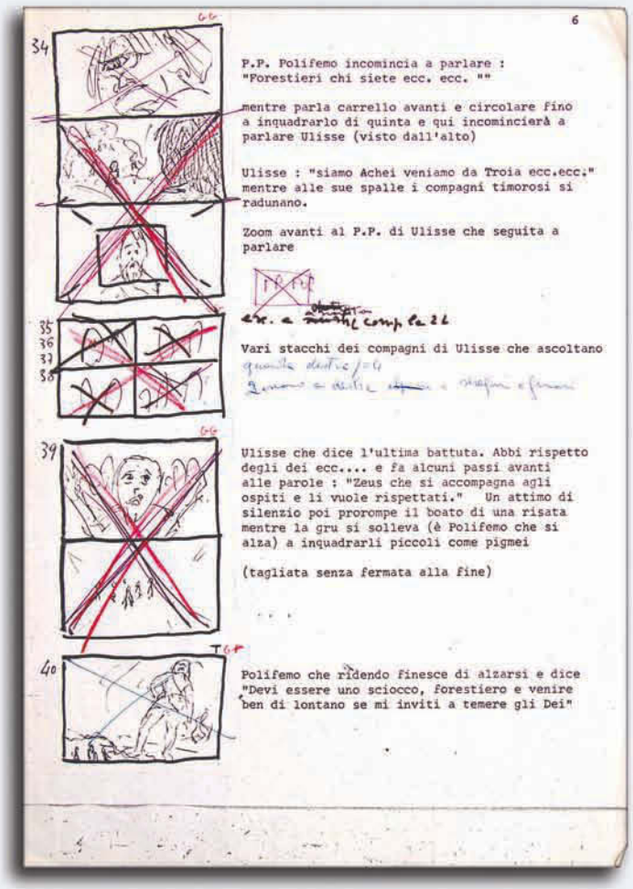


Zoom su Polifemo che si volta di scatto al rumore sentito e guarda torvo

Zoom a P.P.P.



Zoom da C.L. dall'alto a MPP di Ulisse di nuovo indietro e pan.a Sin. Zoom avanti su altri. Zoom indietro e avanti a D e indietro di nuovo al campo lungo.



6

34

P.P. Polifemo incomincia a parlare :
"Forestieri chi siete ecc. ecc. ""

mentre parla carrello avanti e circolare fino a inquadrarlo di quinta e qui incomincierà a parlare Ulisse (visto dall'alto)

Ulisse : "siamo Achei veniamo da Troia ecc.ecc." mentre alle sue spalle i compagni timorosi si radunano.

Zoom avanti al P.P. di Ulisse che seguita a parlare

35 36 37 38

Vari stacchi dei compagni di Ulisse che ascoltano

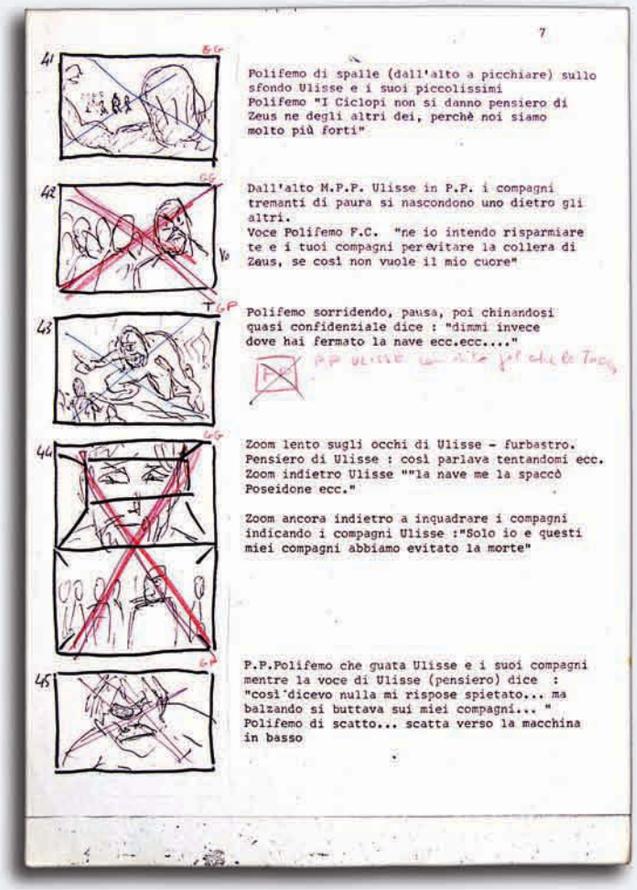
39

Ulisse che dice l'ultima battuta. Abbi rispetto degli dei ecc.... e fa alcuni passi avanti alle parole : "Zeus che si accompagna agli ospiti e li vuole rispettati." Un attimo di silenzio poi prorompe il boato di una risata mentre la gru si solleva (è Polifemo che si alza) a inquadrarli piccoli come pigmei

(tagliata senza fermata alla fine)

40

Polifemo che ridendo finesce di alzarsi e dice "Devi essere uno sciocco, forestiero e venire ben di lontano se mi inviti a temere gli Dei"



7

41

Polifemo di spalle (dall'alto a picchiare) sullo sfondo Ulisse e i suoi piccolissimi
Polifemo "I Ciclopi non si danno pensiero di Zeus ne degli altri dei, perchè noi siamo molto più forti"

42

Dall'alto M.P.P. Ulisse in P.P. i compagni tremanti di paura si nascondono uno dietro gli altri.
Voce Polifemo F.C. "ne io intendo risparmiare te e i tuoi compagni per evitare la collera di Zeus, se così non vuole il mio cuore"

43

Polifemo sorridendo, pausa, poi chinandosi quasi confidenziale dice : "dimmi invece dove hai fermato la nave ecc.ecc...."

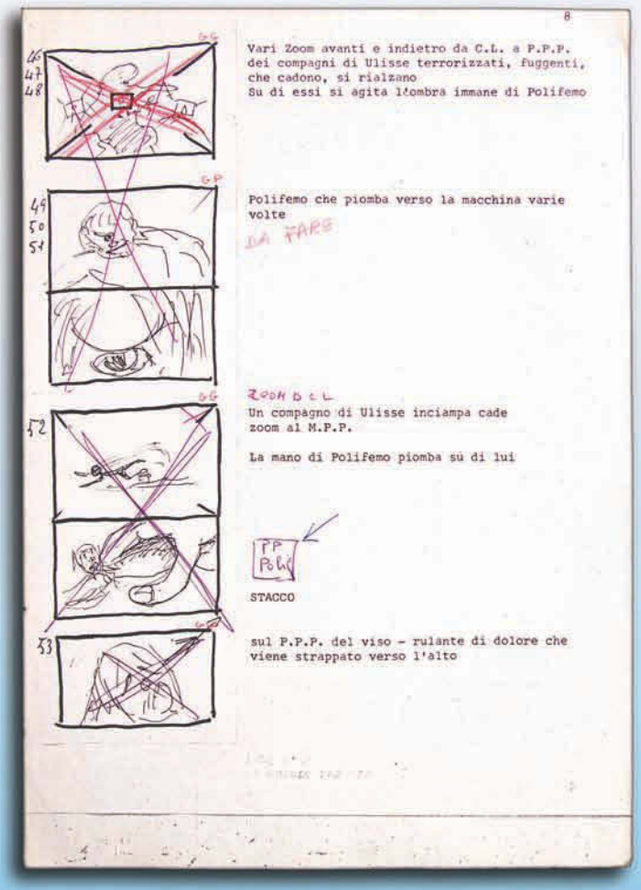
44

Zoom lento sugli occhi di Ulisse - furbastro. Pensiero di Ulisse : così parlava tentandomi ecc. Zoom indietro Ulisse ""la nave me la spaccò Poseidone ecc."

Zoom ancora indietro a inquadrare i compagni indicando i compagni Ulisse :"Solo io e questi miei compagni abbiamo evitato la morte"

45

P.P.Polifemo che guata Ulisse e i suoi compagni mentre la voce di Ulisse (pensiero) dice : "così dicevo nulla mi rispose spietato... ma balzando si buttava sui miei compagni... " Polifemo di scatto... scatta verso la macchina in basso



8

45 47 48

Vari Zoom avanti e indietro da C.L. a P.P.P. dei compagni di Ulisse terrorizzati, fuggenti, che cadono, si rialzano
Su di essi si agita l'ombra immane di Polifemo

49 50 51

Polifemo che piomba verso la macchina varie volte

52

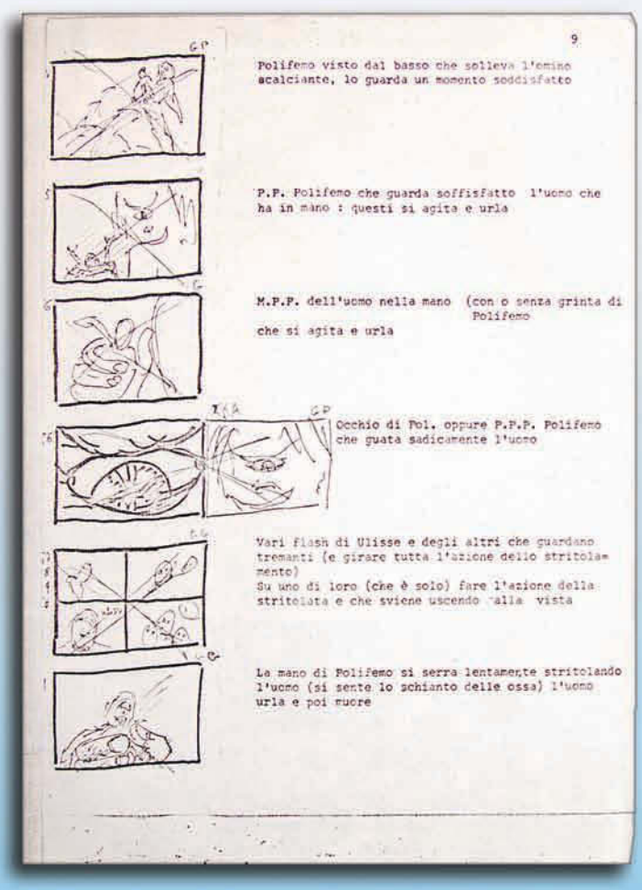
Un compagno di Ulisse inciampa cade zoom al M.P.P.

La mano di Polifemo piomba su di lui

STACCO

53

sul P.P.P. del viso - rulante di dolore che viene strappato verso l'alto



9

Polifemo visto dal basso che solleva l'omino scalciante, lo guarda un momento soddisfatto

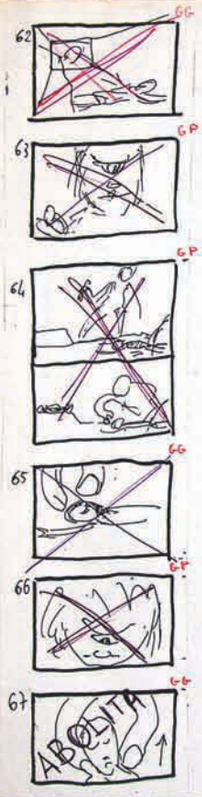
P.P. Polifemo che guarda soffisfatto l'uomo che ha in mano : questi si agita e urla

M.P.P. dell'uomo nella mano (con o senza grinta di Polifemo che si agita e urla

Occhio di Pol. oppure P.P.P. Polifemo che guata sadicamente l'uomo

Vari flash di Ulisse e degli altri che guardano tremanti (e girare tutta l'azione dello stritolamento)
Su uno di loro (che è solo) fare l'azione della stritolata e che sviene uscendo alla vista

La mano di Polifemo si serra lentamente stritolando l'uomo (si sente lo schianto delle ossa) l'uomo urla e poi muore



il compagno che era solo sviene e cadendo si scopre alla vista

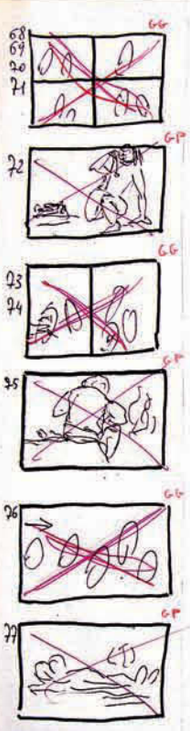
Polifemo abbassando la mano con l'uomo si volta a guardare e sorride chinandosi un pò in avanti

C.L.Polifemo guarda chinandosi un po in avanti l'uomo svenuto in P.P. . Depone l'uomo che aveva in mano su di un masso e si china a guardare e poi a prendere con due dita l'uomo svenuto

M.P.P. dell'uomo svenuto le dita enormi di Polifemo lo rivoltano con delicatezza

P.P. di Polifemo che guarda in giù perplesso sembra quasi dolente che sia svenuto poi fa un movimento col corpo

le due dita tirano su l'uomo svenuto



Vari flash di Ulisse e compagni che guardano ansiosi e seguono con lo sguardo il movimento in alto

Polifemo annusa l'uomo svenuto. Si guarda intorno (si capisce che è preoccupato che non sia buono da mangiare)
poi lo porta all'orecchio e sentendo forse battere il cuore esplode in una tremenda risata - quindi gli sbatte la testa contro un sasso come un uccelletto

Reazione di Ulisse e compagni

Polifemo si siede di spalle a noi e incomincia a divorare i due. Sempre di spalle noteremo i vari movimenti di strappamento (come un pollo) ecc.ecc. Qualche pezzo lo avvicina al fuoco e poi lo porta alla bocca; quindi forbendosi pulisce il letto dei resti e si corica

Pan.lenta l'orrore dipinto sui compagni di Ulisse

Poi.si corica e comincia a russare



Con carrello in curva a scoprire dietro un masso
Filetore : E adesso a chi toccherà
Eraclio : a nessun altro per ora...si è coricato ... è sazio. Guardatelo dorme con l'occhio aperto....
Intanto altri compagni si sono raggruppati dietro guardano

M.P.P. di Polifemo che dorme con l'occhio sbarrato

P.P.P. di Ulisse, la fronte aggrottata, ha deciso, si passa una mano sul viso come a scacciarne gli orrori visti. Poi l'abbassa con decisione PAN. la segue. La mano serra con forza l'impugnatura della spada, un attimo di attesa, e la spada è sfoderata e a punta in avanti;il carrello la precede andando ad inquadrare il volto teso di Ulisse che cammina verso Polifemo. Ad un tratto una mano si posa sulla sua spalla

Pan. a schiaffo a inquadrare Eraclio : non ci riuscirai Ulisse

Ulisse : almeno tentare



Da P.P.Eraclio che inizia : "E la tua furberia Ulisse ecc.
Carrello indietro a scoprire Ulisse
I compagni si avvicinano

Ulisse risponde : hai ragione ecc.
Eraclio dice : non ci resta che pregare.Piomba in ginocchio imitato da tutti : O Zeus potente .... la macchina si avvicina alle teste nella polvere

poi lungo il corpo di Ulisse la spada rimessa nel fodero

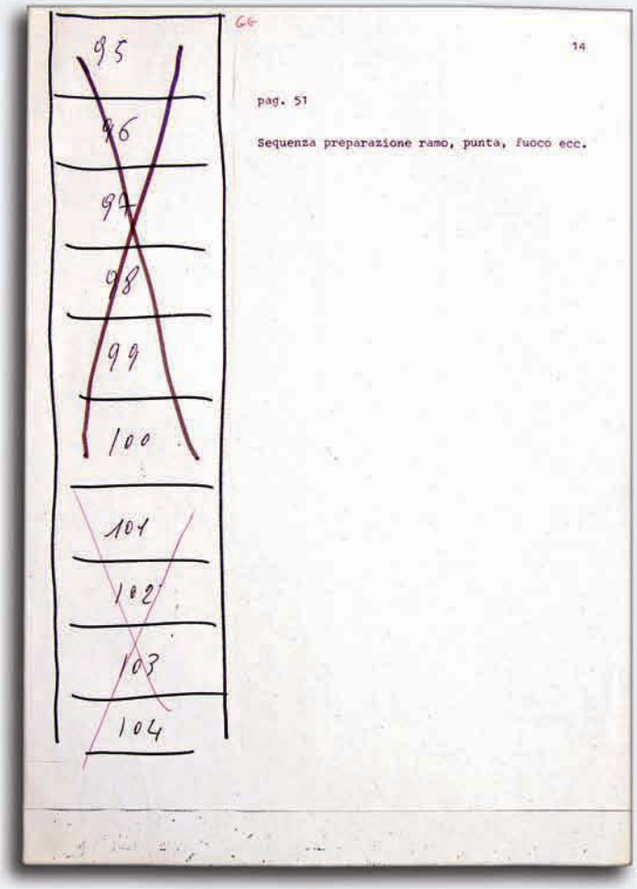
la pan. segue al volto di Ulisse che guarda in alto

dissolvenza in panoramica

fino ad inquadrare i cristalli della volta della grotta
I cristalli a poco a poca diventano luminosi per la luce del giorno nascente - Urla - belati - Pan. a schiaffo già

Pan. a schiaffo da Nero a inquadrare Filetore che dice :
altri due ne ha divorati ecc.
Sullo sfondo la grotta

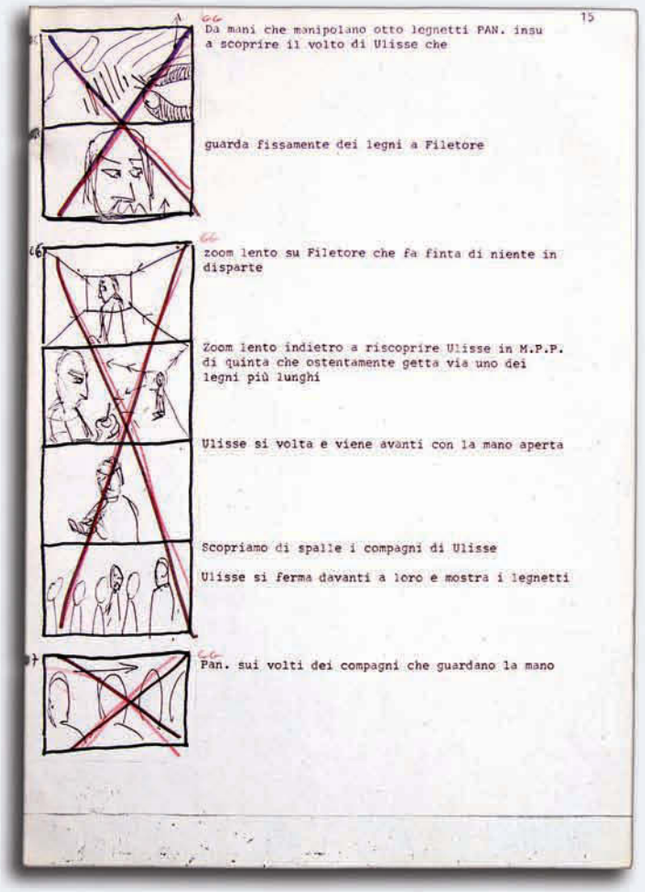
tutta la scena della lista da pag. 46 a pag.50 dove Ulisse ordina di pulire il ramo, e lo trasportano vicino al fuoco



14

pag. 51

Sequenza preparazione ramo, punta, fuoco ecc.



15

Da mani che manipolano otto legnetti PAN. insu a scoprire il volto di Ulisse che

guarda fissamente dei legni a Filetore

zoom lento su Filetore che fa finta di niente in disparte

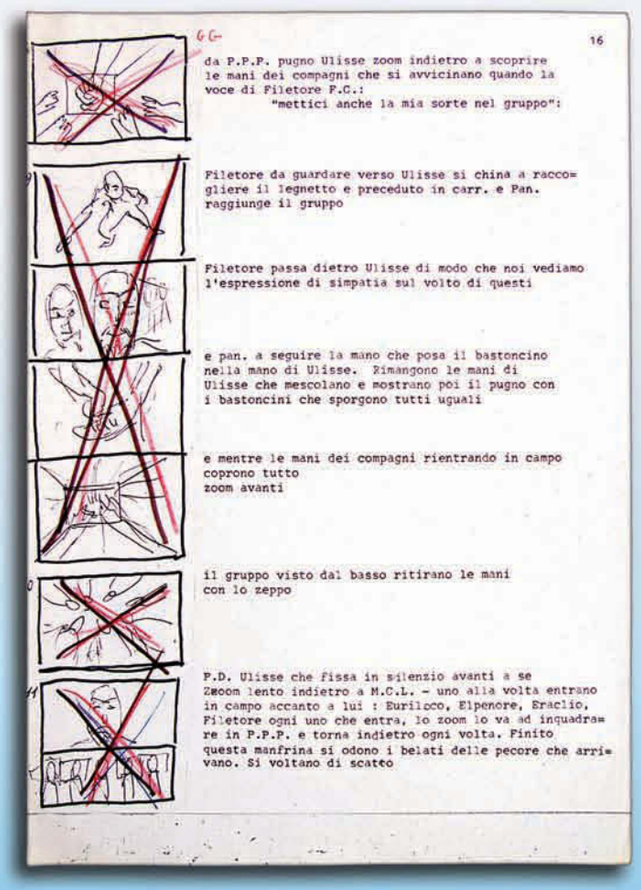
Zoom lento indietro a riscoprire Ulisse in M.P.P. di quinta che ostentamente getta via uno dei legni più lunghi

Ulisse si volta e viene avanti con la mano aperta

Scopriamo di spalle i compagni di Ulisse

Ulisse si ferma davanti a loro e mostra i legnetti

Pan. sui volti dei compagni che guardano la mano



16

da P.P.P. pugno Ulisse zoom indietro a scoprire le mani dei compagni che si avvicinano quando la voce di Filetore F.C.:
"mettici anche la mia sorte nel gruppo":

Filetore da guardare verso Ulisse si china a raccogliere il legnetto e preceduto in carr. e Pan. raggiunge il gruppo

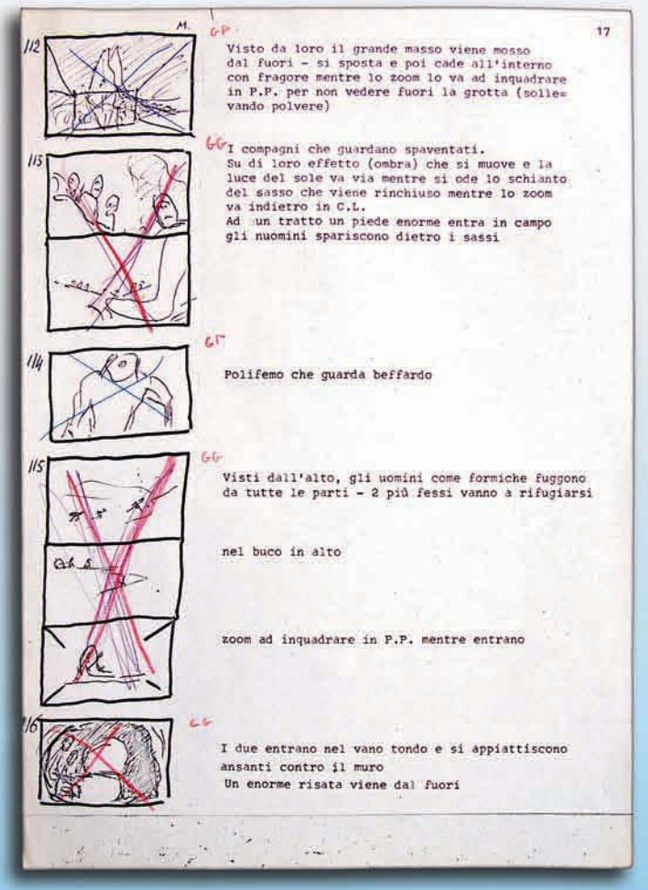
Filetore passa dietro Ulisse di modo che noi vediamo l'espressione di simpatia sul volto di questi

e pan. a seguire la mano che posa il bastoncino nella mano di Ulisse. Rimangono le mani di Ulisse che mescolano e mostrano poi il pugno con i bastoncini che sporgono tutti uguali

e mentre le mani dei compagni rientrando in campo coprono tutto
zoom avanti

il gruppo visto dal basso ritirano le mani con lo zeppo

P.D. Ulisse che fissa in silenzio avanti a se
Zmoom lento indietro a M.C.L. - uno alla volta entrano in campo accanto a lui : Euriloco, Elpenore, Eraclio, Filetore ogni uno che entra, lo zoom lo va ad inquadrare in P.P.P. e torna indietro ogni volta. Finito questa manfrina si odono i belati delle pecore che arrivano. Si voltano di scatto



17

Visto da loro il grande masso viene mosso dal fuori - si sposta e poi cade all'interno con fragore mentre lo zoom lo va ad inquadrare in P.P. per non vedere fuori la grotta (sollevando polvere)

I compagni che guardano spaventati.
Su di loro effetto (ombra) che si muove e la luce del sole va via mentre si ode lo schianto del sasso che viene rinchiuso mentre lo zoom va indietro in C.L.
Ad un tratto un piede enorme entra in campo gli nuomini spariscono dietro i sassi

Polifemo che guarda beffardo

Visti dall'alto, gli uomini come formiche fuggono da tutte le parti - 2 più fessi vanno a rifugiarsi

nel buco in alto

zoom ad inquadrare in P.P. mentre entrano

I due entrano nel vano tondo e si appiattiscono ansanti contro il muro
Un enorme risata viene dal fuori



M.P.P. dei due che guardano verso ansanti e tremebondi



inquadratura eguale alla 116
I due di lato sullo sfondo l'apertura
Lungo silenzio poi con uno "schianto musicale" la faccia i Polifemo appare di colpo nel vano



Come la 117 i due si appiattiscono ancora di più contro il muro e scivolano di lato lungo la parete facendo cadere quello che vi è appeso. Poi si fermano di colpo urlando



La mano enorme di Polifemo sta entrando dall'apertura e inesorabile avanza verso di loro
Finchè tutto piomba nel buio perchè il corpo ostruisce l'apertura

Urla tremende sul buio

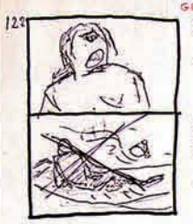
Voce Ulisse "E il mostro ancora una volta fece il suo orribile pasto"



da P.P. pelle capra dalla quale sgorga il vino

panoramica in giù

a una ciotola enorme che si riempie

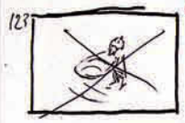


Da P.P.Polifemo che si pulisce la bocca con la lingua, sbadiglia, ecc.ecc.

Zoom indietro a scoprire che è sul letto

Sta per sdraiarsi, quando laggiù in fondo entra in campo Ulisse che porta un'enorme ciotola

Ulisse dice una battuta

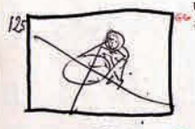


Ulisse in M.C.L. che dice battuta

"tieni...tieni...Ciclope, ora che hai ecc. "



Polifemo che lo guarda e si alza a sedere e dice sospettoso "chi mi assicura che tu non mi vuoi ingannare?....bevi tu prima"



Ulisse immerge la testa nel vino facendo vedere che beve



i compagni di Ulisse guardano tremebondi



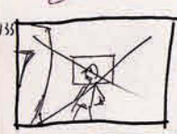
Ulisse che porge la coppa a Polifemo che allunga una mano per prenderla



l'enorme mano di Polifemo che sta per prendere la ciotola dalle mani di Ulisse



Polifemo porta in campo la ciotola dopo aver guardato a lungo e beve lentamente schioccando la lingua e dice
"" E' buono. Dammene ancora ecc. che io possa farti il dono che spetta agli ospiti. ""



Zoom su
Ulisse che guarda Polifemo bere
poi alla battuta "dammene ancora" fa un cenno verso i compagni
(in campo c'è una gamba di Polifemo)

I compagni di Ulisse portano un'altra coppa



Polifemo che segue con lo sguardo la camminata del vino

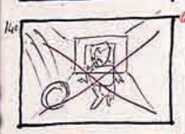




I due che portano la ciotola la danno a Ulisse ritirandosi subito.
Ulisse si volta e porge la coppa verso l'alto
entra la mano di Polifemo che la prende



Polifemo beve C.L. di quinta i compagni di Ulisse nascosti
e getta la ciotola verso Ulisse



C.L. Ulisse dall'alto la ciotola piomba verso di lui. Voce F.C. "Il tuo nome straniero!"
Lento zoom verso Ulisse che dice "Ciclope... tu mi domandi il nome ecc. "
Zoom ancora sui P.P. " Nessuno è il nome mio"

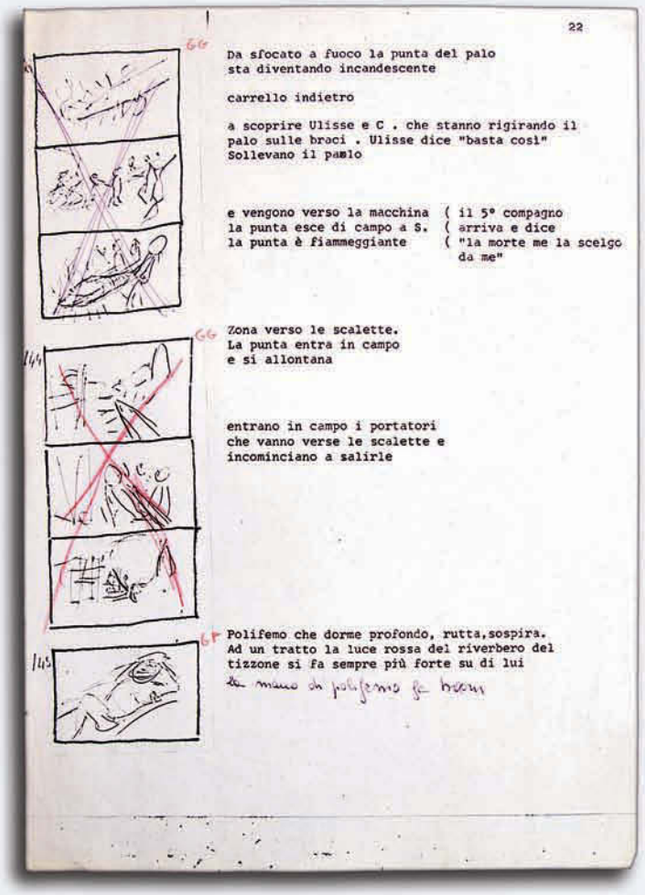


Pan. sui compagni su di loro la frase di Ulisse "Nessuno mi chiamano la madre e il padre e anche i compagni.
Su di loro sbotta la risata di Polifemo



Polifemo ride si ricompone e dice :
"Nessuno me lo mangerò per ultimo... dopo i tuoi compagni... Sarà questo il mio dono"
Ride già brillo e si stende per dormire.

Zoom dvanti al P.P.P. che sfoca completamente


22

GG
Da sfocato a fuoco la punta del palo
sta diventando incandescente

carrello indietro

a scoprire Ulisse e C . che stanno rigirando il
palo sulle braci . Ulisse dice "basta così"
Sollevano il palo

e vengono verso la macchina (il 5° compagno
la punta esce di campo a S. (arriva e dice
la punta è fiammeggiante ("la morte me la scelgo
da me"

GG
Zona verso le scalette.
La punta entra in campo
e si allontana

entrano in campo i portatori
che vanno verse le scalette e
incominciano a salirle

GP
Polifemo che dorme profondo, rutta, sospira.
Ad un tratto la luce rossa del riverbero del
tizzone si fa sempre più forte su di lui
la mano di polifemo fa braci


23

GG
Il ramo portato dai cinque che
avanzano

e in PAN. scopriamo in P.P. di quinta
il faccione di Polifemo.
Gli uomini passano sullo sfondo

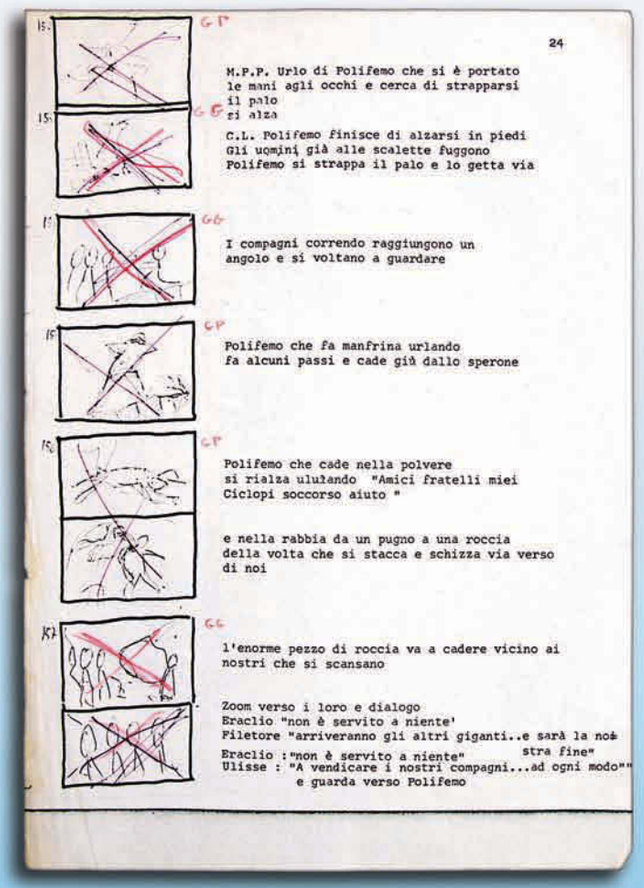
GG
C.L. gli uomini si arrampicano
passandosi il ramo.
Ad un tratto Polifemo ha un sussulto
nel sonno. Gli uomini si congelano
poi Polifemo riprende a russare

GG
M.P.P. degli uomini che giungono
finalmente al posto esatto.
Ulisse temerariamente va più
vicino a Polifemo
Zoom su Ulisse che prende la mira

GP
Come visto da Ulisse il trave ancora
rosseggiante che viene puntato in dire=
zione dell'occhio

GG
Ulisse che prende la mira e

La punta infuocata che punta verso l'obbiettivo
in P.P. Ulisse dietro i compagni che la reggono
GG Ulisse dice : "Ora!" e il palo viene abbassato
a empire l'obbiettivo


24

GP
M.P.P. Urlo di Polifemo che si è portato
le mani agli occhi e cerca di strapparsi
il palo
GG ri alza
C.L. Polifemo finisce di alzarsi in piedi
Gli uomini già alle scalette fuggono
Polifemo si strappa il palo e lo getta via

GG
I compagni correndo raggiungono un
angolo e si voltano a guardare

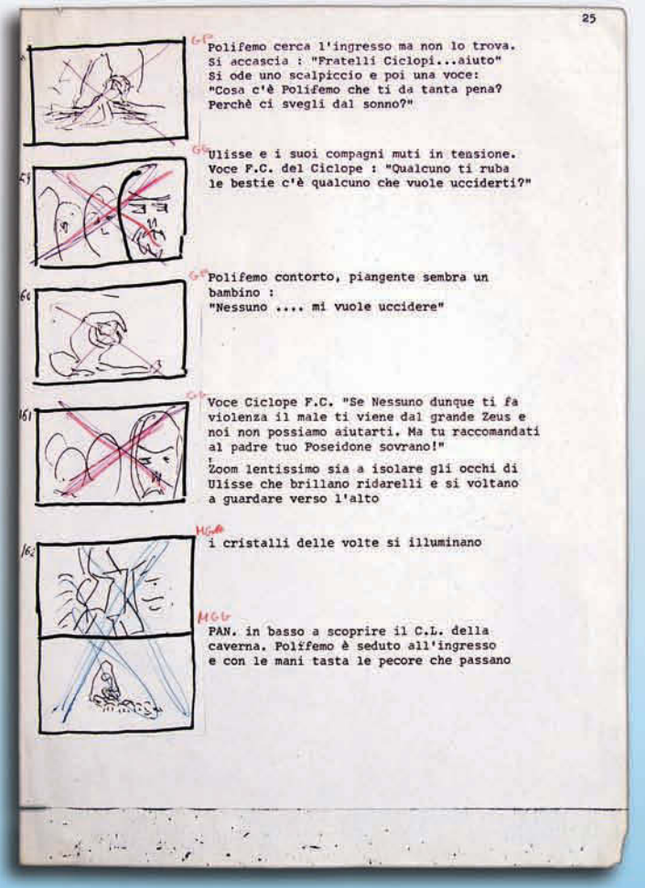
GP
Polifemo che fa manfrina urlando
fa alcuni passi e cade giù dallo sperone

GP
Polifemo che cade nella polvere
si rialza ululando "Amici fratelli miei
Ciclopi soccorso aiuto "

e nella rabbia da un pugno a una roccia
della volta che si stacca e schizza via verso
di noi

GG
l'enorme pezzo di roccia va a cadere vicino ai
nostri che si scansano

Zoom verso i loro e dialogo
Eraclio "non è servito a niente'
Filetore "arriveranno gli altri giganti..e sarà la nos
Eraclio :"non è servito a niente" stra fine"
Ulisse : "A vendicare i nostri compagni...ad ogni modo""
e guarda verso Polifemo


25

GP
Polifemo cerca l'ingresso ma non lo trova.
Si accascia : "Fratelli Ciclopi...aiuto"
Si ode uno scalpiccio e poi una voce:
"Cosa c'è Polifemo che ti da tanta pena?
Perchè ci svegli dal sonno?"

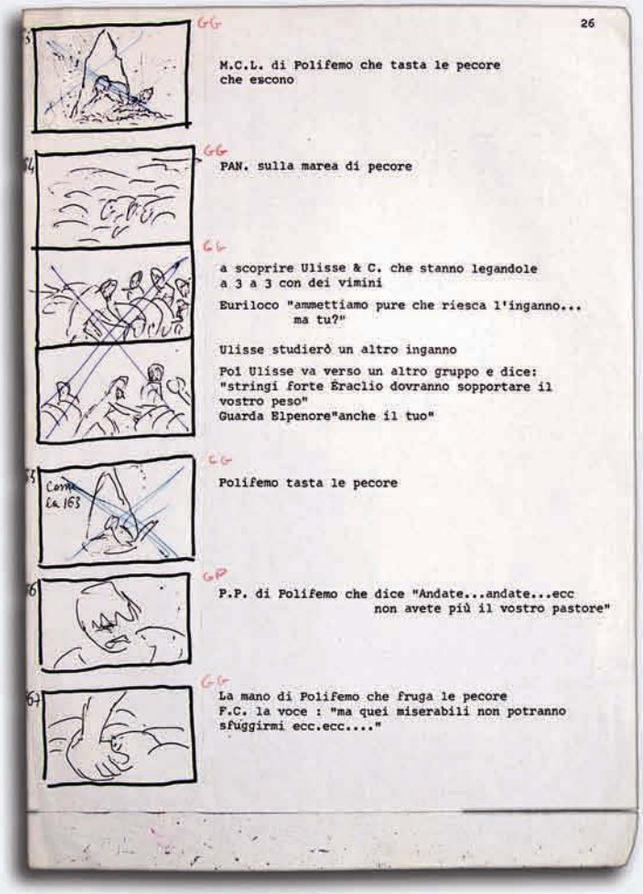
GP
Ulisse e i suoi compagni muti in tensione.
Voce F.C. del Ciclope : "Qualcuno ti ruba
le bestie c'è qualcuno che vuole ucciderti?"

GP
Polifemo contorto, piangente sembra un
bambino :
"Nessuno .... mi vuole uccidere"

GP
Voce Ciclope F.C. "Se Nessuno dunque ti fa
violenza il male ti viene dal grande Zeus e
noi non possiamo aiutarti. Ma tu raccomandati
al padre tuo Poseidone sovrano!"
,
Zoom lentissimo sia a isolare gli occhi di
Ulisse che brillano ridarelli e si voltano
a guardare verso l'alto

MGG
i cristalli delle volte si illuminano

MGG
PAN. in basso a scoprire il C.L. della
caverna. Polifemo è seduto all'ingresso
e con le mani tasta le pecore che passano



26

M.C.L. di Polifemo che tasta le pecore
che escono

PAN. sulla marea di pecore

a scoprire Ulisse & C. che stanno legandole
a 3 a 3 con dei vimini

Euriloco "ammettiamo pure che riesca l'inganno...
ma tu?"

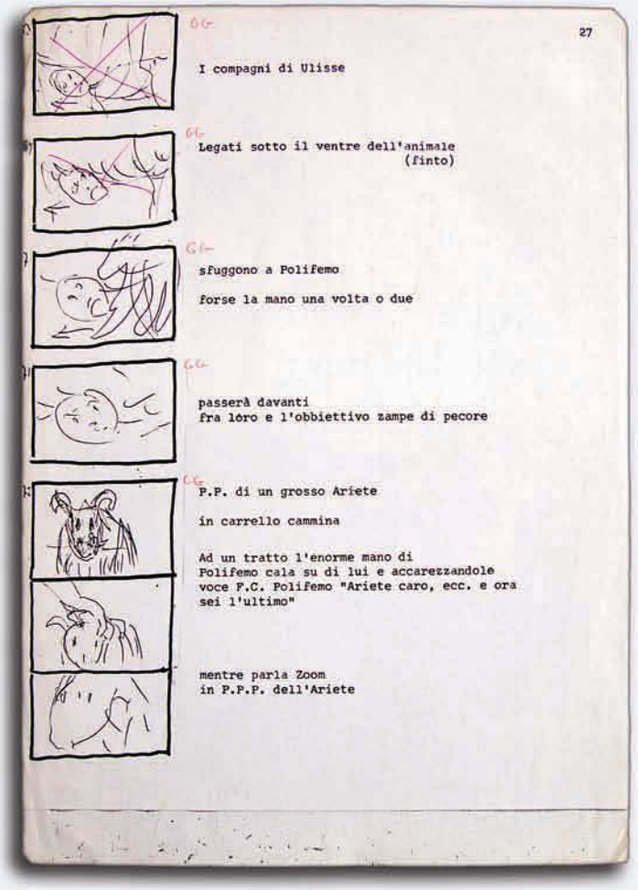
Ulisse studierò un altro inganno

Poi Ulisse va verso un altro gruppo e dice:
"stringi forte Eraclio dovranno sopportare il
vostro peso"
Guarda Elpenore"anche il tuo"

Polifemo tasta le pecore

P.P. di Polifemo che dice "Andate...andate...ecc
non avete più il vostro pastore"

La mano di Polifemo che fruga le pecore
F.C. la voce : "ma quei miserabili non potranno
sfuggirmi ecc.ecc...."



27

I compagni di Ulisse

Legati sotto il ventre dell'animale
(finto)

sfuggono a Polifemo

forse la mano una volta o due

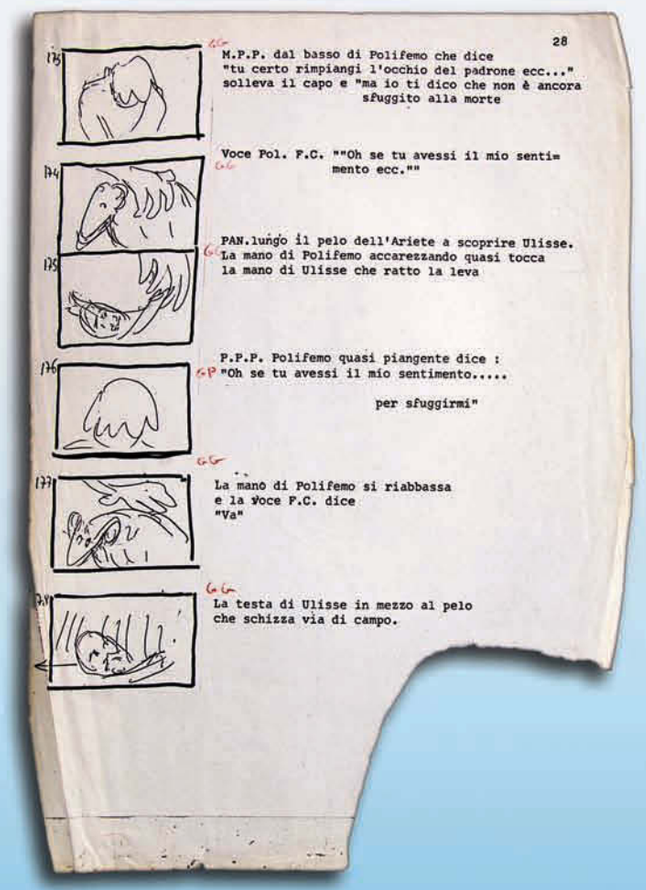
passerà davanti
fra loro e l'obbiettivo zampe di pecore

P.P. di un grosso Ariete

in carrello cammina

Ad un tratto l'enorme mano di
Polifemo cala su di lui e accarezzandole
voce F.C. Polifemo "Ariete caro, ecc. e ora
sei l'ultimo"

mentre parla Zoom
in P.P.P. dell'Ariete



28

M.P.P. dal basso di Polifemo che dice
"tu certo rimpiangi l'occhio del padrone ecc..."
solleva il capo e "ma io ti dico che non è ancora
sfuggito alla morte

Voce Pol. F.C. ""Oh se tu avessi il mio senti=
mento ecc.""

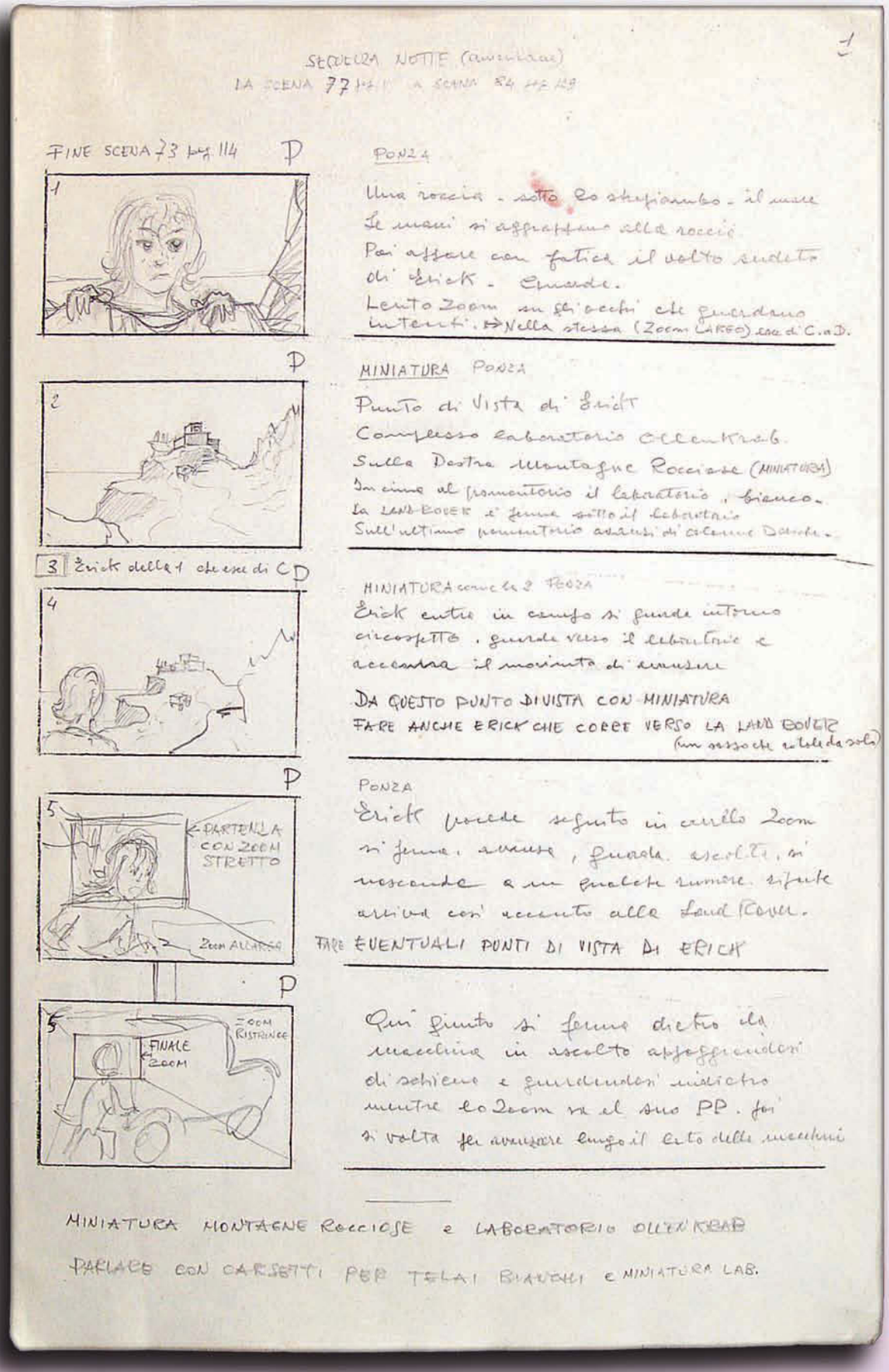
PAN.lungo il pelo dell'Ariete a scoprire Ulisse.
La mano di Polifemo accarezzando quasi tocca
la mano di Ulisse che ratto la leva

P.P.P. Polifemo quasi piangente dice :
"Oh se tu avessi il mio sentimento.....

per sfuggirmi"

La mano di Polifemo si riabbassa
e la voce F.C. dice
"Va"

La testa di Ulisse in mezzo al pelo
che schizza via di campo.

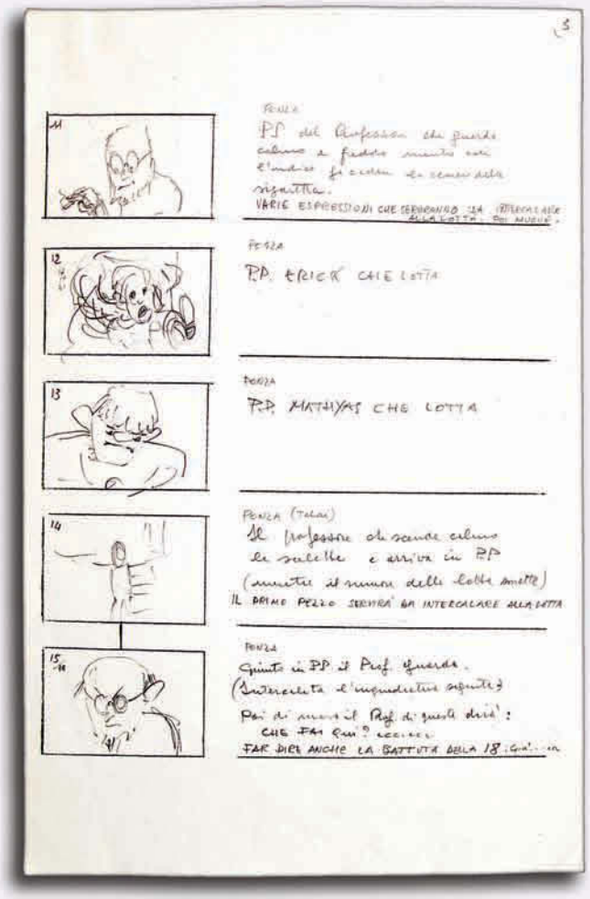


BABY KONG

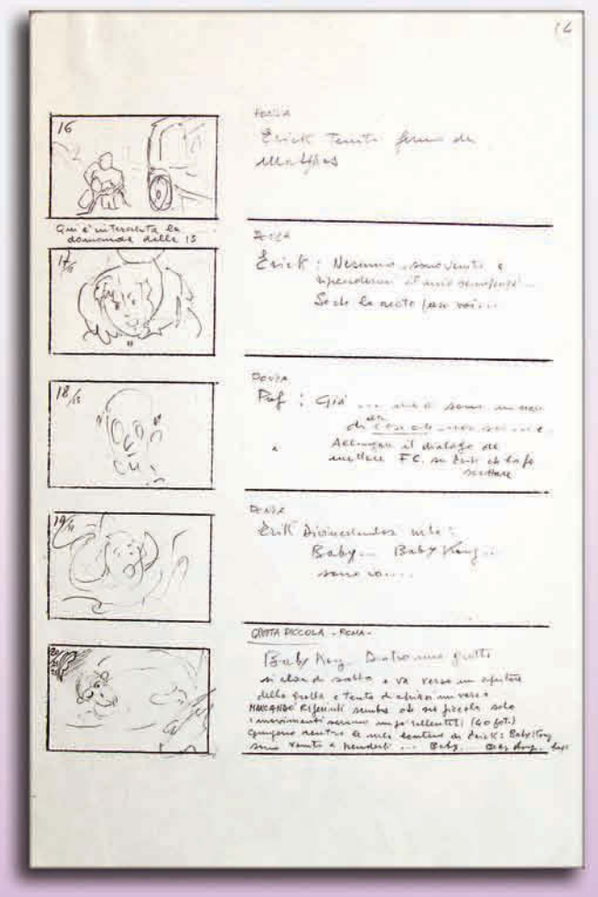
THE COMPLETE *storyboards Bava created for this unproduced film.*



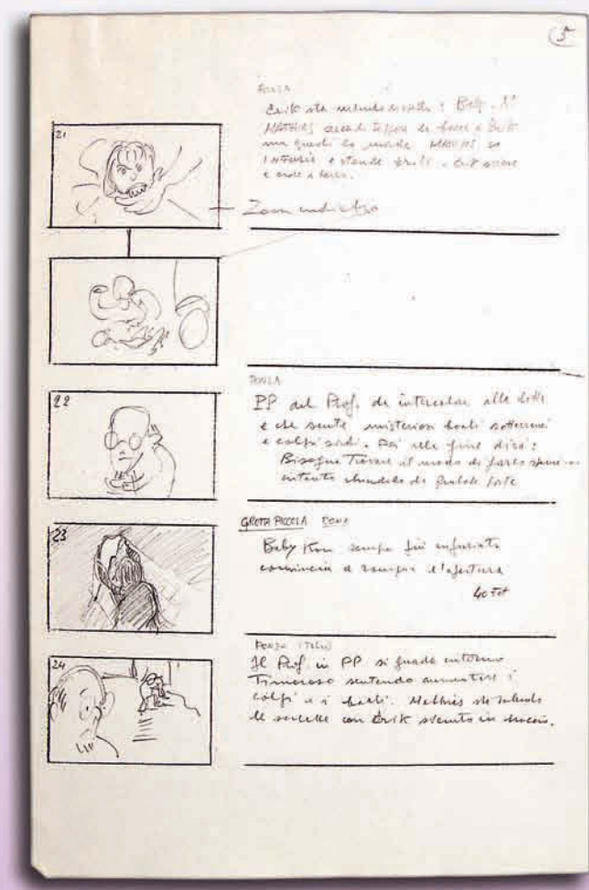
6
Seguendo il movimento della precedente Erick scivola fuori al lato della macchina (mentre la Zoom Torino al PP) finito rosso si alza di scatto fa un balzo in avanti e si mette a correre (PIGLIA UNA MITRA)
MINIATURA - TELAIO
DAL BASSO (come visto da Erick) le gambe del Lobotomico si alza e scatta la sua violenta nell'intento di affrontare il prof Bellavista, ch fa alcuni passi all'indietro fino all'inizio della scalinata
MINIATURA - DAL BASSO - ETHAN ? DAL
PP Erick varie espressioni di odio e furia
(TELAIO)
Il professore guarda in giro sorpreso (e mentre la Zoom si avvicina al PP) facendo una espressione guardando distrattamente verso la direzione di Erick
come la 5
Erick PP ch si blocca subito da inseguire (come nella 5) ma guardando a fianco in fondo, muove subito volentieri la testa ga il colpo. La Zoom scatta indietro e vediamo ch si Matthias che tira per il cappotto mentre lotta fuori a valanga.



11
PP del Professore che guarda calmo a fondo inquadrato con l'indice fa cadere la cenere della sigaretta.
VARIE ESPRESSIONI CHE TERMINANO CON (RIFERIMENTO ALLA LOTTA DI MUSICA)
12
PP ERICK CHE LOTTA
13
PP MATHIAS CHE LOTTA
14
(TELAIO)
Il professore che scende calmo le scalette e arriva in PP
(mentre il rumore delle botte smette)
IL PRIMO PEZZO SERVIRÀ DA INTERCALARE ALLA LOTTA
15-11
Giunto in PP il Prof guarda.
(Interessato e inquisitorio segnetto)
Poi di mezzo il Prof di quelli dirà:
CHE FAI QUI? ecc.ecc.
FAR DIRE ANCHE LA BATTUTA DELLA 18: Già...



16
Erick tenuto fermo da Matthias
Qui è interrotta la dormona della 15
17/16
Erick: Nessuno si muove e spaventi di mia iniziativa... Solo la morte fara noi...
18/16
Prof: Già... che ci fanno qui... e Accenna al dialogo dei ragazzi FC. in basso ch ha fa scattare
19/16
Erick Disperatamente urla: Baby... Baby King... sono io...
20/16
GROTTA PICCOLA - PENNA -
Baby King Barbarossa guarda si alza di scatto e va verso un aperture della grotta e tenta di aprirsi un varco MARCANDO Riguardi simbolo ch sia piccola solo i movimenti saranno un po' rallentati (60 fot.) Compare dentro la mia dentro di Erick: Baby King sono venuto a prenderti ... Baby ... Baby King...

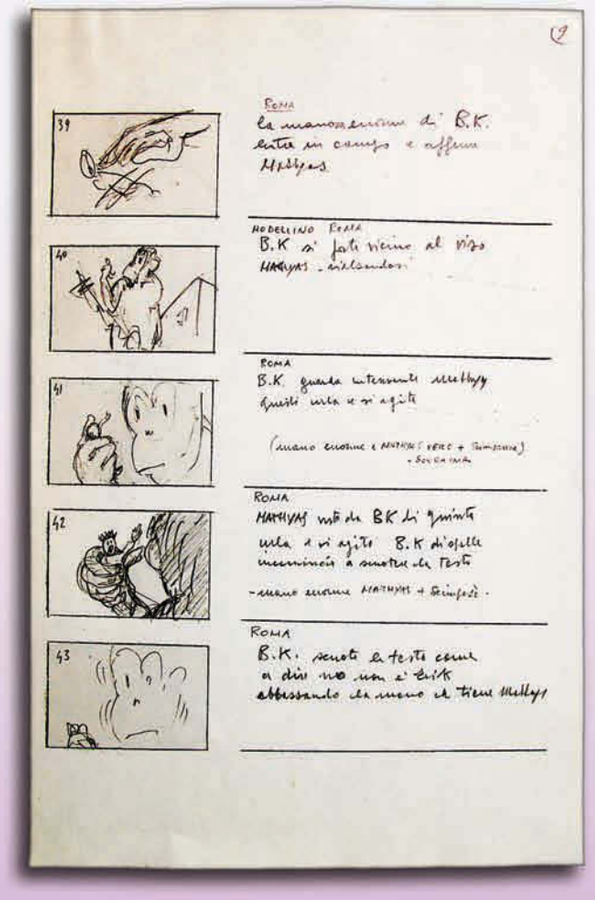


21
Erick sta urlando disperato: Baby... !!
MATHIAS accede il capo da terra e Erick una grande ira invade MATHIAS si INFURIA e stende Erick... Erick scende e cade a terra.
Zoom indietro
22
PP del Prof. che interessato alle grida e che sente misteriosi boati sottomessi e colpi sordi. Poi alla fine dirà: Bisogna tirare il meccanismo... interrotto chiudere di fretta fate
GROTTA PICCOLA PENNA
23
Baby King sempre più infuriato continuerà a sempre l'aperture
40 fot
24
(TELAIO)
Il Prof in PP si guarda intorno Tronoso sentendo aumentare i colpi e i gridi. Matthias sta tirando il cavallo con Erick steso in mezzo.


6
25
GROTTA PICCOLA ROMA
Baby Kong si muove nel spiazzo un
Passo e esce all'esterno
40 Fot
26
ROMA e ROMA come sopra
Improvviso all'82' incastro nelle ragnatele
Matthyas lascia cadere a Terra B.K
e esce (prendendo un cavallo Dora) e
chiude la porta di ferro con un
chiavistello.
27
(Questa scena fa semplicemente vedere
Baby che gira tutto all'interno
con l'effetto di luce della porta che si
chiude e il rumore metallico delle sbarre
e del chiavistello.
ROMA - DAL VERO -
Esterno montagna roccioso
Baby s'arrampica verso l'alto
al suo stesso dimostra l'altezza
40 Fot
28
ROMA
Controcampo a precedente il professore dalla scala
viene verso d'angolo del laboratorio Francesco
sente i rumori e, forte e seguito da Matthyas
stanno per dire qualcosa ma si bloccano
inorriditi e restano

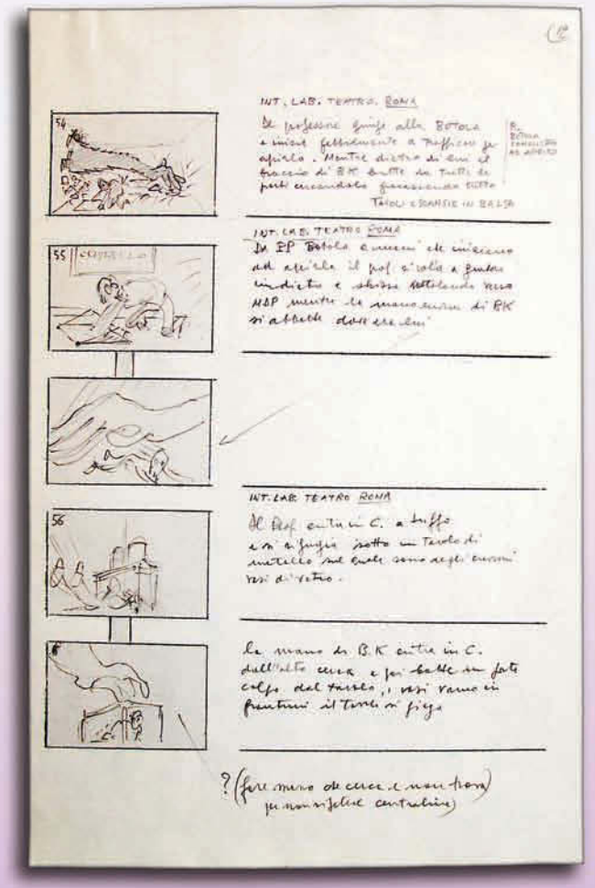

7
29
ROMA
MODELLINO STUDIO
Baby Kong fa per uscire e immediatamente
scavalcando il laboratorio. Quando vede
i due, fa un urlone mostruoso con una
mano e col pugno sfondando l'angolo della
casa (simile come forma
30
ROMA
PP Baby contro cielo
guarda singhiozzando verso i due
31
ROMA
i due come visti da Baby
visti a prospettiva con il 9 % di modo
che siano deformati
sono sovrastanti dal Torrione
32
ROMA
Dopo occhi di Baby Zoom allargo
al M.PP Baby fa il movimento in avanti
33
MODELLINO ROMA
Baby avanza e schiaccia il tetto
della prima casa (e quello che succede)
facendo crollare ogni cosa

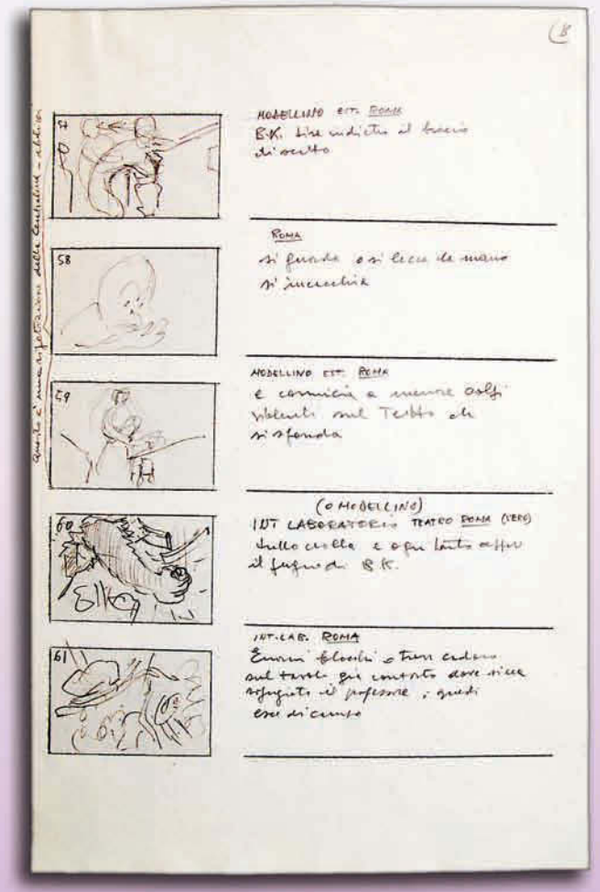

8
34
ROMA
Il Professore fugge verso l'angolo
destro di Em - MATTHYAS resta all'interno e tenta di
mentre da sopra la M.P. precipita
massi mentre Trave e polvere
si vede fuoriuscire un urlo di MATTHYAS
(SOVRAIMPRESSIONE TESTI: BLOCCATO NELLE RAGNATELE)
PP B.K. che guarda di qua e là
35
MODELLINO e SOVRAIMPRESSIONE (a STUDIO) TECNICA ROMA
Il prof. correndo disperatamente arriva a
raggiungere la porta del laboratorio
mentre B.K. si batte il petto e altro inaccessibile.
36
ROMA
P.A. del Professore che chiude la porta
P.S. urla di MATTHYAS che rimbalzano dentro
37
ROMA (con tutto il disegno in angolo di visione)
Matthyas caduto tra macerie
che gli impediscono di muoversi
urla guardando in alto
38
MODELLINO ROMA
Baby Kong enorme
e guarda verso di Em (PP di B.K.)
poi si china per prenderlo

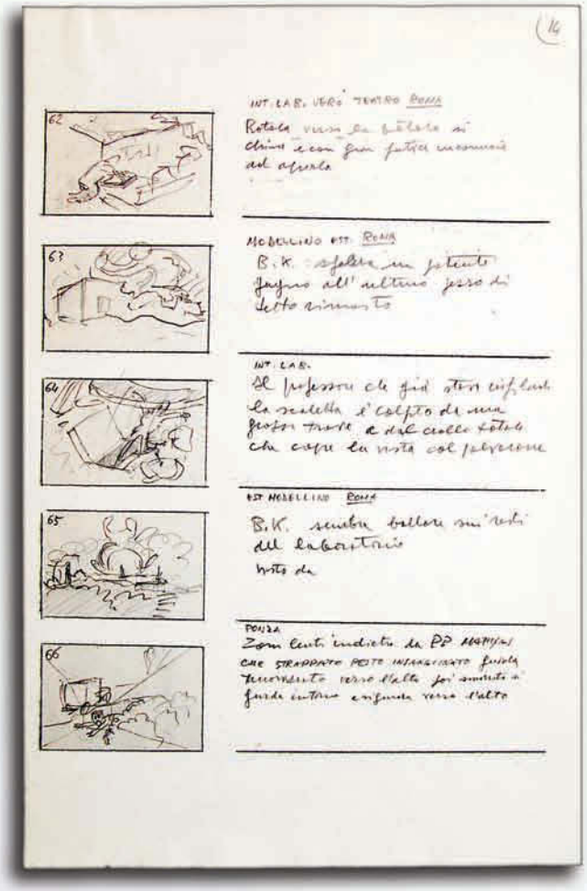

9
39
ROMA
La manona enorme di B.K.
entra in campo e afferra
Matthyas
40
MODELLINO ROMA
B.K si porta vicino al viso
MATTHYAS - inferocito
41
ROMA
B.K guarda interessato Matthyas
questi urla e si agita
(mano enorme e MATTHYAS reale + Trasparenza)
- SOVRAIMP.
42
ROMA
MATTHYAS visto da B.K di spalle
urla e si agita B.K di profilo
incominciò a mordere la testa
- mano enorme MATTHYAS + trasparenza -
43
ROMA
B.K. scosta la testa come
a dire no non si fa
abbassando la mano di fronte Matthyas

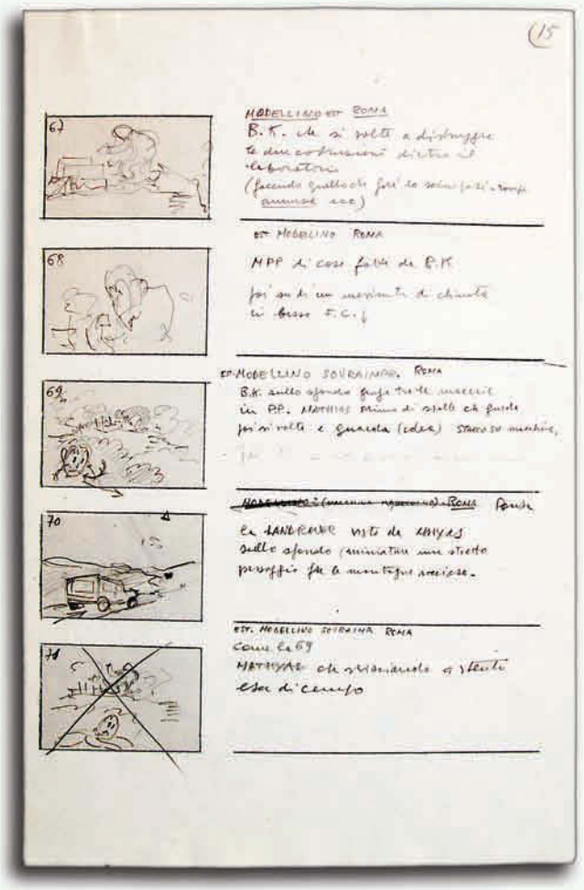

10
44
MODELLINO ROMA
B.K. fatica con movimenti studiati faticosi volendo sopra il Laboratorio
45
MODELLINO ROMA
Parabola discendente del PUPAZZO MECC. MENTRE da sopra il tetto del Laboratorio a F.C.
46
PENZA - (CONTROFIGURA)
(FIGHT)
alla LANDMOTOR
47
ROMA INT. LAB. VECC TEATRO
48
MODELLINO INT LABORATORIO ROMA
Zoom rapido
da C.L. Laboratorio come visto dal Professore a PP finestra dalle quali sta fuoriuscendo dentro il muso enorme di B.K.

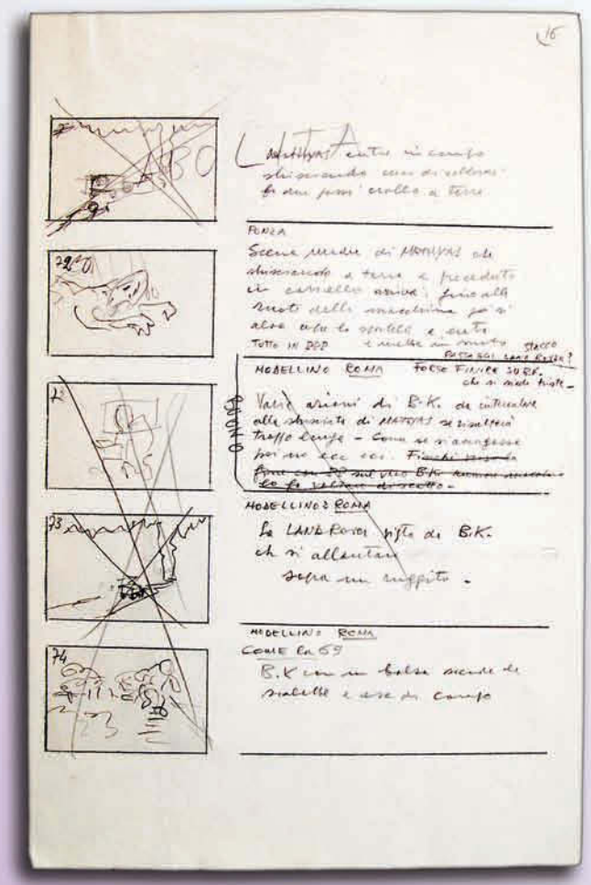

11
LAB. TEATRO ROMA
Il professore C.L. Laboratorio come visto da B.K. dall'alto
Cento,
49
50
Zoom in avvicinamento
sul Prof Tremante che fa
un'espressione di sollievo
finale
51
MODELLINO INT. LABORAT.
Il muso di B.K. si sta
sbriciando dalla finestra
52
EST. MODELLINO ROMA
ALL'esterno B.K. che a Libra della
finestra e muso cercando a fatica
una nuova presa di questi fa
di colpo la retromarcia cadendo.
53
INT. LABORATORIO TEATRO ROMA VERO
Da finestra (Zoom Rapido) e CL
la mano enorme di B.K. schizza verso
il professore ch a sua volta (CONTROFIGURA)
schizza via per un pelo mentre il muso
della finestra crolla

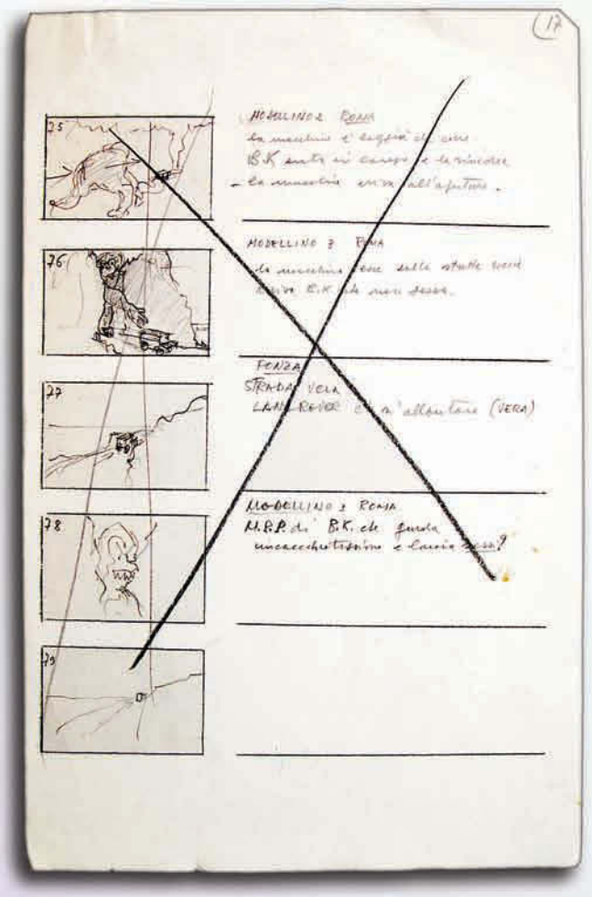

12
54
INT. LAB. TEATRO ROMA
Il professore finisce alla BOTOLA e muove febbrilmente a raffica per aprirla. Mentre dietro di lui il braccio di B.K. sbatte da tutti da parti incendiando finalmente tutto
TAVOLI E SEDIE IN BALSA
55
INT. LAB. TEATRO ROMA
In PP Botola e mezzo di mezzano ad aprirla il prof. s'alza a fondo indietro e schizza fottendo verso MDP mentre la mano enorme di B.K. si abbatte dove era lui
56
INT. LAB. TEATRO ROMA
Il Prof. entra in C. a tuffo e va a fuggire sotto un Tavolo di metallo sul quale sono degli enormi vasi di vetro.
57
La mano di B.K entra in C. dall'alto cerca e poi batte un forte colpo del tavolo, i vasi vanno in frantumi il Tavolo si piega
? (forse meno da cercare e non trovare per non infilare contraltare)


13
Quando il muso di B.K. si abbatte sulla botola = addosso
47
MODELLINO EST. ROMA
B.K. Lira indietro il braccio
di scatto
58
ROMA
si fionda e si lecca la mano
si incazzato
59
MODELLINO EST. ROMA
e comincia a mettere colpi
violenti sul Tetto che
si sfonda
60
(o MODELLINO)
INT LABORATORIO TEATRO ROMA (VERO)
61
INT. LAB. ROMA
Enormi falcoidi o travi cadono
sul tavolo già contorto dove si era
rifugiato il professore, quasi
esce di campo


14
INT. LAB. VERO' TEATRO ROMA
Rotaia vuota da bilico si chiude con gran fragore metallico ad effetto
MODELLINO EST. ROMA
B.K. solleva un potente pugno all'ultimo piano di tetto rimasto
INT. LAB.
Il professore che gia' stava riflettendo la scaletta s'colpito da una grossa trave e dal crollo totale che copre la vista col polverone
EST MODELLINO ROMA
B.K. sembra ballare sui resti del laboratorio visto da
PONZA
Zoom lento indietro da PP MATTIAS che STRAPPATO POSTO INTRAVEDUTO fumo terrorizzato verso d'alto poi smesso a fondo inferno enfumo verso d'alto


15
MODELLINO EST ROMA
B.K. che si volta a distruggere le due costruzioni dietro il laboratorio
(facendo qualche cosa' le solite cose)
EST MODELLINO ROMA
MPP di cose fatte da B.K.
poi su di un movimento di camera in basso F.C.
EST MODELLINO SOVRAIMPR. ROMA
B.K. sullo sfondo finge tutte macerie
in PP. MATTIAS stanco di vedere ch fonde
poi si volta e guarda (edera) stanco su mentre,
ESTERNO MODELLINO ROMA
la LANDROVER vista da MATTIAS
sullo sfondo (animation non stretto
proseguo fa la mentre ameisse.
EST. MODELLINO ESTERNA ROMA
come la 69
MATTIAS che stanziando si volta
esce di campo

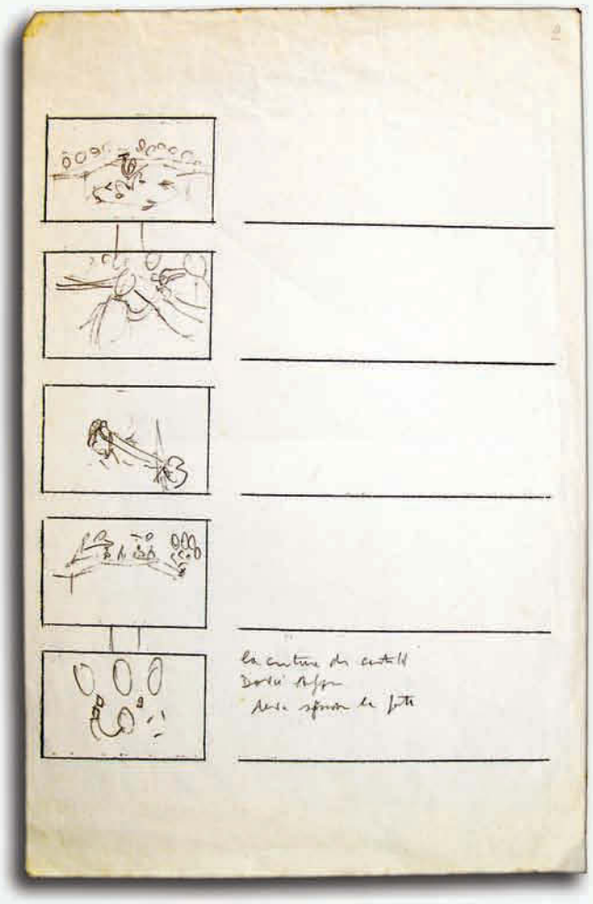

16
MODELLINO ROMA
Varie azioni di B.K. da intervallare alla stanchezza di MATTIAS se possibile traffico lungo - Come se si avvicinasse poi ecc ecc. Finche
MODELLINO 2 ROMA
la LANDROVER piena di B.K. che si allontana sopra un rialzato.
MODELLINO ROMA
come la 69
B.K con in bocca scende di scalette e esce di campo

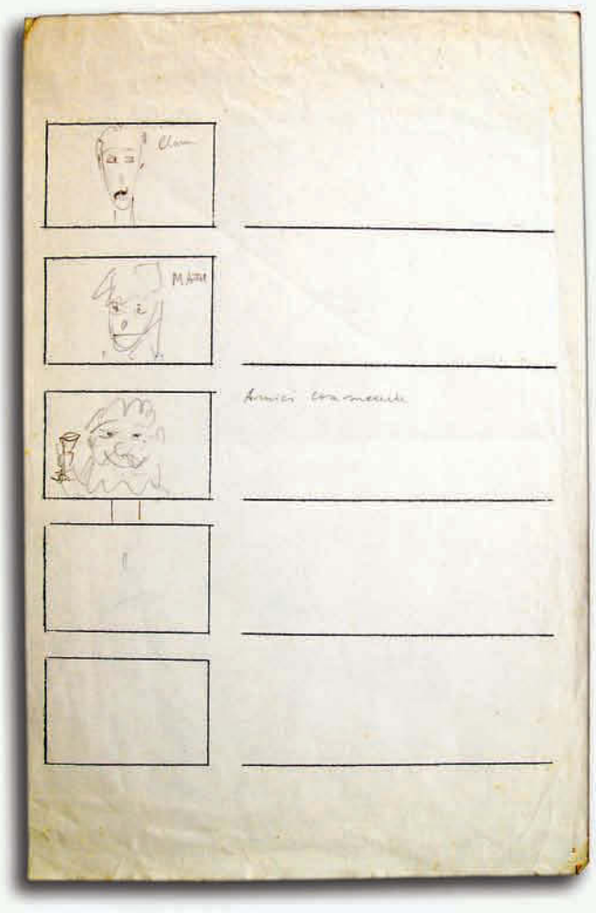

17
MODELLINO 2 ROMA
la macchina e seguita da cani
B.K entra in campo e la rincorre
- la macchina esce all'aperture.
MODELLINO 2 ROMA
la macchina cane sulle statue verso
dove B.K ha preso stesso.
PONZA
STRADA VERA
LANDROVER che si allontana (VERA)
MODELLINO 2 ROMA
M.P.P. di B.K. che fonde
incarecchiandosi e cane



LA VENERE D'ILLE

THEFT *of the bride's garter during the wedding party.*
The child in this sequence was played by Mario's grandson, Fabrizio "Roy" Bava.







EUGENIO BAVA CHRONOLOGY

In telling the story of the life and career of Mario Bava, it has also been necessary for me to tell the previously untold story of the life and work of Mario's father and mentor, Francesco Eugenio Bava. If allowing only for the countless title sequences that Eugenio and his Istituto LUCE colleagues created for Italian films over a period of thirty-five years, what is known of his work is grievously incomplete. Perhaps this outline, sketchy as it is, will inspire others to further research about this great artisan and pioneer of the Italian cinema.

1886 Born in Sanremo, March 31.

1900-01 Father, Giovanni, dies.

1905 Assists a Pathé Frères film crew by sculpting a fireplace. First job in the cinema.

1908 Marries Emma Ficini-Carpita.

1909 Founds San Remo Film.
Maggio—mese dei fiori ("May—Month of Flowers"). San Remo Film.

1910 *Terremoto fatale* ("Fatal Earthquake"). San Remo Film.

1911 Daughter, Elena, born on October 9.

1913 *Quo Vadis?* Historical drama. Dir: Enrico Guazzoni. DP/spfx: EB.
Cabiria. Historical drama. Dir: Giovanni Pastrone.

1914 Son, Mario, born on July 30.

1916 Hired by Arturo Ambrosio of Ambrosio Film. Family moves to Turin.
Cenere ("Ashes"). Melodrama. Ambrosio Film. Dir: Febo Mari.

1919 *L'amante della luna* ("The Moon Lover"). A Melodrama in Two Episodes: "*L'amante della luna*" and "*Il viandante.*" Ambrosio Film, Turin. Dir: Achille Consalvi. Screenplay: Based on a novel by Paul DeKock. DP: Achille Bianchi [EB, according to another source]. Cast: Lucy di San Germano, Cav. Roberto Villani, etc.
Champagne caprice. Melodrama. Ambrosio Film, Turin. Dir: Achille Consalvi. SP: Roberto Omegna. DP: Achille Bianchi, EB. Cast: Maria Roasio, Umberto Scalpellini.

1920 *La farfalla della morte* ("The Butterfly of Death"). Melodrama. Ambrosio Film, Turin. Dir and SP: F. G. Viancini & Arturo Ambrosio Jr. DP: Fernando [Eugenio] Bava. Cast: Maria Roasio, Cav. Roberto Villani.

1921 *Le ultime avventure di Galaor.* [Alternate title: *L'ultima impresa di Galaor*; reissued in 1923 as *Galaor tra i leoni*] Historical adventure. Do-Re-Mi Film, Rome. Dir: Mario Restivo [EB?]. SP and DP: EB. Cast: Alfredo Boccolini, Tatiana Gorka, Armando Novi, Decio Iacobacci.

1924 *Galaor contro Galaor.* Historical adventure. Fert, Turin. Dir: Eugenio Perego [EB]. DP: Sergio Goddio. Cast: Alfredo Boccolini.

1925 Films documentary about *Giovane Fascisti* tour of Far East, title unknown.
Named head of Istituto LUCE's Optical and Special Effects Department, where he and his co-workers design the mail titles of nearly every Italian feature released for the next three decades.

1933 *L'intelligenza del fioro* ("The Intelligence of Flora"). Scientific documentary. Istituto LUCE. Dir: Roberto Omegna (and EB, uncredited). DP: EB.

1936 *Nei giardini del mare* ("In the Garden of the Sea"). Scientific documentary. Istituto LUCE. Dir: Roberto Omegna (and EB, uncredited). DP: EB.
Sguardo al fondo marina ("Look at the Bottom of the Sea") Scientific documentary. Istituto LUCE. Dir: Roberto Omegna (and EB, uncredited). DP: EB.

1937 *Bolle di sapone.* Scientific documentary. Istituto LUCE. Dir: Roberto Omegna and EB. DP: EB.

1939 *La cavaletta* ("The Little Cavalla"). Scientific documentary. Istituto LUCE. Dir: Roberto Omegna and EB. DP: EB.
L'axolotl, il curioso anfibio messicano ("The Axolotl, a Curious Mexican Amphibian"). Scientific documentary. Istituto LUCE. Dir: Roberto Omegna and EB. DP: EB.

1941 *L'Islam.* Religious documentary. Istituto LUCE. Dir: Vittorio Gallo and EB. DP: EB.

1942 *Morfologia del fiore* ("Metamorphosis of Flowers"). Scientific documentary. Istituto LUCE. Dir: Roberto Omegna and EB. DP: EB.

Undated known Omegna/Bava works from the Istituto LUCE period:
L'occhio ("The Eye"), *I fiori* ("The Flowers"), and *Mosca delle olive (dacus oleae rossi) ed il suo endofago* ("The Olive Flies").

1948 *La macchina ammazzacattivi.* Dir: Roberto Rossellini. Spfx: EB.

1951 *Amor non ho! Però... però...* Dir: Giorgio Bianchi. DP: Mario Bava. Spfx: EB.

1957 *Sigfrido.* Mythological adventure. Dir: Giacomo Gentilomo. Spfx consultant: EB.

1959 *Caltiki il mostro immortale/Caltiki the Immortal Monster.* Horror/Science fiction. Galatea. Dir: "Robert Hamton" [Riccardo Freda and Mario Bava]. Spfx consultant: EB.
Retires from Istituto LUCE.

1960 *La maschera del demonio/Black Sunday.* Horror. Galatea/Jolly. Dir: Mario Bava. Spfx/sculpture: EB.
Il ladro di Bagdad/The Thief of Baghdad. Fantasy. Galatea. Dir: Arthur Lubin. Spfx: EB, Mario Bava (uncredited).

1961 *Maciste contro il vampiro/Goliath and the Vampires.* Horror/fantasy. Dir: Giacomo Gentilomo. Spfx: EB, Mario Bava (uncredited).

1963 *Perseo l'invincible/Medusa Against the Son of Hercules.* Mythological adventure. Dir: Alberto de Martino. Technical advisor: EB. Spfx: Mario Bava, Carlo Rambaldi.
I tre volti della paura/Black Sabbath. Horror. Galatea/American International. Dir: Mario Bava. Wax sculptures: EB.

1965 *Terrore nello spazio/Planet of the Vampires.* Science fiction. American International/Italian International. Dir: Mario Bava. Spfx consultant: EB.
Wife Emma dies after a long battle with cancer.

1966 Dies after being struck by automobile on Via Gregorio VII, September 9.

◀ THE DEAD *medium that Eugenio Bava sculpted in wax in I TRE VOLTI DELLA PAURA.*



MARIO BAVA *and Pietro Francisci (seated) co-direct a scene from* LE FATICHE DI ERCOLE.

Mario Bava Filmography

While the following filmography is more complete than others which have preceded it, I offer it knowing only too well how incomplete it must be. For a well-connected, respected workaholic like Bava, it is impossible to accept that he held only two jobs during 1957, one of the biggest "boom" years in the history of Italian film production, or that he had nothing to show for his efforts in the year 1969—but this is the extent of the activity my research has been able to uncover. Mario's son Lamberto, who assisted his father on feature film assignments, rarely if ever assisted him on his side-jobs and did not keep track of them. The dates below represent the years in which the following titles were released, and do not always reflect the years in which Bava actually worked on these titles.

1932–38
During this period, MB worked as his father's assistant in the optical effects department at the Istituto Nazionale LUCE, where his duties included main title design, animation, special trick photography, and the supervision of the department in his father's absence.

1935
L'occhio (Roberto Omegna & Eugenio Bava, S - a*)

1937
Scipione l'africano (Carmine Gallone, FF - t*)

1938
Il dottor Antonio (Enrico Guazzoni, FF - ca*)
La principessa Tarakanova (Fyodor Otsep & Mario Soldati, FF - ca*)
Giuseppe Verdi (Carmine Gallone, FF - ca*)
Inventiamo l'amore (Camillo Mastrocinque, FF - ca*)

1939
Il tacchino prepotente (Roberto Rossellini, S - dp/t)
La vispa Teresa (Roberto Rossellini, S - dp/t)
Il socio invisibile (Roberto Roberti, FF - ap*)

1940
Ecco la felicità! (Marcel L'Herbier, FF - ca*)
Istituto LUCE newsreels

1941
La compagna della teppa (Corrado D'Errico, FF - ca*)
Uomini sul fondo (Francesco De Robertis, FF - ap/sfx)
La corona di ferro (Alessandro Blasetti, FF - ap/sfx*?)

1942
Capitan Tempesta (Corrado D'Errico, FF - ca)
La nave bianca (Francesco De Robertis, FF - ca/sfx)
Alfa tau! (Francesco De Robertis, FF - ap/sfx)

1943
•*Uomini e cieli* (Francesco De Robertis, FF - ap/sfx)
Le avventure di Annabella (Leo Menardi, FF - dp)
Sant'Elena, piccola isola (Renato Simoni & Umberto Scarpelli, FF - dp)

1946
Montecassino nel cerchio di fuoco (Arturo Gemmiti, FF - ap*)
Donne belle nella pittura italiana (Raffaele Saitto, S - dp)
Paolo Veronese, pittore della gioia e del fasto (Raffaele Saitto, S - dp)
L'orecchio (S - d/dp/sfx/e)
Il barbiere di Siviglia (Mario Costa, FF - ca*)

KEY

S - short
FF - feature film
MS - mini-series
TV - television commercial

a - actor
ad - assistant director
ap - additional photography
ca - camera assistant
co - camera operator
cod - co-director (always uncredited)
d - director
dp - director of photography
e - editor
sfx - special effects
sp - screenplay
t - title design
* - uncredited
• - not mentioned in main text
? - unconfirmed

1947
Elisir d'amore (Mario Costa, FF - dp)
Il mito di Giorgine (Raffaele Saito, S - dp)
Cristo in Gerusalemme (Pietro Francisci, S - dp)
Musica nel cielo (Pietro Francisci, S - dp)
Passagio del mare (Pietro Francisci, S - dp)
La resurrezione (Pietro Francisci, S - dp)
Anfiteatro Flavio (S - d/dp/sfx/e)
Santa notte (S - d/dp/sfx/e)
Leggenda sinfonica (cod w/ Riccardo Melani, S - dp)
Natale al campo 119 (Pietro Francisci, FF - dp)

1948
Una lezione di geometria (Leonardo Sinisgalli & Virgilio Sabel, S - dp/sfx)
Follie per l'opera (Mario Costa, FF - dp)
•*L'auto nel tempo* (Fernando Pisani, S - dp)
•*Il trucco nel tempo* (Elio Picconi, S - dp)
I pagliacci (amore tragico) (Mario Costa, FF - dp/sfx)

1949
Antonio de Padova (Pietro Francisci, FF - dp/sfx)
Variazioni sinfoniche (S - d/dp/sfx/e)
Le porte d'oro (Riccardo Melani, S - dp)
Il demoniaco nell'arte (Carlo Castelli Gattinara, S - dp)
Fantasie di statuine (Telloli, S - dp/sfx)
Porcellana nell'arte (Telloli, S - dp)
Il vangelo del Beato Angelico (Telloli, S - dp)
Arte nella porcellana (N. Pasqualini, S - dp)

1950
Miss Italia (Duilio Coletti, FF - dp)
Il leone di Amalfi (Pietro Francisci, FF - dp/sfx)
È arrivato il cavalieri! (Mario Monicelli & Steno, FF - dp/sfx)
L'amore nell'arte (S - d/dp/sfx/e)
•*Canzone di primavera* (Mario Costa, FF - dp/sfx)
Disastri della guerra (Luciano Emmer, S - dp)
La festa di Sant Isidoro (Luciano Emmer, S - dp)
•*Il pittore di trastavere: Bartolomeo Pinelli* (G. Bagnani, S - dp)
I nuraghi (Marino Girolami, S - dp)
L'ospedale del delitto (Luigi Comencini, S - dp)
Sulle orme di Esculapio (Augusto Petrone, S - dp)
Quel bandito sono io! (Mario Soldati, FF - dp/sfx)
Vita da cani (Steno, FF - dp)

1951
•*La leggenda della croce* (Giuseppe Massani, S - dp)
•*Il pittore della primavera* (Giuseppe Massani, S - dp)
Guardie e ladri (Mario Monicelli & Steno, FF - dp)
Amor non ho, però... però... (Giorgio Bianchi, FF - dp/sfx)
La famiglia Passaguai (Aldo Fabrizi, FF - dp/sfx)

1952
La famiglia Passaguai fa fortuna (Aldo Fabrizi, FF - dp/sfx)
Papa diventa Mamà (Aldo Fabrizi, FF - dp/sfx)
Gli eroi della domenica (Mario Camerini, FF - dp)
Una croce senza nome (Tullio Covaz, FF - ap?)

1953
Spartaco (Riccardo Freda, FF - ap/sfx*)
Perdonami! (Mario Costa, FF - dp)
Il viale della speranza (Dino Risi, FF - dp/sfx)
Balocchi e profumi (Natale Montillo & F. M. De Bernardi, FF - dp)
Villa Borghese (Gianni Franciolini, FF - dp)

1954
Terza liceo (Luciano Emmer, FF - dp)
Cose da pazzi (G. W. Pabst, FF - dp/sfx)
Graziella (Giorgio Bianchi, FF - dp)
Attila il flagello di dio (Pietro Francisci, FF - ap/sfx?)
Ulisse (Mario Camerini, FF - ap/sfx?)
Hanno rubato un tram (Mario Bonnard, FF - dp/sfx)
Teodora imperatrice di Bisanzio (Riccardo Freda, FF - ap/sfx*)

1955
Buonanotte... avvocato! (Giorgio Bianchi, FF - dp)
Non ch'e amore più grande (Giorgio Bianchi, FF - dp)
Le avventure di Giacomo Casanova (Steno, FF - dp/sfx)
La donna più bella del mondo (Robert Z. Leonard, FF - dp/sfx)
Da qui all'eredità (Riccardo Freda, FF - ap/sfx*)
Beatrice Cenci (Riccardo Freda, FF - ap/sfx*)

1956
Mio figlio Nerone (Steno, FF - dp/sfx)
Orlando e i paladini di francia (Pietro Francisci, FF - cod/dp/sfx)
Alto Lazio pittoresco (Fernando Pisani, S - dp)
Copiando la natura (Viviana Pasqualini, S - dp/sfx)

1957
I vampiri (Riccardo Freda, FF - cod/dp/sfx)

1958
Le fatiche di Ercole (Pietro Francisci, FF - cod/dp/sfx)
Città di notte (Leopoldo Trieste, FF - cod/dp)
La morte viene dello spazio (FF - d [credited to Paolo Heusch] /dp/sfx)
Totò a Parigi (Camillo Mastrocinque, FF - ap/sfx*)
Totò nella luna (Steno, FF - ap/sfx*)
Nel segno di Roma (Guido Brignone, FF - ap/sfx*)

1959
Ercole e la regina di Lidia (Pietro Francisci, FF - cod/dp/sfx)
Agi Murad il diavolo bianco (Riccardo Freda, FF - dp/sfx)
Gli ultimi giorni di Pompei (Mario Bonnard, FF - ap/sfx?)
Caltiki il mostro immortale ("Robert Hamton" [Riccardo Freda], FF - cod/dp/sfx)
La battaglia di Maratona (Jacques Tourneur, FF - cod/dp/sfx)

1960
La maschera del demonio (FF - d/dp/sfx)
Morgan il pirata (Andre de Toth, FF - ap/sfx*)
Esther and the King (Raoul Walsh, FF - cod/dp/sfx)
Il giganti della Tessaglia (Riccardo Freda, FF - ap/sfx*)

1961
L'ultimo dei vichinghi (Giacomo Gentilomo, FF - cod/ap/sfx*)
Il ladro di Bagdad (Arthur Lubin, FF - ap/sfx*)
Le meraviglie di Aladino (Henry Levin, FF - cod/dp/sfx)
Maciste contro il vampiro (Giacomo Gentilomo, FF - ap/sfx?)
Maciste alla corte del Gran Khan (FF - ap/sfx*)
Ercole alla conquista di Atlantide (Vittorio Cottafavi, FF - ap/sfx*)
Ercole al centro della terra (FF - d/dp/sfx)
Il gladiatore invincibile (Alberto De Martino, FF - ap/sfx*)
Gli invasori (FF - d/dp/sfx)

1962
Maciste all'inferno (Riccardo Freda, FF - ap/sfx*)
I Normanni (Giuseppe Vari, FF - ap/sfx*)
Sette spade del vendicatore (Riccardo Freda, FF - ap/sfx*)
Perseo l'invincibile (Alberto De Martino, FF - ap/sfx*)

1963
La ragazza che sapeva troppo (FF - d/dp/sfx)
Oro per i cesari (Andre de Toth, Riccardo Freda and Sabatino Ciuffini - FF, ap/sfx*)
I tre volti della paura (FF - d/dp/sfx)
La frusta e il corpo (FF - d/dp/sfx)

1964
Sei donne per l'assassino (FF - d/dp/sfx)
Ercole l'invincibile (Al Wordl, FF - ap/sfx*)
Evil Eye (FF - d/dp/sfx/a)
Maciste e la regina di Samar (Giacomo Gentilomo, FF - ap/sfx*)
La strada per Fort Alamo (FF - d/dp/sfx)
Dunwich (unproduced, pre-production only)

1965
12 bambole biondo (pre-production only)
Minnesota Clay (Sergio Corbucci, FF - ap/sfx*)
Sfida dei giganti (Maurizio Lucidi, FF - co-d/sfx*)
Terrore nello spazio (FF - d/dp/sfx)
Ringo del Nebraska (Antonio Roman, FF - cod/ap/sfx*)
Roma contro Roma (Giuseppe Vari, FF - ap/sfx*)

1966
I coltelli del vendicatore (FF - d/dp/sfx)
Operazione paura (FF - d/dp/sfx)
Le spie vengono dal semifreddo (FF - d/dp/sfx/a)
Dr. Goldfoot and the Girl Bombs (FF - d/dp/sfx/a)
Cry Nightmare (pre-production only)

1967
Dick Smart 2.007 (pre-production only)

1968
Diabolik (FF - d/dp/sfx)
Odissea (Franco Rossi, MS - cod/dp/sfx)
Le avventure di Ulisse (Franco Rossi, FF - cod/dp/sfx)
Il pistolero segnato a dio (Giorgio Ferroni, FF - ap/sfx*)
Nude... si muore ("Anthony M. Dawson," FF - sp [uncredited])

1970
Il rosso segno della follia (FF - d/dp/sfx/t)
5 bambole per la luna d'agosto (FF - d/dp/sfx/e)
Roy Colt & Winchester Jack (FF - d/dp/sfx)
I futuribili (TV - d/dp/sfx*)
Waterloo (Sergei Bondarchuk, FF - ap/sfx*)
Esso commercials (Franco Rossi, TV - dp/sfx*)

1971
Four Times That Night (FF - d/dp/sfx)
Ecologia del delitto (FF - d/dp/sfx)
Vivisection documentary (d/dp*)
Ciocolatini baci commercials (TV - d/dp/sfx*)

1972
Baron Blood (FF - d/dp/sfx)
The Shadow Guest (pre-production only)
La vita a volte è molto dura, vero Provvidenza? (Giulio Petroni, FF - sfx)

1973
Lisa and the Devil (FF - d/sp)

1974
Last Will and Testament (pre-production only)
L'ospite dalle due (TV guest)

1975
The House of Exorcism ("Micky Lion," FF - cod/dp/sfx)
Moses the Lawgiver (Gianfranco De Bosio, MS - ap/sfx)
Cani arrabbiati (FF - d/a, unreleased)

1976
Moses (Gianfranco De Bosio, FF - ap/sfx)
Bordella (Pupi Avati, FF - sfx advisor)
Baby Kong (unproduced, pre-production only)

1977
Radici di paura (unproduced, pre-production only)
Schock (FF - d/dp/sfx)
Il cavalieri della stelle (unproduced, pre-production only)
Il vagabondo dello spazio (unproduced, pre-production only)

1978
La Venere d'Ille (S - cod w/ Lamberto Bava)

1979
Apocalypse (unproduced, pre-production only)

1980
Inferno (Dario Argento, FF - ap/sfx*)
Anomalia (unproduced, pre-production only)
Star Express (unproduced, pre-production only)

1997
Rabid Dogs (FF - d/a)

2000
Mario Bava Maestro of the Macabre. Channel 4 documentary (UK), directed by Garry S. Grant. Cast (in alphabetical order): Samuel Z. Arkoff, Fabrizio Bava, Georgia Bava, Lamberto Bava, Allan Bryce, Tim Burton, John Carpenter, Sean S. Cunningham, Joe Dante, John Phillip Law, Alfredo Leone, Tim Lucas, Ib Melchior, Kim Newman, Daria Nicolodi, Carlo Rambaldi, Carlo Rustichelli, Dardano Sacchetti, John Saxon

2002
Kidnapped (FF - d/a)

2004
Mario Bava Operazione paura. SKY TV documentary (Italy), directed by Gabriele Acerbo and Roberto Pisoni, first aired April 30, 2004. Cast (in alphabetical order): Dario Argento, Fabrizio Bava, Lamberto Bava, Mario Bava, Alberto Bevilacqua, Tim Burton, Roman Coppola, Roger Corman, Callisto Cosulich, Luigi Cozzi, Joe Dante (host), Dino De Laurentiis, Stefano Della Casa, Massimo De Rita, John Landis, John Phillip Law, Alfredo Leone, Tim Lucas, Fulvio Lucisano, Mario Monicelli, Ennio Morricone, Daria Nicolodi, Carlo Rambaldi, Elke Sommer, Barbara Steele, Sergio Stivaletti, Quentin Tarantino

Other Possibilities

As Lamberto Bava once told me about his grandfather Eugenio, "He didn't take credit for his work, but you see his influence everywhere." The same could said of his father Mario's side jobs in the Italian film industry.

Mario Bava was not one to stand around idly. A compulsive worker, he put his free time to use by providing anonymous assistance to other directors. He chose to work anonymously because he did not wish the pleasure he took in working to be perceived by his colleagues as a sign of his failure as a director. In the main text of this book, I have included accounts of those films in which Bava's participation is a certainty—either because someone else present on the set has confirmed it for me, and in some cases where I feel that his creative signature is too obvious to be denied.

Identifying Bava's cinematography is easy, identifying films which he completed for their directors or assistant-directed is impossible, and identifying his unsigned special effects work can be tricky. His special effects pose a special problem because Mario learned everything about this art, this science, this discipline from his father Eugenio Bava, who also passed it on to other apprentices, including Antonio Margheriti. Therefore, it is not always possible to say with confidence that "this trick shot was the work of Mario Bava," because the similarity we see could be a technique that Mario learned from his father, but was not alone in learning from him—as Lamberto says, such influence is visible everywhere. At the same time, a trained eye would not confuse a Margheriti effects shot with the work of Mario Bava; Margheriti built excellent miniature sets, but he had a tendency to spoil their illusion with intruding elements like undercranked water or fire that somehow never looks in correct proportion to its surroundings.

The following list is composed of titles about which I feel varying degrees of suspicion but opted not to include in the main text because, ultimately, I was not wholly confident of their paternity. Of one thing I am certain: regardless of how many "maybes" are on this list, the list of "certainties" that eluded my net—either because those films were never released in America, or because they belonged to a genre outside my expertise, because I saw them in a pan-and-scanned TV print that cropped Bava's contribution offscreen—is probably much longer.

1960

Seddok (l'erede di Satana)/Atom Age Vampire

For as long as the name Mario Bava has been included in American books and fan journals, he has been widely miscredited as the producer of this interesting black-and-white horror thriller, first released in Rome in August 1960. The confusion can be blamed on an animated main title sequence (found only in the American version) that proclaims the picture to be "A Mario Fava Production."

Seddok was produced by Lyons Film, with no executive producer listed, though Elio Ippolito Mellino is listed as production supervisor. Lamberto Bava strongly contests any speculation that his father may have produced the film anonymously: "It was not in my father's character to be a film producer; it would have been one of the very last things he would do."

The special effects of the transformation scenes, which cleverly replace actor Alberto Lupo with a clay likeness that is transformed, frame-by-frame, into the visage of a monster, is attributed in Italian references to Ugo Amadoro—who surely apprenticed to Eugenio Bava, and who was also the credited special effects designer of *Ercole e la regina di Samar/Hercules Against the Moon Men*, a film which (I believe) contains additional effects work and possibly second unit direction by Bava.

Though I'm confident that Bava had nothing to do with *Seddok*'s production or special effects, as my research made me more familiar with Bava's specific black-and-white photographic techniques, I have become more suspicious of his possible partial involvement in its cinematography. The credited cameraman is Aldo Giordani, who photographed *Odissea* (including Bava's "Polyphemus" episode)—but, at this stage of his career, Giordani's work (*Teseo contro il minotauro/The Minotaur, I Mongoli/The Mongols*) was simply not as accomplished as it sometimes is here. It's possible that Bava replaced Giordani for some days of shooting on this picture, or was brought in during post-production to "punch-up" the film with additional photography.

Gli amore di Ercole/
The Loves of Hercules *a.k.a.* ***Hercules vs. the Hydra***

This Carlo Ludovico Bragaglia film, starring Jayne Mansfield and her husband Mickey Hargitay, is one of the more ridiculous *pepla*, but it does contain a single location shot of a hillside crested with a superb glass matte painting of an ancient Roman city. The way the attributes of the actual location are skillfully merged with the illusion on the glass suggests the artist was Bava.

1961

Maciste, l'uomo più forte del mondo/
Mole Men Against the Son of Hercules

The camera unit on this Antonio Leonviola *peplum* consisted of Alvaro Mancori as director of photography and his son Sandro Mancori as camera assistant. Bava worked with Mancori family members on several occasions, and this film does contain some noticeably uncredited matte and effects shots that may reflect Bava's cooperation.

1963

Oro per i Cesari/Gold for the Caesars

After Riccardo Freda and Mario Bava worked together on *Sette spade del vendicatore/Seventh Sword*, Freda went on to co-direct this excellent *peplum*, starring Jeffrey Hunter and Mylène Démongeot. Set in 958 A.D., it tells the story of an ambitious, enslaved architect (Hunter) who is given the opportunity to win his freedom by leading pro-consul Gaius Cornelius Maximus (Massimo Girotti) to a vast deposit of gold in the mountains patrolled by the Celts, enemies of Rome, which will allow him to made a successful bid for the throne of the recently fallen emperor. The architect is needed because only he can envision and execute, with slave labor, a dam large enough to stop the flow of water that buries the gold.

Freda reportedly directed the exterior scenes while Andre de Toth and Sabatino Ciuffini shared direction of the studio interiors. The actual division of labor is not so easily perceived in the presence of the film itself, which plays out most of its climactic scenes on a studio-built "exterior" set. The film contains some exterior matte shots that could be the work of Bava (who was otherwise unoccupied during the period of filming), as well as some fairly elaborate scale model recreations of portions of the Cascate delle Marmore—a magnificent falls located in Umbria, not far from Rome—which is the waterfall used for some clever rear-screen projections to depict the final collapse of the dam.

Sandokan, la tigre di Mompracem/Sandokan the Great

Steve Reeves liked to have Mario Bava around when he made his films in Italy, and one scene in this costume adventure, directed by Umberto Lenzi, is staged in a manner that suggests Bava's possible presence behind the camera. A hostage of Sandokan (Reeves) is tied to a tree overnight for safekeeping, but he is found the next morning with a knife planted in his chest. Everything about the staging of this scene is nearly identical to the scene in Bava's *5 bambole per la luna d'agosto/5 Dolls for an August Moon* (1970) where the dead body of Marie (Edwige Fenech) is discovered tied to a tree, a knife protruding from her breast. In another odd coincidence, actor Maurice Poli is present as an onlooker in both scenes.

Ercole contro Molock/The Conquest of Mycenae

Directed by Giorgio Ferroni, *Ercole contro Molock* is a terrifically pulpy *pepla* in which a series of women are sacrificed to Moloch, the disfigured son of Queen Demetra (Rosalba Neri, playing a woman twice her own age), who ravages their faces and bodies with his sharp talons, for spiting his royal

ugliness with their beauty. The glass matte paintings that complete the illusion of ancient Mycenae—and, more particularly, an animated glass matte effect of a darkening cloud over the city—are very likely Bava's work as they share many traits with similar shots in *Le fatiche di Ercole*. One of the glass mattes seen here first appeared in Ferroni's earlier film *La guerra di Troia/The Trojan Horse* (1962), starring Steve Reeves. An intriguing coincidence is that two of the cast members of *Ercole contro Molock*, Michel Lemoine and Jany Clair, were cast together in Bava's next feature in this time period, *La strada per Fort Alamo* (1964).

Horror/The Blancheville Monster

This Alberto De Martino film contains some maquettes of a castle exterior in the rain that strongly resemble similar work that Bava had previously done for Riccardo Freda's *Beatrice Cenci* (1956).

1964

Il trionfo di Ercole/The Triumph of Hercules

Marilù Tolo appears in this Alberto De Martino *pepla*, starring Dan Vadis, which may be how Bava became familiar enough with her skills to want her for the role of Eva Kant in *Diabolik* (which she did not play). Bava's likeliest contributions to this entertaining adventure would be the upper tiers of the arena where the competitions are staged (these were filled in with glass matte painting) and a series of mattes depicting a ledge over a deep, flaming chasm. Vadis creeps along the ledge at one point (he is standing on a high platform behind the glass matte, viewed through a negative lens to diminish his size further), and the camera pans down the matte to a small (but seemingly large) fire surrounded by a number of foregrounded stalagmites. Later in the film, as Tolo stands on the same precarious ledge, the setup is the same, with the addition of a shot showing the pit from her perspective; this appears to have been achieved by positioning Tolo in front of the matte painting, with bluescreen behind the matte to permit a subsequent optical insert of a flaming, miniature quarry.

The techniques employed here are very true to Bava's approach, and the brushstrokes are very much like those seen in the mattes of the Medusa's valley in *Perseo l'invincibile*. The results are a little cruder than one would expect of Bava, which may reflect Bava making do with inadequate time or budget, or another technician following Bava's advice for filming the sequences.

1965

Fantômas se Déchainé!/Fantômas Strikes Back!

The second of André Hunebelle's Fantômas films, unlike its companions in the series, was partially shot in Rome. Viewers attentive to location will notice that some interiors were filmed at the Roma Hilton Hotel, including the same crimson-carpeted staircase seen in Bava's *Le spie vengono dal semifreddo/Dr. Goldfoot and the Girl Bombs* (1966). The two films actually have a good deal in common stylistically, and I *particularly* suspect that Bava was involved in, if not solely responsible for, the final reel effects shots involving the flying car of Fantômas. If true, this film would mark the only time Bava's work was translated into product for the Corgi miniature car company. The charming, naïve quality of the special effects, involving animated cut-outs and blueback opticals, strongly recalls the climactic hot air balloon sequence of *Le spie vengono dal semifreddo.* The film was first released in Paris at the end of 1965, with its Roman premiere following a month later. Therefore, it may well account for part of Bava's free time in September – October 1965.

1970

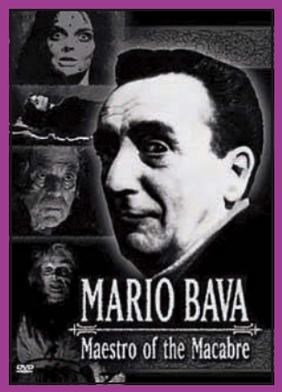
Matalo!

I came very close to including this latter-day Italian Western by Cesare Canevari in the main text, regardless of confirmation—that's how strongly I feel the presence of Bava throughout its running time . . . and I mean from the very first shot. The Bava and Canevari families were friendly. Cesare's sister Serena, after working as Michelangelo Antonioni's script girl on *Deserto rosso/Red Desert* (1964), had served as Bava's continuity assistant on *Terrore nello spazio* in 1965. Afterwards, she moved on to work on a series of films with Sergio Leone, but Bava would hire her brother Sergio Canevari—the production designer of Francesco Rosi's *Salvatore Giuliano* (1962), Gillo Pontecorvo's *La battaglia di Algeri/The Battle of Algiers* (1965), and Elio Petri's *Un tranquillo posto di campagna/A Quiet Place in the Country* (1969, a progressively styled ghost story that Bava much admired)—to design his next feature, *Ecologia del delitto*—immediately after this film was made.

For anyone reasonably acquainted with Mario Bava and his films, the experience of watching *Matalo!* is an unexpected encounter with a catalogue of Bava's most familiar visual tropes, as well as a sketchbook of cinematographic ideas too far-fetched for him to have undertaken under his own established name. The Italo-Spanish co-production's cinematography is credited to Julio Ortas, who shared a fair number of Bava's closest past professional affiliations, having photographed films for Mario Costa (*Il terrore del mantilla rossi*, 1963), Franco and Ciccio (*I due mafiosi*, 1964), and Riccardo Freda *(Il magnifico avventuriero*, 1963; *Giulietta e Romeo*, 1964; *Genoveffa di Brabante*, 1967); he also directed and photographed the second unit of Sergio Leone's *Per qualche dollaro in più/For a Few Dollars More* (1965). Ortas was credited with continuing to do second unit work throughout the 1960s, but *Matalo!* is such a peculiar combination of controlled cinematography and out-of-control cinematography that it is hard to know which unit was the supportive one; furthermore, it would not be proper to ascribe only the out-of-control work to Ortas because it is in these moments when the film is most often divinely inspired.

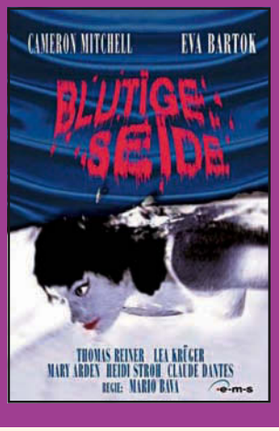
The opening shot in *Matalo!* is an archetypal Bava zoom into the eye of the sun, light flaring in perfect circles around the orb—a shot appearing in Bava's work as early as his second-unit photography for *Ercole alla conquista di Atlantide*, and which recurs throughout his *oeuvre*, as it would again in *Ecologia del delitto*. When the story reaches Benson City, the setting is introduced with a shot of an empty swing being buffeted by the wind (see *Operazione paura*, *Four Times That Night*, *Schock*), followed by a 180° establishing shot (*I sette gladiatori*). The interiors, especially during night scenes, make frequent use of luminous blue and amber lighting gels, usually with a dress or a drape or some other red object centered in the composition. After the coach robbery, scenes of Phil's (Luís Davila) gang returning to Benson City are intercut with rapid cutaways to the closeup of a peering eye (*Ecologia del delitto*), and as Phil sets about concealing the box of gold in a barn, the barrel of a rifle is shown in the fog outside an open window, framed in such a way as to recall the *mise-en-scène* of Kurt's unexpected murder in *La frusta e il corpo*. As Ted (Antonio Salines) is tormenting Ray (Lou Castel), there is a subjective shot of Ray that evokes the thirsty man's delirium by executing an inexplicable 360° clockwise rotation (as in the reveal of the undead Prince Vajda in *La maschera del demonio*). As the tormenting continues, the maniacal Ted delights in multiplying his victim's anguish by peering at him through a faceted crystal ball ornament—and the camera shows us the fractured image that Ted sees (*Mio figlio Nerone, Il rosso segno della follia*). Later, a sense of impending danger is imparted by the strumming of a harp's strings (*Sei donne per l'assassino*), which we see being sounded by the rifle barrel; when the sound is investigated, the strings appear to have been plucked by a loose curtain rod blown to and fro by the wind (an analogy to the whipping sounds in *La frusta e il corpo* that turn out to be the sound of a loose vine lashing at a window pane). As the gang's tensions reach a boiling point, the cinematography indulges not only in 360° camera spins (*Il tacchino prepotente*, *La maschera del demonio*, *Diabolik*), but continuous, even accelerated spinning as the camera cranes up to spin—gratuitously—at the level of the rooftops. Even Ray's use of the boomerang carries Bava-like associations harkening back to the knife-throwing in *I coltelli del vendicatore*, and one of the fundamental themes of Bava's work (the futility of human greed) is restated with ultimate irony in the closing shot of the gang strewn dead around the main street as the ass ambles away with the fortune in gold.

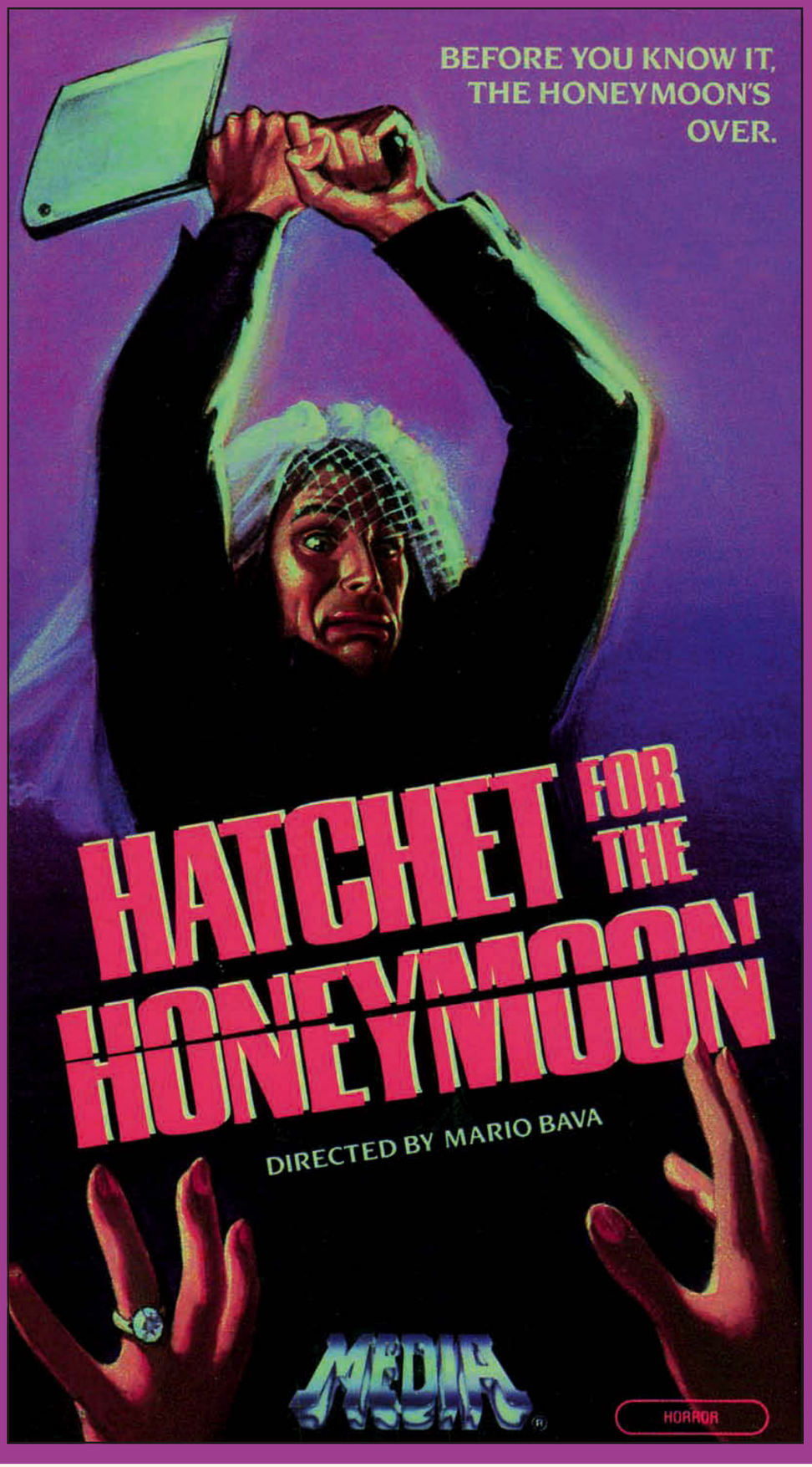
In short, though I feel convinced that Bava was somehow significantly involved in the creation of this film, I was not able to obtain confirmation from Cesare Canevari before this book went to press. But now that the question has been asked, perhaps someday the answer will be known.

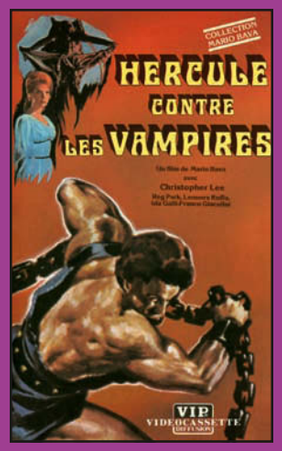

MARIO BAVA
Maestro of the Macabre


EVC
KILL!
BABY
KILL!

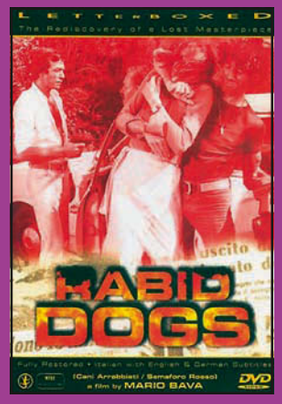

COLLECTION MARIO BAVA
LES 5 VISAGES DE LA PEUR
MICHÈLE MERCIER - BORIS KARLOFF - MARK DAMON
VIP VIDEOCASSETTE

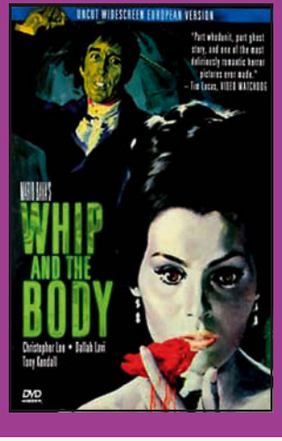

CAMERON MITCHELL
EVA BARTON
BLUTIGE SEIDE
THOMAS REINER · LEA KRÜGER
MARY ARDEN · HEIDI STROH · CLAUDE DANTES
REGIE: MARIO BAVA
e·m·s


BEFORE YOU KNOW IT,
THE HONEYMOON'S
OVER.
HATCHET FOR THE HONEYMOON
DIRECTED BY MARIO BAVA
MEDIA
HORROR


COLLECTION MARIO BAVA
HERCULE CONTRE LES VAMPIRES
Christopher Lee
VIP VIDEOCASSETTE


Les Mille et Une Nuits
COLLECTION MARIO BAVA
VIP


LETTERBOXED
The Rediscovery of a Lost Masterpiece
RABID DOGS
(Cani Arrabbiati / Semaforo Rosso)
a film by MARIO BAVA
DVD


RAROT WIDESCREEN EUROPEAN VERSION
"Part whodunit, part ghost story, and one of the most deliciously romantic horror pictures ever made."
– Tim Lucas, VIDEO WATCHDOG
MARIO BAVA'S
WHIP AND THE BODY
Christopher Lee • Daliah Lavi
Tony Kendall
DVD

Mario Bava Videography

The following is an accounting of Mario Bava's availability on all the different home viewing formats (DVD, VHS, Beta, LaserDisc, even CED Disc and Super 8 mm film), compiled with the assistance of Marc Morris. It is undoubtedly incomplete, particularly where recent releases and the endless "public domain" tape issues of ***Hercules*** *are concerned, but it is as thorough as we could make it. Many of these titles are obviously no longer in print.*







5 Bambole per la luna d'agosto

Australia: *Five Dolls for an August Moon*, Goldseal (VHS)
Australia: *Five Dolls for an August Moon*, Sundowner (VHS)
Australia: *Five Dolls*, Vogue Video (VHS)
Denmark: *Five Dolls for an August Moon*, Filmlab (VHS)
France: *L'Ile d'Epouvante*, Vip International (VHS, 1982)
France: *L'Ile d'Epouvante*, Mad Movies/One Plus One (DVD R2, 1.85:1/16:9 with extras)
Italy: *5 bambole per la luna d'agosto*, PAC (VHS)
Italy: *5 bambole per la luna d'agosto*, Center Video (VHS)
Spain: *5 Muñecas para la Luna de Agosto*, EV (VHS)
Sweden: *5 dockor i augustimänen*, Trix Video (VHS, English with Swedish subtitles)
Switzerland: *5 bambole per la luna d'agosto*, Star Video (VHS)
UK: *Five Dolls for an August Moon*, Redemption Video (VHS)
US: *5 Dolls for an August Moon*, Image Entertainment (VHS, 1.85:1)
US: *5 Dolls for an August Moon*, Image Entertainment (DVD R1, 1.85:1, English/French/Italian soundtracks, liner notes by Tim Lucas, extras)

Agi Murad il diavolo bianco

US: *The White Warrior*, VCI Home Video (VHS)
US: *The White Warrior*, VCI Home Video (DVD R0)
Note: A very strange composite of widescreen and stretched standard screen elements, but worthwhile as the only source to see Bava's widescreen compositions.

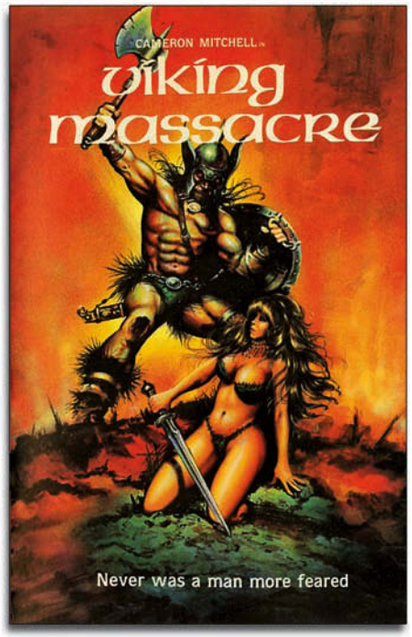
Le avventure di Giacomo Casanova

Italy: *Le avventure di Giacomo Casanova*, Ripley's Home Video (DVD R2, 1.35:1, extras: Italian/French audio options, French/Italian trailers, restored scene, 24-page booklet).

Baron Blood

Australia: *Baron Blood*, Roadshow Video (VHS)
Denmark: *Baron Blood*, Irish Video (VHS, English continental version with Danish subtitles)
France: *Baron Blood—Le Chambre de la Mort*, PolyGram Video (VHS)
France: *Baron Vampire*, VIP (VHS)
France: *Baron Vampire*, Mad Movies/One Plus One (DVD R2, 1.33:1 with extras)
French Canada: *Baron Vampire*, label unknown (VHS)
Germany: *Baron Blood*, E-M-S/Anolis Entertainment (DVD R2, 1.85:1, extras: Elke Sommer interview, "*Il castello dell'oriore*" documentary [imported from Italian Raro/Nocturno release] featuring Lamberto Bava, Alberto Pezzotta, Stefano Della Casa, and others, trailers, stills, liner notes, German/Italian subtitles, German/English audio)
Greece: *Baron Blood*, label unknown (VHS)
Holland: *Baron Blood*, Paradiso (DVD R2, same as US Image Entertainment release with Dutch subtitles)
Italy: *Gli orrori del castello di Norimberga*, Lamberto Forni Video (VHS, widescreen)
Italy: *Gli orrori del castello di Norimberga*, Raro Video/Nocturno (DVD, 1.85:1/16:9, extras: "*Il castello dell'oriore*" documentary with Lamberto Bava, Alberto Pezzotta, Stefano Della Casa and others, trailers, Italian/English audio, subtitles)
Japan: *Baron Blood*, Toshiba Video (VHS, English continental version with Japanese subtitles)
Sweden: *Baron Blood*, Videoklubben (VHS, English continental version with Swedish subtitles)
UK: *Baron Blood*, Guild Home Video #GH131 (VHS, AIP version)
UK: *Baron Blood*, Redemption Video (VHS) Note: Continental version.
US: *The Torture Chamber of Baron Blood*, Thorn EMI HBO Video #TVC3762 (VHS and Beta) Note: AIP version.
US: *The Torture Chamber of Baron Blood*, HBO Video (VHS) Note: AIP version.
US: *The Torture Chamber of Baron Blood*, Orion Home Video (LaserDisc with co-feature *Circus of Horrors*) Note: AIP version.







US: *Baron Blood*, Elite Entertainment/Video Treasures (VHS, 1.85:1) Note: Continental version.
US: *Baron Blood*, Elite Entertainment (LaserDisc, 1.85:1, extras, with co-feature *Lisa and the Devil*) Note: Continental version.
US: *Baron Blood*, Image Entertainment (DVD R1, 1.85:1, with trailer, liner notes by Tim Lucas) Note: Continental version.

La battaglia di Maratona

France: *La Battaille de Marathon*, Vip International (VHS, cropped to 1.85:1)
US: *The Giant of Marathon*, Sinister Cinema (VHS and Beta, 1.85:1 composite of the French image track and the English soundtrack of a cropped print)
US: *The Giant of Marathon*, Alpha Video (DVD, same as Sinister Cinema VHS)

Black Sabbath

US: *Black Sabbath*, Orion/Image Entertainment (LaserDisc, AIP version with *Black Sunday* as co-feature)

Black Sunday

US: *Black Sunday*, Orion/Image Entertainment (LaserDisc, AIP version with *Black Sabbath* as co-feature)

Buonanotte... avvocato!

US: Surf Film (VHS, Italian)

Cani arrabbiati

Germany: *Rabid Dogs*, Lucertola Media (DVD, 1.66:1, Italian with removable English and German subtitles, biographies, poster and stills galleries) Note: Includes reconstructed main title sequence exclusive to this release.
Germany: *Wild Dogs*, Astro Video (DVD R2) Note: Unauthorized bootleg release.
Germany: *Wild Dogs*, Marketing Video (DVD R2) Note: According to Alfredo Leone, this is an unauthorized release.
US: *Rabid Dogs*, Jef Films (DVD R1) Note: Identical to Lucertola Media release, this is reportedly an unauthorized issue.
US: *Rabid Dogs*/*Kidnapped*, Anchor Bay Entertainment (DVD R1, 1.78:1/16:9, contains 1997 and 2002 versions of film, Tim Lucas commentary, "End of the Road" featurette with producer Alfredo Leone, other extras)

I coltelli del vendicatore

Canada: *Viking Massacre*, Pan-Canadian Video Presentations (VHS)
Finland: *The Knives of the Avenger*, Alfa (VHS)
France: *Duel au Coteau*, Vip International (VHS)
Germany: *Eine Handvoll blanker Messer*, Spectrum Video (VHS)
Germany: *Rurik der Huene*, "Rurik the Great," Arcade Video (VHS)
Germany: *Rurik—Mein ist die Rache*, "Rurik—Vengeance is Mine," Tyrus Film Video (VHS)
Germany: *Rurik der Huene—Eine Handvoll blanker Messer*, United Video (VHS)
Germany: *Eine Handvoll blanker Messer*, E-M-S/Anolis Entertainment (DVD R2 with extras: English, German and Italian audio options, US trailer, German main title, poster gallery, issued in two different slip-covers)
Greece: *Knives of the Avenger*, label unknown (VHS, English with Greek subtitles)
US: *Viking Massacre*, Mega Video (VHS)
US: *Bladestorm*, label unknown (VHS)
US: *Knives of the Avenger*, Image Entertainment (VHS, 2.35:1)
US: *Knives of the Avenger*, Image Entertainment (DVD R0, 2.35:1/16:9, liner notes by Tim Lucas, trailer, extras)
US: *The Mario Bava Collection Volume 1*, Anchor Bay Entertainment (DVD R1 box set, 2.35:1/16:9, with trailers)

The Devil's Commandment

US: The Devil's Commandment, Sinister Cinema (VHS) Note: The source of several knock-off video releases of this re-edited, augmented US version of the classic I vampiri. The 2.35:1 anamorphic source materials are only partly decompressed to a ratio of 1.85:1.
US: The Devil's Commandment, Something Weird Video (VHS)

Diabolik

France: *Fatal Mission*, American Video (VHS)
Greece: *12 Ekoikheh tou Ehatepman*, H Video (VHS, 1.75:1)
US: *Danger: Diabolik*, Paramount/Gateway (VHS, EP mode)
US: *Danger: Diabolik*, Paramount Home Video (LaserDisc, widescreen)
US: *Danger: Diabolik*, Paramount Home Video (DVD R1, with audio commentary by John Phillip Law and Tim Lucas; "From Fumetti to Film" featurette with Stephen R. Bissette, Roman Coppola, Dino De Laurentiis, Ennio Morricone and others; The Beastie Boys' "Body Movin'" rock video with audio commentary by Adam Yauch; more)

Dr. Goldfoot and the Girl Bombs

Greece: title unknown, Home Video Hellas (VHS, AIP version in English with Greek subtitles)
US: *Dr. Goldfoot and the Girl Bombs*, Orion Home Video #6617 (VHS, also available in EP)

Ecologia del delitto

Denmark: *Bay of Blood*, WM Video (VHS, English with Danish subtitles)
France: *La Baie Sanglante*, American Video (VHS)
France: *La Baie Sanglante*, Hollywood Video (VHS)
France: *La Baie Sanglante*, Fil à Film (VHS)
France: *La Baie Sanglante*, Mad Movies/One Plus One (DVD R2, 1.85:1 with extras)
France: *La Baie Sanglante*, TFI Video (DVD, 1.85:1)
Germany: *Im Blutrausch des Teufels*, Divisori (VHS)
Germany: *Im Blutrausch des Teufels*, Hunter Video (VHS)
Germany: *Im Blutrausch des Teufels*, Universal Video (VHS, banned photo cover)
Germany: *Im Blutrausch des Teufels*, Mondial Video (VHS)
Germany: *Im Blutrausch des Teufels*, Mondial Video (LaserDisc)
Germany: *Bay of Blood*, label unknown (DVD R2) Note: We have gathered conflicting information on this release, which we've heard is either a bootleg release or a legitimate but anonymous release by a German company called MIB. Neither report could be confirmed.
Germany: *Im Blautrausch des Satans*, XT (DVD R2 limited edition of 1000 copies with extras, 1.85:1/16:9, trailer, radio spots, slide show)
Germany: *Twitch of the Death Nerve*, Astro Records & Filmworks (DVD R2) Note: In Germany, the Astro and XT DVDs were officially released as "foreign" discs, because the earlier German VHS release was banned for glorification of violence.
Greece: *Bay of Blood*, Cronos (VHS)
Holland: *Bay of Blood*, Paradiso (DVD R2, same as US Image Entertainment release with Dutch subtitles)
Italy: *Reazione a catena*, Cvr/Gvr (VHS)
Italy: *Reazione a catena*, General Video (VHS)
Italy: *Reazione a catena*, Raro Video/Nocturno/Horror Club (DVD R2, 1.85:1 anamorphic with extras: documentary with Lamberto Bava, Dardano Sacchetti, Alberto Pezzotta and others, poster galleries)
Japan: *Bay of Blood*, Toho Video (Japan, English with Japanese subtitles)

Spain: *Bahia de Sangre*, Exclusivas 79 (VHS)
UK: *Blood Bath*, Hokushin Audio Visual #VM75 (VHS and Beta, "Video Nasty")
UK: *Twitch of the Death Nerve*, Redemption Video (VHS)
US: *Bay of Blood*, MPI/Gorgon Video (VHS and Beta)
US: *Twitch of the Death Nerve*, MPI/Gorgon Video #MF3061 (VHS and Beta, repackaged)
US: *Bay of Blood*, Simitar Entertainment #7654 (DVD R1, 1.66:1) Note: While the sound quality of this unauthorized release is quite acceptable, the picture quality is wretched.
US: *Twitch of the Death Nerve*, Image Entertainment (VHS, 1.85:1, trailer). Note: Substandard audio quality.
US: *Twitch of the Death Nerve*, Image Entertainment (DVD R1, 1.85:1/16:9, liner notes by Tim Lucas, trailer, extras). Note: This disc offers the same transfer as the Image VHS. The audio is gratingly defective.

L'elisir d'amore

US: Bel Canto Society, Inc. (VHS)

Ercole al centro della terra

France: *Hercule contre les Vampires*, Vip International (VHS, 1982)
France: *Hercule contre les Vampires*, PolyGram Video (VHS)
Germany: *Vampire gegen Herakles*, Monte Video (VHS)
Germany: *Vampire gegen Herakles*, Juenger Video (VHS)
Germany: *Vampire gegen Herakles*, Astro Video (VHS)
Greece: *Hercules in the Center of the Earth*, Zodiac (VHS)
Italy: *Ercole al centro della terra*, Ricordi (VHS)
UK: *Hercules in the Centre of the Earth*, Skyline Video #CLO 009 (VHS)
US: *Hercules in the Haunted World*, Rhino Video #RNVD1415 (VHS) Note: This is the only home video release of the re-edited, re-scored Woolner Bros. edition, but the image is badly cropped and the color badly faded.
US: *Hercules in the Haunted World*, Fantoma (DVD R1, Italian version with alternate English track and other extras, liner notes by Tim Lucas) Note: Despite the title given to this release, it includes the *Hercules in the Center of the Earth* export cut rather than the re-edited, re-scored Woolner Bros. release with Filmation animated titles shown in US theaters. This otherwise outstanding release is lacking the pre-credits sequence with Christopher Lee found on the British Skyline Video VHS release.

Ercole e la regina di Lidia

Germany: *Herkules im Reich der Amazonen*, "Hercules in the Empire of the Amazons," Concorde (DVD R2, German/French/English audio, 2.35:1/16:9 with co-feature *Le fatiche di Ercole*) Note: The only letterboxed presentation in English currently available, which lamentably offers only the shortened 1970s reissue cut.
Japan: *Ercole e la regina di Lidia*, Nippon Columbia (VHS)
UK: *Hercules Unchained*, Intervision #A-A 0393 (VHS, Beta)
US: *Hercules Unchained*, Magnetic Home Video (VHS, Beta)
US: *Hercules Unchained*, Embassy Video #2074 (VHS, Beta)
US: *Hercules Unchained*, Vid America #7144 (VHS, Beta)
US: *Hercules Unchained*, Image Entertainment #ID7296VA (LaserDisc)
US: *Hercules Unchained*, Gemstone Entertainment (DVD)

Ester e il re

France: *Esther et le Roi*, Initial Distribution Vide (VHS)
US: *Esther and the King*, Continental Home Video (VHS and Beta, 1989)
US: *Esther and the King*, 20th Century Fox Home Entertainment (VHS)
US: *Esther and the King*, Diamond Entertainment (DVD R0, 1.33:1)

La fatiche di Ercole

France: *Les Travaux de Hercule*, G.C.T.H.V. (DVD, 2.35:1/16:9, with French, Italian and English soundtracks, extras)
Germany: *Die unglaublichen Abenteuer des Herkules*, Toppic (VHS)
Germany: *Die unglaublichen Abenteuer des Herkules*, Concorde (DVD R2, German/French/English audio, 2.35:1/16:9). Note: A two-disc set also including *Ercole e la regina di Lidia/Hercules Unchained*, also letterboxed. Both films reflect the shorter running time of the 1970s double-bill.
Japan: *La fatiche di Ercole*, Pioneer LDC (DVD, 2.35:1)
UK: *Hercules*, Intervision #A-A 0389 (VHS and Beta)
US: *Hercules*, Embassy Video #2073 (VHS and Beta, original English dub)
US: *Hercules*, VidAmerica #7143 (VHS and Beta, Levine produced dub)
US: *Hercules*, Image Entertainment #ID7295VA (LaserDisc, 2.35:1; a new composite of the Levine credits and the original English dub)
US: *Hercules*, Sterling Entertainment (DVD, original English dub)

Follie per l'opera

US: Bel Canto Society, Inc. (VHS, Italian with subtitles)

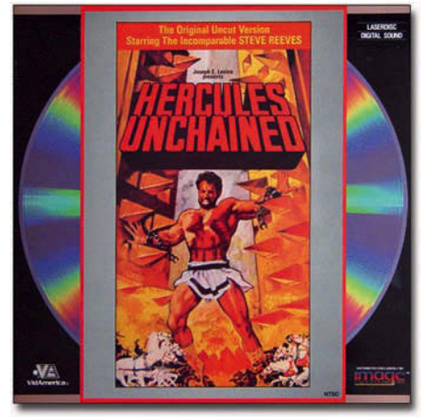
Four Times That Night

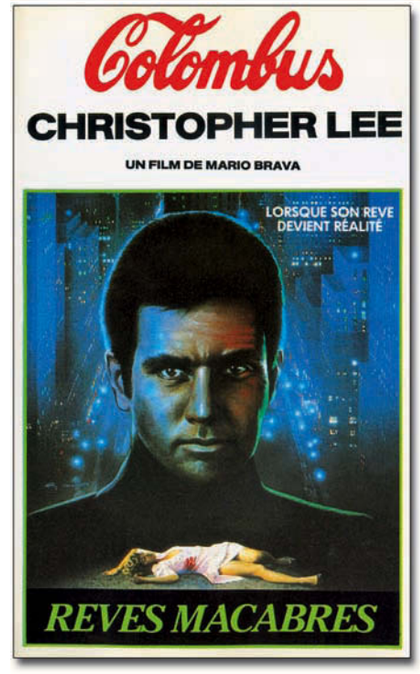
Denmark: *Four Times That Night*, Dana Sound (VHS, English with Danish subtitles)
Italy: *Quattro volte... quella notte*, Fonit Cetra (VHS)
Sweden: *Vad hände den natten*, Videoklubben (VHS, English with Swedish subtitles)
UK: *Four Times That Night*, Pagan Films (VHS, English dubbed version) Note: The only official release of the English dubbed version.
US: *Quattro volte... quella notte*, International Cassandra Video (VHS, widescreen in Italian only)
US: *Four Times That Night*, Image Entertainment (VHS, 1.85:1, in Italian with English subtitles)
US: *Four Times That Night*, Image Entertainment (DVD R1, 1.85:1/16:9, in Italian with removable English subtitles, liner notes by Tim Lucas) Note: Though an English dub track exists for the film, which has been released elsewhere in the world, producer Alfredo Leone opted to withhold it from the US release, feeling that the track's poor quality would sour its reception by the viewing public.

La frusta e il corpo

France: *Le Corps & le Fouet*, Alpi Video Diffusion (VHS)
France: *Le Corps & le Fouet*, PolyGram Video (VHS)
France: *Reves Macabres*, Columbus (VHS)
Germany: *Der Dämon und die Jungfrau*, SK (Sauerland Kunststoffe, VHS). Note: This version had two ratings on the cover ("16" and "18"), but the "FSK 16" sign should be correct. This release is cut, even missing the film's opening credits.
Germany: *Der Dämon und die Jungfrau*, E-M-S/Anolis Entertainment (DVD R2, 1.85:1/16:9 with extras: audio commentary by Tim Lucas [in English], English and German audio options, trailers, liner notes by Tim Lucas in German, German VHS main titles, US *What* main titles)
Holland: *The Whip and the Flesh*, EVC (VHS and Beta, original English language export version, widescreen)
Japan: *The Whip and the Body*, Toshiba VTS-F269V (VHS, Beta, 1.75:1, English with Japanese subtitles)
Mexico: *Allucinacíon*, Mexicinema Video Corporation (VHS)
US: *What!*, Sinister Cinema (VHS)
US: *The Whip and the Body*, VCI Home Video (VHS, 1.85:1)
US: *The Whip and the Body*, VCI Home Video (DVD R0, 1.85:1, with audio commentary by Tim Lucas, liner notes by Jay Fenton, trailers and other extras)
US: *The Whip and the Body*, Movie Ventures/Miracle Pictures (DVD R0, 1.85:1, DTS sound option)

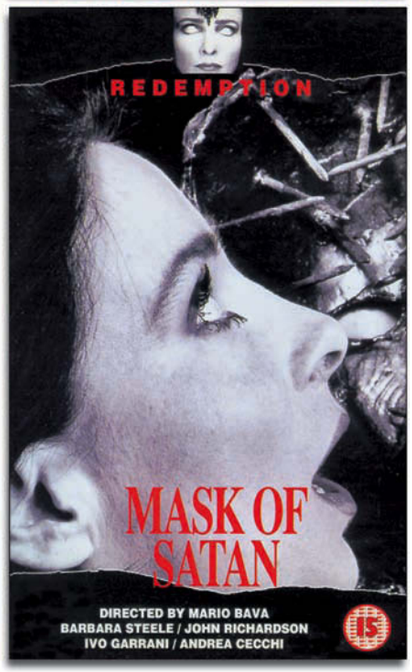












Graziella

US: Mastro Entertainment Corporation (VHS, Italian)

Guardie e ladri

Italy: *Guardie e ladri*, Video Movie #DVT06 (DVD)

The House of Exorcism

Australia: *The House of Exorcism*, Seven Keys (VHS)
Australia: *The House of Exorcism*, Showcase Video (VHS)
Denmark: *House of Exorcism*, Irish Video (VHS, English with Danish subtitles)
France: *La Maison de l'Exorcisme*, Vip International (VHS, 1987)
France: *La Maison de l'Exorcisme*, PolyGram Video (VHS)
France: *La Maison de l'Exorcisme*, Collection Ciné-Club (DVD R2)
Germany: *Der Teuflische*, "The Devilish One," Geiselgasteig (VHS) Note: Standard ratio, cropped and cut
Germany: *Der Teuflische—Das Haus des Exorzisten*, "The Devilish one—The House of the Exorcist," SVC (VHS) Note: Letterboxed and reportedly a different cut to the Geiselgasteig release.
Holland: *The House of Exorcism*, Paradiso (DVD R2, same as US Image Entertainment release, with Dutch subtitles)
Japan: *House of Exorcism*, Funai Video (VHS, English with Japanese subtitles)
Spain: *La Casa del Esorcismo*, Cydis Video (VHS)
Sweden: *House of Exorcism*, Europafilm (VHS, English with Swedish subtitles)
UK: *House of Exorcism*, Video Tape Centre #VTC1021 (VHS)
US: *House of Exorcism*, MPI Video #CG2050 (VHS and Beta)
US: *The Devil in the House of Exorcism*, MPI/Gorgon Video (VHS)
US: *House of Exorcism*, Image Entertainment (VHS, 1.85:1, trailer)
US: *Lisa and the Devil/House of Exorcism*, Image Entertainment (DVD R1, 1.85:1/16:9, audio commentary by Alfredo Leone and Elke Sommer, liner notes by Tim Lucas, trailer and extras)

Inferno

Germany: *Horror Infernal*, CBS/Fox (VHS)
Germany: *Horror Infernal*, CBS/Fox (LaserDisc)
UK: *Inferno*, CBS/Fox #1140-50 (VHS and Beta)
UK: *Inferno*, CBS/Fox (LaserDisc, stereo)
UK: *Inferno*, Fox #1140-50 (VHS, stereo)
US: *Inferno*, Key Video #1140 (VHS and Beta, stereo)
US: *Inferno*, Anchor Bay Entertainment (VHS, 1.85:1, trailer and extras, stereo)
US: *Inferno*, Anchor Bay Entertainment (DVD R1, 1.85:1/16:9, stereo surround, interview with Dario Argento, trailer, extras)

Gli invasori

France: *La Ruée des Vikings*, Vip International (VHS)
France: *La Ruée des Vikings*, Polygram (VHS)
Germany: *Das Königsmal/Iron–Rächer des Nordens*, Dynamic Video (VHS)
Germany: *Die Rache der Wikinger*, Starlight Video (VHS)
Germany: *Die Rache der Wikinger*, Ascot Elite/Colosseo (DVD R2 PAL, 2.35:1, English, Italian and German audio, German trailer, essential *Mario Bava Speaks* documentary)
Greece: *Erik the Conqueror* (VHS, uncompressed anamorphic picture)
Spain: *La Furia de los Vikingos*, Civsa (VHS)
UK: *Erik the Conqueror*, Hotline (VHS and Beta, AIP version)
UK: *Viking Invaders*, Inter-Ocean #IOV 070 (VHS and Beta, Italian cut in English, widescreen)
US: *Erik the Conqueror*, Sinister Cinema (VHS and Beta, AIP version)
US: *The Invaders*, Panther Entertainment (VHS, Italian cut in English)
US: *Erik the Conqueror*, Anchor Bay Entertainment (DVD R1, 2.35:1/16:9, announced for 2007 release)

Il ladro di Bagdad

France: *Le Voleur de Bagdad*, VIP Diffusion (VHS). Note: The only letterboxed release known, but—as with all VIP and Video Club French VHS releases of the early 1980s, the widescreen framing has been cropped from 2.35:1 to something closer to 1.85:1.
US: *The Thief of Baghdad*, Embassy Video (VHS, Beta)
US: *The Thief of Baghdad*, Embassy Video (LaserDisc)

Lisa and the Devil

Denmark: *Lisa and the Devil*, Breien Film (VHS, English with Danish subtitles)
France: *Lisa et le Diable*, Mad Movies/One Plus One (DVD R2, 1.85:1 with extras: *Revivez la maison de l'exorcisme* interview/documentary featuring Lamberto Bava, Roberto Natale and Alberto Pezzotta, poster galleries for *Lisa and the Devil* and *House of Exorcism*, and *Domino Cass Crad* by David Morlet.)
Greece: *Lisa and the Devil*, Liberty Video (VHS, English with Greek subtitles)
Spain: *El Diablo se Lleva los Muertos*, Video España (VHS, alternate Spanish cut)
Spain: *El Diablo se Lleva los Muertos*, Dream Time (VHS, alternate Spanish cut)
Sweden: *Lisa and the Devil*, Videoklubben (VHS, English language version with Swedish subtitles)
UK: *Lisa and the Devil*, Guild Video #GH260 (VHS, announced but not released)
UK: *Lisa and the Devil*, Redemption Video (VHS, 1.85:1)
US: *Lisa and the Devil*, Elite Entertainment/Video Treasures (VHS, 1.85:1, liner notes by Alfredo Leone)
US: *Lisa and the Devil*, Elite Entertainment (LaserDisc, 1.85:1, extras, with co-feature *Baron Blood*)
US: *Lisa and the Devil*, Image Entertainment (DVD R1, 1.85:1)
US: *Lisa and the Devil/House of Exorcism*, Image Entertainment (DVD R1, 1.85:1, audio commentary by Alfredo Leone and Elke Sommer, liner notes by Tim Lucas, trailer and extras)

Mario Bava Maestro of the Macabre

US: Image Entertainment (DVD R1 with extras, 1.85:1/16:9, trailers)

La maschera del demonio

France: *Le Masque du Démon*, RCA/Fantastic Video (VHS)
France: *Le Masque du Démon*, RCA/Fil à Film (VHS)
France: *Le Masque du Démon*, Mad Movies/One Plus One (DVD with extras)
Germany: *Die Stunde Wenn Dracula Kommt*, Atlas (16 mm)
Germany: *Die Stunde Wenn Dracula Kommt*, E-M-S/Anolis Entertainment (DVD R2 with restored scene, audio commentary by Tim Lucas [in English], trailers, interviews, and comic book)
Holland: *Black Sunday*, Paradiso (DVD R2, same as US Image Entertainment release, with Dutch subtitles, no audio commentary)
Italy: *La maschera del demonio*, Shendene e Moizzi (VHS)
Italy: *La maschera del demonio*, Ripley's Home Video (DVD R2, 1.66:1/16:9 anamorphic 2-disc set with extras: photo gallery, bios, Italian and English trailers, bonus documentary *Mario Bava Maestro of the Macabre*, Barbara Steele interview, and more)
Note: This is the only DVD release of this title to date

which includes the "lost" scene between Prince Vajda and Katia described in the *La maschera del demonio* chapter.
Japan: *The Mask of Satan*, Toshiba
(VHS, English with Japanese subtitles)
Portugal: *Black Sunday—A Mascara de Sata*, label unknown
(DVD R0, 1.66:1 with trailers)
Spain: *La Muchacha que Sabia Demasiado*, Videotecnics (VHS)
UK: *Black Sunday*, Videomedia/Vampix #HVM 1026 (VHS, Beta)
UK: *Black Sunday*, SC Video Ltd. (VHS, 1986)
UK: *Revenge of the Vampire*, Derann (Super 8 mm)
UK: *The Mask of Satan*, Redemption Video (VHS, 1.66:1)
US: *Black Sunday*, Image Entertainment #ID4948AO
(VHS, 1.66:1 with trailer)
US: *Black Sunday*, Image Entertainment #ID5942AODVD
(DVD R1, 1.66:1, with liner notes and audio commentary by Tim Lucas, trailers and extras)
Note: The menu screen of this disc is introduced with a sound byte from one of AIP's radio spots, featuring narrator Paul Frees ("The sound you hear is dripping blood! This is the sound of *Black Sunday*!").
US: *The Mario Bava Collection Volume 1*,
Anchor Bay Entertainment
(DVD R1, includes both the *Mask of Satan* and *Black Sunday* versions, with Tim Lucas commentary and extras from Image Entertainment disc)

Le meraviglie di Aladino
France: *Les Mille et une Nuits*, Vip International (VHS, 1.85:1)
France: *Les Mille et une Nuits*, Video Club (VHS, 1.85:1)
Germany: *Aladins Wunderlampe*, Beverly Video Tape (VHS)
Germany: *Aladins Abenteuer*, Best Entertainment (DVD R2)
US: *The Wonders of Aladdin*, Embassy Video (VHS and Beta)
US: *The Wonders of Aladdin*, Charter Entertainment (VHS)

Minnesota Clay
Japan: *Minnesota Clay*, Imagica
(DVD R2, widescreen, interview with Piero Piccioni, original US trailer, and alternate American main and end titles)

Mio figlio Nerone
Greece: *O Yioç pio o Nerone*, Key Video
(VHS, Italian with Greek subtitles)

Morgan il pirato
US: *Morgan the Pirate*, Embassy Video (VHS and Beta)
US: *Morgan the Pirate*, Embassy Video
(LaserDisc, same as VHS and Beta)

La morte viene dallo spazio
France: *La Morte Vient de l'Espace*. Virgin Video
Note: 79m in SECAM; 83m at 24 f.p.s., 5m longer than the US releases
US: *The Day the Sky Exploded*, Sinister Cinema
(VHS and Beta)
US: *The Day the Sky Exploded*, Alpha Video (DVD)

Moses (Feature Version)
Germany: *Moses*, Scotia-UFA-ATB
(Super 8 mm, three reels)
UK: *Moses*, Channel 5 (VHS)
UK: *Moses*, CBS Fox Home Video (LaserDisc, two discs)
US: *Moses*, CBS Fox Home Video (VHS and Beta)
US: *Moses*, Selectovision (CED Disc, two discs)
US: *Moses*, LIVE Entertainment #69917 (VHS)

Moses the Lawgiver (Miniseries)
France: *Moise*, *le Dix Commandements,* Paramount (DVD)
UK: *Moses the Lawgiver*, Cannon Video (VHS)

Natale all' campo 119
US: Parade Films (VHS, Italian)

Nude... si muore
US: *Schoolgirl Killer*, Air Video/Ariel International Releasing
(VHS and Beta, cropped and cut TV print)
Italy: *Sieben Jungfrauen für den Teufel*, X-Rated Kult
(DVD R2 with German or Italian audio options, English subtitles, original German language B&W version, German trailer, alternate scene)
US: *Naked You Die*, Dark Sky Films
(DVD R1, 2.35:1/16:9 with extras)

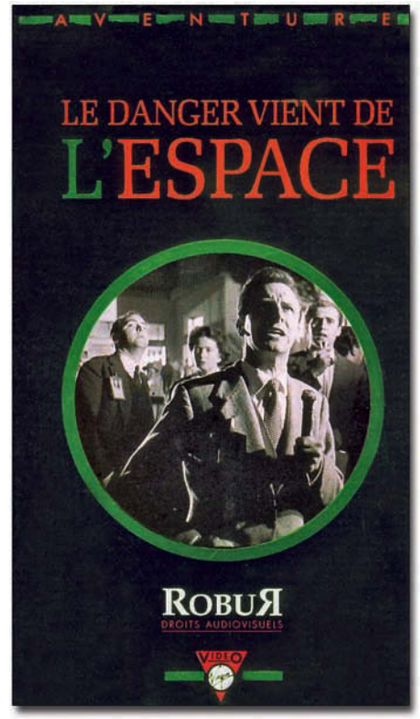
Odissea
Germany: *Die Odysee*, Ascot Elite Home Entertainment GmbH
(DVD 3-disc set, 1.33:1, German and Italian audio, with 70m documentary *Die Phantastische Reise des Odysseus.*
Italy: Odissea, label unknown (VHS, 3 PAL cassettes).
Italy: *Odissea*, Multimedia San Paolo Srl/20th Century Fox Home Entertainment (distributor) #DV03
(DVD R2, 2-disc set)
Italy: *Odissea*, Elleu Multimedia
(DVD R2 2-disc set, 1.33:1, extras)

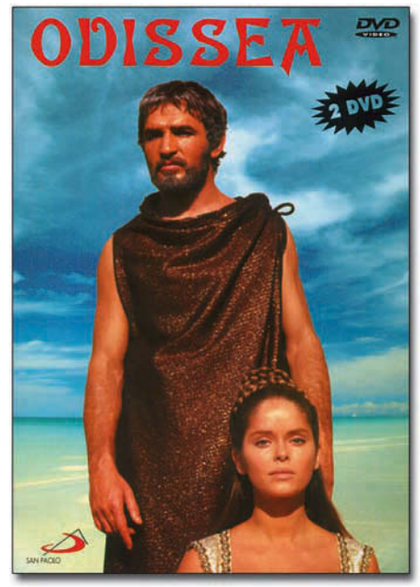
Operazione paura
Australia: *Kill Baby Kill*, Stomp Visual
(DVD R2, 1.85:1/16:9 with trailer)
Note: The source print used for this release was licensed from Alfredo Leone's International Media and is the same version Image Entertainment declined to release in America owing to substandard quality. The picture quality is darker, coarser, and with occasionally unstable framing, but it is the only authorized English language DVD with correct 1.85:1 framing.
France: *Opération Peur*, Warner Vision/Neo Publishing
(DVD R2, 1.85:1/16:9, interview with Lamberto Bava by Daniel Gouyette, trailers, filmographies, biographies)
Germany: *Die Toten Augen des Dr. Dracula* (Part 1, No. 252), *Dr. Dracula—Eine Bestie schlägt zu* (Part 2, No. 253), UFA ATB (8 mm, one reel each)
Germany: *Die Toten Augen*, Award Video (VHS)
Germany: *Die Toten Augen des Dr. Dracula*,
Anolis Entertainment (VHS)
Germany: *Die Toten Augen des Dr. Dracula*, E-M-S/Anolis Entertainment (DVD R2, 1.66:1, widescreen, extras)
Germany: *The Curse of the Living Dead*, label unknown
(DVD R2)
Holland: *Kill, Baby... Kill!*, European Video Corp.
(VHS, 1.66:1, English with Dutch subtitles)
Italy: *Operazione paura*, Torino (VHS)
US: *Kill, Baby... Kill!*, VCI Home Entertainment (VHS)
US: *Kill, Baby... Kill!*, VCI Home Entertainment (DVD R0)
US: *Kill, Baby... Kill!*, Diamond Entertainment (DVD R0)
US: *Blood Bath*, Brentwood Entertainment
(DVD R0 2-disc set, contains *Kill, Baby... Kill!*)
US: *Mario Bava's Kill Baby Kill*, Dark Sky Films
(DVD R1, 1.85:1/16:9, Tim Lucas commentary, *Kill Bava Kill* featurette of Lamberto Bava revisiting filming locations—withdrawn)
US: *10 Tales of Terror*, Brentwood Entertainment
(DVD R0 5-disc set, contains *Kill, Baby... Kill!*)
US: *The Mario Bava Collection Volume 1*, Anchor Bay Entertainment
(DVD R1 box set, 1.85:1/16:9 with trailer)

Orlando e i paladini di Francia
Germany: *Roland der Eroberer*, USA (VHS), Sailing (VHS)
US: *Roland the Mighty*, Sinister Cinema (VHS)

I pagliacci (amore tragico)
US: Bel Canto Society, Inc. (VHS, Italian with subtitles)

Il pistolero segnato da Dio
Italy: *Il pistolero segnato da Dio*, UVI (VHS)













La ragazza che sapeva troppo

France: *La Fille qui en Savait Trop*, Vip International (VHS)
France: *La Fille qui en Savait Trop*, Mad Movies/One Plus One (DVD R2, 1.66:1 with extras)
France: *La Fille qui en Savait Trop*, Collection Ciné-Club (DVD R2)
Italy: *La ragazza che sapeva troppo*, Fonit Centra (VHS)
US: *Evil Eye*, Sinister Cinema (VHS and Beta, AIP version)
US: *The Girl Who Knew Too Much*, Image Entertainment #ID5949AO (VHS, 1.66:1, Italian with English subtitles, trailer)
US: *The Girl Who Knew Too Much*, Image Entertainment #ID5943AODVD (DVD R1, 1.66:1/16:9, liner notes by Tim Lucas, trailer, extras)
US: *The Mario Bava Collection Volume 1*, Anchor Bay Entertainment (DVD R1 box set, 1.78:1/16:9, includes the *Girl Who Knew Too Much* and *Evil Eye* versions of the film, Tim Lucas commentary, other extras)

Ringo del Nebraska

Germany: *Nebraska Jim*, UFA Video (VHS)
Spain: *Nebraska il Pistolero*, Divisa Ediciones (VHS)

Il rosso segno della follia

Finland: *Hatchet for a Honeymoon*, United Film (VHS, English with Finnish subtitles)
France: *Une Hache pour le Lune de Miel*, PolyGram Video (VHS)
France: *La Baie Sanglante 2*, Delta Video Diffusion (VHS)
France: *Une Hache pour le Lune de Miel*, Mad Movies/One Plus One (DVD R2, 1.33:1 with extras)
Germany: *Red Wedding*, Media Entertainment (VHS)
Germany: *Hatchet for the Honeymoon*, Koch Media (DVD R2)
Japan: *Hatchet for the Honeymoon*, Toei (VHS)
Spain: *Una Hacha para la Luna de Miel*, Galan Video (VHS)
Sweden: *Hatchet for the Honeymoon*, Video Invest (VHS)
UK: Hatchet for the Honeymoon, Anchor Bay UK Entertainment (DVD R2, 1.85:1/16:9 anamorphic with extras: trailer, photo gallery, and bonus documentary *Mario Bava Maestro of the Macabre*)
US: *Hatchet for the Honeymoon*, Media Home Entertainment (VHS, Beta)
US: *Hatchet for the Honeymoon*, Charter Entertainment (VHS)
US: *Hatchet for the Honeymoon*, Image Entertainment (VHS, composite print using parts of 35 mm and 16 mm prints, below average)
US: *Hatchet for the Honeymoon*, Image Entertainment (DVD R1, with liner notes by Tim Lucas, extras, otherwise same as Image Entertainment VHS)
US: *Hatchet for the Honeymoon*, Madacy Entertainment (DVD R0, double-bill with *Anatomy of a Psycho*)

Roy Colt e Winchester Jack

US: *Roy Colt & Winchester Jack*, Image Entertainment (DVD R1, 2.35:1/16:9, liner notes by Tim Lucas)

Schock

Australia: *Beyond the Door II*, K&C Video (VHS)
Australia: *Beyond the Door II*, Syme Video (VHS)
France: *Cauchemar*, MPM Video (VHS)
France: *Shock*, MPM Video (VHS)
Italy: *Schock*, Mondadori Video (VHS)
Italy: *Schock Transfert-Suspence-Hypnos*, Medusa Video (DVD R2, 1.85:1/16:9)
Japan: *Shock*, Toshiba Video (VHS and Beta, English language with Japanese subtitles)
Japan: *Shock*, Culture Publishers (VHS, English language with Japanese subtitles)
Japan: *Shock*, Culture Publishers (DVD R2, English language with Japanese subtitles)
Spain: *Shock*, Record Vision (VHS)
UK: *Shock*, Videomedia / Vampix HVM 1019 (VHS, Beta)
UK: *Shock*, Stablecane Home Video (VHS, 1985)
UK: *Beyond the Door II*, Hollywood Video (DVD R2)
US: *Beyond the Door II*, Media Home Entertainment #M251 (VHS, Beta)
US: *Shock*, Anchor Bay Entertainment (VHS, 1.85:1, trailer and extras)
US: *Shock*, Anchor Bay Entertainment (DVD R1, 1.85:1/16:9, English and Italian tracks, Lamberto Bava interview, trailers and extras)
US: *Drive-In Now Showing Possession & Shock*, Anchor Bay Entertainment (same as previous listing, but includes Andrzej Zulawski's *Possesion* on flip side)

Sei donne per l'assassino

Note: All known VHS copies of this film are cut.
France: *6 Femmes pour l'Assassin*, Fil-à-Film (VHS, widescreen)
France: *6 Femmes pour l'Assassin*, Miroir l'étrange (VHS, widescreen)
France: *Atelier de la Mort*, label unknown (VHS, with *Blood and Black Lace* opening credits)
France: *6 Femmes pour l'Assassin*, PolyGram Video #PY 772 (LaserDisc with extra Bava trailers)
French Canada: *L'Atelier de la Mort*, Propulsion (VHS)
Germany: *Blutige Seide*, Edition Hände Weg!/Buio Omega (VHS)
Germany: *Blutige Seide*, Anolis/Edition Hände Weg!/Buio Omega (DVD R2 with special red velvet cover, introduction by Thomas Reiner, audio commentary (in German) by Christian Kessler and Robert Zion, extras, hidden Easter egg [in filmography area] with Bava trailers)
Note: This extraordinary release, the best currently available in English, was sourced from a censored German Technicolor 35 mm print in otherwise breathtaking condition. The censored material (moments of violence) were digitally reinserted, making use of VCI's materials as obtained from the Australian "superstation" SBS. The Bava filmography includes a number of highlighted titles which, when clicked, reveal hidden anamorphic trailers for such titles as *Orlando i la paladini di Francia* and *I vampiri*, which contains actual footage of the guillotine prologue not included in the film's final cut.
Greece: *Blood and Black Lace*, Cronos (VHS)
Italy: *Sei donne per l'assassino*, Shendene e Moizzi (VHS, 1.66:1)
Italy: *Sei donne per l'assassino*, Nocturno (DVD R2)
Japan: *Six Women for the Murdere*, Toshiba (VHS and Beta, 1.66:1; English with Japanese subtitles, cut) Note: The title given here is not the title as it appears on the videocassette packaging, but rather the title as it appears onscreen. The last letter of the last word is not cropped offscreen, but was evidently left off by a careless titles worker.
Japan: *Six Women for the Murdere*, Toshiba (LaserDisc, same as Toshiba VHS)
Japan: *Six Women for the Murderer*, Pioneer Entertainment/ New Line Entertainment (DVD, uncut)
Spain: *Six Women for the Murdere*, Euro (VHS, widescreen, Spanish dub of Italian export print, cut)
Spain: *Seis Mujeres para un Asesino*, Star's Hunter (VHS)
UK: *Blood and Black Lace*, Iver Film Services Ltd. (VHS and Beta, widescreen)
UK: *Blood and Black Lace*, Nouveaux Pictures (VHS, widescreen)
US: *Blood and Black Lace*, Media Home Entertainment #M715 (VHS, Beta)
US: *Blood and Black Lace*, The Roan Group (LaserDisc, liner notes by Tim Lucas)
US: *Blood and Black Lace*, VCI Home Video (VHS, 1.66:1)
US: *Blood and Black Lace*, VCI Home Video

(DVD R0, 1.66:1, with liner notes and audio commentary by Tim Lucas, Cameron Mitchell interview by David Del Valle, Mary Dawne Arden interview, trailers and extras)
US: *Blood and Black Lace*, VCI Home Video
(DVD R0, 1.78:1/16:9, two-disc deluxe edition with liner notes and audio commentary by Tim Lucas, Cameron Mitchell interview by David Del Valle, Mary Dawne Arden interview, trailers and extras)

Le sfida dei giganti

US: *Hercules the Avenger*, BCI Eclipse (VHS)
Note: A terrible copy of a black-and-white print, recorded at the EP or six-hour mode.
US: *Hercules the Avenger*, Retromedia Entertainment (DVD, 2.35:1/16:9) Note: A superb presentation, double-billed with Hercules and the Black Pirate, the English-dubbed version of Sansone contro il corsaro nero (1964).

Le spie vengono dal semifreddo

Italy: *Le spie vengono dal semifreddo*, 01 Distribution
(DVD R2, 16.9 anamorphic, Italian 5.1 and 2.0 audio options, trailer)
Italy: *Le spie vengono dal semifreddo*, 01 Distribution
(DVD R2, 16:9 anamorphic with English subtitles, Italian 2.0 audio only, trailer)

La strada per Fort Alamo

Italy: *La strada per Fort Alamo*, Shendene e Moizzi
(VHS, cut: 65m)

Terrore nello spazio

Australia: *Planet of the Vampires*, Video Box Office (VHS)
France: *Space Mutants*, Collection Frissons/Initial Distribution (VHS)
France: *Terror dans l'Espace*, PolyGram Video (VHS)
France: *Le Terreur vient de l'Espace*, Virgin (VHS)
France: *La Planete des Vampires*, Canal + Video
(DVD R2, 1.85:1/16:9, with interviews with Jean-François Rauger and Jean Pierre Jackson; complete, withdrawn)
Germany: *Planet der Vampire*, Piccolo
(8 mm, one reel condensation)
Germany: *Planet der Vampire*, Legend-Universum Film
(DVD R2, 1.85:1/16:9 anamorphic with extras: complete version, English and German audio options, German and US trailers, German 8 mm home movie condensed version)
Greece: *Planet of the Vampires*, Home Video Hellas (VHS)
Italy: *Terrore nello spazio*, Domo Video (VHS, widescreen)
Italy: *Terrore nello spazio*, 01 Distribution
(DVD R2, 1.85:1/16:9 anamorphic, complete version with trailer)
Japan: *Planet of the Vampires*, RCA Columbia Pictures International (VHS and Beta, AIP version, Japanese subtitles)
Spain: *Terror en el Espacio*, Video Copy (VHS)
UK: *Planet of the Vampires*, RCA Columbia Pictures International CVT 10723 (VHS and Beta, AIP version)
US: *Planet of the Vampires*, Thorn EMI HBO Video
(VHS and Beta, Kendall Schmidt score)
US: *Planet of the Vampires*, HBO Video #3671
(VHS, Kendall Schmidt score)
US: *Planet of the Vampires*, MGM Home Entertainment
(VHS, Kendall Schmidt score)
US: *Planet of the Vampires*, HBO/Image Entertainment
(LaserDisc with Kendall Schmidt score, with co-feature *Queen of Blood*)
US: *Planet of the Vampires*, MGM Home Entertainment
(DVD R1, 1.85:1, Gino Marinuzzi Jr. score restored). Note: An incomplete version, lacking the aftermath of Wess' demise, but also a unique reconstruction of the film involving an overall re-edit and new sound work. See Glenn Erickson's article "Restoring Mario Bava's Planet of the Vampires" in *Video Watchdog* #76 (October 2001, pp. 36-39 for more details.)

I tre volti della paura

France: *Les Trois Visages de la Peur*, Vip France (VHS, 1983)
France: *Les Trois Visages de la Peur*, Iris Television (VHS)
France: *Les Trois Visages de la Peur*, Proserpine (VHS)
France: *Les Trois Visages de la Peur*, Mad Movies/One Plus One (DVD R2, 1.85:1/16:9, Italian with French subtitles, with extras)
Germany: *Die 3 Gesichter der Furcht*, Arena Video, Juenger Video, Astro Video, Edition Haende weg! (VHS).
Note: Arena, Juenger and Astro feature the US running order of the three re-edited episodes, while the Edition Haende weg! release is the only complete version with correct running order and the original ending with Karloff on his horse available on VHS in Germany.
Germany: *Die Drei Gesichter der Furcht*, E-M-S/Anolis Entertainment (DVD R2, includes *Mario Bava, Maestro of the Macabre*)
Greece: *Black Sabbath*, Astro Klassiker (VHS)
Holland: *Black Sabbath*, Paradiso
(DVD R2, same as US Image Entertainment release, with Dutch subtitles)
Italy: *I tre volti della paura*, Fonit Cetra (VHS)
Japan: *I tre volti della paura*, Nikkatsu (VHS)
Spain: *Las Tres Caras del Miedo*, Videotecnics (VHS)
Sweden: *Black Sabbath*, US Videomovies (VHS, AIP version)
UK: *Black Sabbath*, Inter-Ocean Video #IOV 030
(VHS and Beta, widescreen, AIP version)
US: *Black Sabbath*, Thorn EMI HBO Video
(VHS and Beta, AIP version)
US: *Black Sabbath*, HBO Video (VHS, AIP version)
US: *Black Sabbath*, Image Entertainment
(VHS, 1.85:1/16:9, Italian version with English subtitles, with trailer)
US: *Black Sabbath*, Image Entertainment
(DVD R1, 1.85:1/16:9—Italian cut with removable English subtitles, liner notes by Tim Lucas, trailer, extras)
US: *The Mario Bava Collection Volume 1*, Anchor Bay Entertainment (DVD R1 box set, 1.78:1/16:9, contains both the *Three Faces of Fear* and *Black Sabbath* versions, Tim Lucas commentary, other extras)

L'ultimo dei vichinghi

Denmark: *Vikinger Angriber*, "Furious Vikings," Næstved Video Distribution (VHS, 1.66:1)
US: *The Last of the Vikings*, Sinister Cinema (VHS)

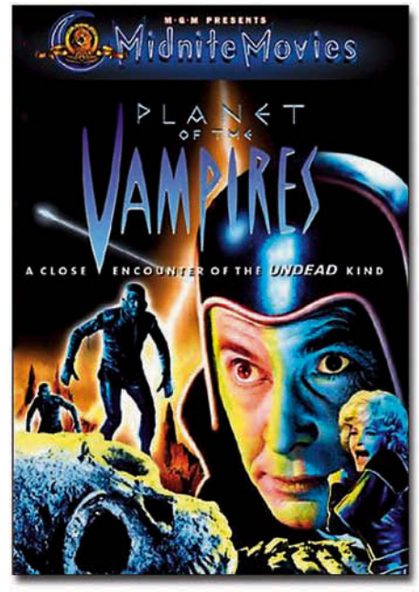
I vampiri

Belgium: *I Vampiri/The Devil's Commandment*
(DVD R2, 2.35:1/16:9, Italian language, Dutch subtitles) Note: Despite the two film titles noted on the packaging, the *Devil's Commandment* version is not included on this disc.
US: *The Devil's Commandment*, Sinister Cinema
(VHS, 2.01:1, American version)
US: *I vampiri*, Image Entertainment
(VHS, 2.35:1, Italian with English subtitles)
US: *I vampiri*, Image Entertainment
(DVD, 2.35:1/16:9, Italian with removable English subtitles, liner notes by Tim Lucas, extras)

Thanks to the following for their help in compiling this videography: Ian Adams (Australia), Christian Becker (Spain), Francis Brewster (UK), Roberto Curti (Italy), Alwin Dewaele (Belgium/France), Kenneth Eriksen (Denmark), Johan Karlson (Sweden), Keiji (Japan), Stefan Novak (Germany), and Aris Poulopoulos (Greece).








ORIGINAL SOUNDTRACK
Also contains "HATCHET FOR THE HONEYMOON"
Mario Bava's
Black Sabbath
(I TRE VOLTI DELLA PAURA)
Musica di Roberto Nicolosi

Mario Bava Discography

5 bambole per la luna d'agosto (1970)

Italy: ***5 bambole per la luna d'agosto***. Piero Umiliani. Cinevox Records #MDF 33/45. Stereo 12" LP, 1970.

Tracks: 1. *5 bambole*, 2. *Luna d'Agosto*, 3. *Danza Primitiva*, 4. *Danza Jazz Moon*, 5. *Danza Citar Free*, 6. *Notte di Luna*, 7. *Fantoccio Grottesco*, 8. *Luna D'Agosto 1971*, 9. *Bambola Omicida*, 10. *Interludio Azzuro*, 11. *Interludio Giallo*, 12. *5 bambole Rosa*, 13. *5 bambole Azzure*, 14. *Luna di Pieno Agosto*.

This superb recording was released in an extremely limited edition pressing.

Italy: ***Sirio 2222***. Il Balletto di Bronzo. RCA Records. Stereo 12" LP, 1970.

This progressive rock album was the source of the song "*Ti risveglierai con me*" heard at the film's finale. Not written by Piero Umiliani, the song was written by Gianni Leone and performed by the group's lineup: Marco Cecioni (guitar/vocals), Miky Cupaiolo (bass), Gianchi Stinga (drums). Lino Aiello (guitar). The film's end credits also mention the use of another song from this album, *"Neve calda,"* but it is heard nowhere in the release cut. The album was most recently issued on CD by Phantom Records, but is currently out of print.

Japan: ***5 bambole per la luna d'agosto***. Piero Umiliani. SLC Incorporated #SLCS-7135. Stereo CD, 1996. Length: 48:54.

Tracks: 1. *5 bambole* (3:33), 2. *Luna d'Agosto* (2:36), 3. *Danza Primitiva* (2:45), 4. *Danza Jazz Moon* (2:25), 5. *Danza Citar Free* (1:35), 6. *5 Bambole per la Luna d'Agosto M6* (2:06), 7. *M18* (1:44), 8. *M22* (2:53), 9. *M5* (1:30), 10. *Notte di Luna* (2:42), 11. *Fantoccio Grottesco* (1:00), 12. *Luna D'Agosto 1971* (organo solo, 2:34), 13. *M17* (1:07), 14. *M42* (1:05), 15. *Bambola Omicida* (2:19), 16. *Interludio Azzuro* (1:40), 17. *Interludio Giallo* (1:30), 18. *5 bambole Rosa* (*organo e ritmi*, 2:25), 19. *M39* (0:58), 20. *Luna di Pieno Agosto* (*versione coro,* 2:26), 21. *5 bambole Azzure* (versione cembalo, 3:55), 22. *Titoli coda* (harpsichord versione, 3:09).

A remixed presentation with eight additional tracks.

Italy: ***5 bambole per la luna d'agosto***. Piero Umiliani. Cinevox #MDF 33/33. Stereo CD, 1997.

Tracks: Same as SLC Incorporated #SLCS-7135.

Italy: ***5 bambole per la luna d'agosto***. Piero Umiliani. Cinevox #CINV-343. Stereo CD, 2001. Length: 57:19.

Tracks: 1. *Cinque Bambole* (Vers. Coro, 3:32), 2. *Luna D'Agosto* (2:36), 3. *Danza Primitiva* (2:45), 4. *Danza Jazz Moon* (2:26), 5. *Danza Citar Free* (1:36), 6. *Notte Di Luna* (2:41), 7. *Fantoccio Grottesco* (1:00), 8. *Luna D'Agosto 1971* (Organo Solo, 2:34), 9. *Bambola Omicida* (2:18), 10. *Interludio Azzurro* (2:35), 11. *Interludio Giallo* (1:32), 12. *Cinque Bambole Rosa* (*Organo E Ritmi*, 2:23), 13. *Cinque Bambole Azzurre* (Vers. Cembalo, 03:53), 14. *Luna Di Pieno Agosto* (2:24), 15. *Cinque Bambole Azzurre* (Original Main Title, 3:59), 16. *Luna D'Agosto* (3:03), 17. *Cinque Bambole* (1:43), 18. *Cinque Bambole Rosa* (2:53), 19. *Luna D'Agosto 1971* (3:50), 20. *Cinque Bambole* (3:21), 21. *Bambola Omicida* (1:58), 22. *Cinque Bambole* (Original End Title, 3:09).

A remastered version of Cinevox's soundtrack album with some retitled and replacement tracks. The definitive release to date.



Baron Blood (1972)

US: See *Black Sunday*.

Italy: ***Mario Bava Original Soundtracks Anthology Volume III: Ecologia del delitto / Gli orrore del castello di Norimberga / Cani Arrabbiati***. Stelvio Cipriani. Digitmovies #CDDM046. Stereo CD, 2006. Length: 65:28 (Disc 1), 57:33 (Disc 2).

Disc 1 Tracks: 1–21 See *Ecologia del delitto.*

Disc 1 Tracks: 22–31 See *Cani arrabbiati*.

Disc 2 Tracks: 1. *Gli orrore del castello di Norimberga* (Titoli, 4:23), 2. *Notturno* (1:00), 3. *Esplorando il castello* (4:00), 4. *Il Barone appare e morte del dottore* (3:46), 5. *Sadico omicidio* (2:27), 6. *Nella cattedrale* (organo solo, 1:06), 7. *Ipnosi* (organo solo, 1:35), 8. *Inseguita* (3:55), 9. *Eva e Peter* (tema d'amore, 2:32), 10. *Il Barone e fuga di Eva* (4:30), 11. *Magica nera* (6:19), 12. *La bambina e il castello* (celesta solo, 1:20), 13. *Visitando Mr. Becker* (2:04), 14. *Macabro maniero* (1:56), 15. *Gli orrore del castello di Norimberga* (suite finale, 11:14), 16. *Gli orrore del castello di Norimberga* (Titoli di coda, 2:06), 17. *Gli orrore del castello di Norimberga* (Titoli—take 1 mix senza piano, 2:38).



Black Sunday (1961)

US: ***Jewels of the Sea***. Les Baxter. Capitol Records #T1537. Stereo 12" LP, 1961.

Subtitled "Titillating Orchestrations for Listening and Loving," this album contains 12 tracks of Baxter's trademark exotica music. According to the sleeve notes, "The













song 'Jewels of the Sea' was composed originally by Les Baxter as 'Katia's Theme' for the American International picture *Black Sunday*." This title track is the last cue on Side 2.

US: ***Black Sabbath***. Les Baxter. Bax Records #LB-1000. Monaural 12" LP, c. early 1980s.

Tracks: *The Drop of Water* (8:50), *The Telephone* (6:15), *The Wurdalak* (18:45).

Despite its title, track listings and packaging, this limited edition soundtrack—issued by Tony Thomas Productions (Box 1662, Burbank CA 91507) in association with Bax Music—contains excerpts from Baxter's score for *Black Sunday*.

US: ***Mario Bava's Black Sunday***. Les Baxter. Bay Cities #CD 3034. Monaural CD, 1992. Length: 59:38.

Tracks: *Suite—Black Sunday* (33:59), *Suite—Baron Blood* (25:34).

Disc producers Bruce Kimmel and Alain Silver re-edited the material previously released on the Bax Records *Black Sabbath* album into a new suite, properly labelled for the first time. Still monaural, but supplemented with a very nice stereo suite of Baxter's previously unreleased music for *Baron Blood*. CD booklet contains liner notes by Barbara Steele and Tim Lucas.

US: ***Black Sunday and Baron Blood***. Les Baxter. Citadel Records #77110. Monaural CD, 1998. Length: 59:26.

Tracks: 1. *Black Sunday* (33:54), 2. *Baron Blood* (25:32).

A reissue of the Bay Cities release with improved sound and slightly different running times for the two tracks.

Caltiki il mostro immortale (1959)

Italy: ***Mario Bava Original Soundtracks Anthology Volume IV: I vampiri / Caltiki il mostro immortale / Lisa and the Devil***. Roberto Nicolosi. Conducted by Carlo Savina. Digitmovies #CDDMO58. Monaural CD, 2006. Length: 46:12 (Disc 1), 44:54 (Disc 2).

Disc 1 Tracks: 1-18 See *I vampiri*.

Disc 1 Bonus Track: See *Lisa and the Devil*.

Disc 2 Tracks: 1. *Prologo e titoli* (2:42), 2. *Fuga dal terrore* (1:15), 3. *Il superstite & Esplorazione delle rovine Maya* (2:29), 4. *Danza Tam Tam* (3:40), 5. *Discesa & Esplorazione subacquea* (2:14), 6. *Seconda immersione & Attacco del mostro* (1:44), 7. *Caltiki emerge dalle acque & Fuga* (1:37), 8. *Ultime notizie & Ritorno a casa* (2:27), 9. *Mutazione cellulare* (2:29), 10. *Analisi della "cosa" & Aggressione* (2:12), 11. *Forza oscura* (3:41), 12. *Il mostro immortale* (4:02), 13. *Metamorfosi di Caltiki* (2:44), 14. *Invasione* (2:15), 15. *Distruzione* (2:20), 16. *Fuga dalla casa* (2:20), 17. *L'assedio* (2:13), 18. *Distruzione di Caltiki* (Finale, 1:46).

Cani arrabbiati (1975)

Italy: ***Mario Bava Original Soundtracks Anthology Volume III: Ecologia del delitto / Gli orrore del castello di Norimberga / Cani Arrabbiati***. Stelvio Cipriani. Digitmovies #CDDM046. Stereo CD, 2006. Length: 65:28 (Disc 1), 57:33 (Disc 2).

Disc 1 Tracks: 1–21 See *Ecologia del delitto*.

Disc 1 Tracks: 22. *Cani arrabbiati* (Titoli, 2:10), 23. *Rapina e fuga* (4:08), 24. *Radio bossa* (1:27), 25. *Autostrada* (3:09), 26. *Fuga nel campo di grano* (3:15), 27. *Ripresa del viaggio* (2:23), 28. *Fine di un incubo* (3:45), 29. *Cani arrabbiati* (finale, 2:11), 30. *Fuga nel campo di grano* (versione alternativa, 2:24), 31. *Fine di un incubo* (versione alternativa, 3:34).

Disc 2 Tracks: 1–17 See *Baron Blood*.

Diabolik (1968)

Italy: ***"Deep Down"*** *b/w* ***"Amore Amore Amore"***. Christy. Parade Records #PRC 5052. Monaural 45 rpm 7" single, 1968.

One side of this single contains an Italian-language performance of the title song *"Deep Down"* (sung by Christy). The other side contains an unrelated track from Piero Piccioni's score for the film *Un italiano in America*.

Italy: ***Danger: Diabolik***. Ennio Morricone. Pallottola Foro #OTHR-1968. Monaural CD, 2001.

This bootleg recording claims to be from Italy, but its use of the American title is a clue to the contrary. Consists of various cues and dialogue lifted from the American VHS release.

Italy: ***Diabolik / Danger: Diabolik***. Ennio Morricone. Sycodelic #SYCO:0011. Stereo/Monaural CD, 2001.

Also a bootleg recording and unlikely to have truly originated from Italy, as labelled. Despite titles that misspell character names, this is the most listenable of the various Diabolik bootlegs, as it upgrades the movie-lifted cues (which were here taken from Paramount Home Video's LaserDisc release) and adds the Parade single (in Italian and taken from a rare Japanese Morricone anthology CD), the English language variant and another Christy/Morricone cue from *O.K. Connery*, also starring Adolfo Celi. Mystery track 34 is apparently an original composition by the disc producer; it is not heard in *Diabolik* and has no relationship to the film itself.

Tracks: 1. *Deep Down* (in English, 03:09), 2. *Yes Sir, No Sir* (dialogue, 0:23) 3. *Charading Chaffeurs in Wait* (0:59), 4. *Driving Decoys* (2:08), 5. *Into the Cave* (2:53), 6. Diabolik's Hide-out (1:52), 7. *The Shower/Deep Down Two* (1:25), 8. *Logical Suggestion* (dialogue, 0:25), 9. *Money Orgy* (2:09), 10. *Criminal/Justice Solution* (dialogue, 0:44), 11. *Headlines/Organ Freakout 1* (0:33), 12. *Valmont's Go-Go Pad* (03:38), 13. *Dumped by Dimockracy* (dialogue, 0:41), 14. *Eva's Holy Dress/Deep Down Three* (01:33), 15. *Diabolik Capture/Conference* (dialogue, 0:33), 16. *Gunfight at Red Sands* (1:33), 17. *Eva's Sketchy I.D.* (dialogue, 0:59), 18. *Metamorphosis/Organ Freakout 2* (0:33), 19. *Emerald Bikini/Deep Down 4* (1:28), 20. *Doctor Vinear's I.D. Prescription* (dialogue, 1:11), 21. *Downhill Decoy* (0:30), 22. *Vinear's X-Out Session/Death/Life* (dialogue, 2:51), 23. *Jenko's Plan Derails* (00:33), 24. *Guiness's Gold Bar* (dialogue, 0:40), 25. *Bubbles/Extracting Au from H20* (1:22), 26. *Underwater Wah-Wah* (2:51), 27. *Now Go!!!* (0:41), 28. *Eva Alone* (dialogue, 0:09), 29. *The Pyrite Wink/Deep Down 5* (1:57), 30. *Last Laff* (0:28), 31. *Deep Down* (Parade 5052, in Italian, 3:03), 32. *O.K. Connery* (Parade 5035, 03:03), 33. *Valmont (Underworld Don) Philosophises* (0:38), 34. *Untitled* (3:04).

La donna più bella del mondo (1955)

France: ***Gina Lollobrigida Chante***. Vogue Records #EPL-7201. Monaural 7" EP, 1956.

Tracks: 1. *D'art et d'amour*, 2. *Ideale*, 3. *Nocturne pour orchestre*, 4. *A la Française*, 5. *L'Espagnole*, 6. *Pourquois ne pas m'aimer?*

Six cues from the Robert Z. Leonard film, some—but not all—featuring vocals by Lollobrigida. The earliest Bava-related soundtrack, and extremely rare.

Dr. Goldfoot and the Girl Bombs (1966)

US: ***Dr. Goldfoot and the Girl Bombs***. Various Artists. Tower Records #T-5053. Monaural/Stereo 12" LP, 1966.

This album bears only the slightest resemblance to an actual soundtrack recording. It contains none of the

original music found in Bava's *La spie vengono dal semifreddo*, and only two songs heard in the AIP version. Most of this album is teen-oriented filler, recorded by anonymous studio musicians under the aegis of producers Mike Curb and Bob Summers.

Tracks: 1. *Dr. Goldfoot & The Girl Bombs* (The Sloopys) 2. *Dr. Goldfoot's Igloo* (The Mad Doctors) 3. *Try My World, Little Girl* (Terry Stafford) 4. *The Mad Mad Doctor* (The Mad Doctors) 5. *They Just Don't Make 'Em Like Her Anymore* (Bobby Lite) 6. *Hidin' from Myself* (Paul & The Pack) 7. *The Golden Bomb* (The Mad Doctors) 8. *This I Say* (The Candles) 9. *The Golden Price* (Mad Doctors) 10. *Dr. Goldfoot & The Girl Bombs* (The Mad Doctors).

Ecologia del delitto (1971)

Italy: ***"Evelyn Theme"*** *b/w* ***"Mamy Blue"***. Stelvio Cipriani. CAM Records #CAM-P95. Monaural 45 rpm 7" single, 1971.

Though the sleeve prominently mentions *Ecologia del delitto* as the source of "Evelyn Theme" (2:31)—"Mamy Blue" (3:35) is apparently unrelated—there is no character named Evelyn in the film. However, there was another Italian horror film released in 1971 entitled *La notte che Evelyn uscì dalla tomba*, directed by Emiglio Miraglia. This coincidence raises two questions: Was Cipriani's *Ecologia* score originally written for the Miraglia film but rejected in favor of another by Bruno Nicolai (the credited composer)? Was the Miraglia film perhaps scored with library tracks, and credited Nicolai as the composer of the majority of the cues used? Or is this, in fact, a cue written exclusively for *Ecologia del delitto* that just happened to be given an arbitrarily chosen title unsanctioned by the composer, *à la* "The Winsor Concerto"?

Italy: ***Mario Bava Original Soundtracks Anthology Volume III: Ecologia del delitto / Gli orrore del castello di Norimberga / Cani Arrabbiati***. Stelvio Cipriani. Digitmovies #CDDM046. Stereo CD, 2006. Length: 65:28 (Disc 1), 57:33 (Disc 2).

Disc 1 Tracks: 1. *Ecologia del delitto* (Titoli, 2:03), 2. *Evelyn theme* (2:18), 3. *Due amanti* (2:28), 4. *Spiato* (1:15), 5. *Giovani e liberi* (2:13), 6. *Tribal shake* (1:39), 7. *Passeggiata al lago* (1:51), 8. *Shake giradischi* (1:50), 9. *Slow giradischi* (1:00), 10. *Un cadavere nel lago* (1:29), 11. *Inseguimento e uccisione* (0:58), 12. *Evelyn Theme* (1:33), 13. *Guidando nella notte* (1:04), 14. *Ritrovamento dei cadaveri* (0:51), 15. *Piano diabolico* (0:53), 16. *Decapitata* (2:12), 17. *Solitudine di Simone* (2:14), 18. *Ultimo atto* (1:39), 19. *Teenagers cha cha cha* (2:00), 20. *Evelyn Theme* (versione alternativa, 2:32), 21. *Teenagers cha cha cha* (final versione alternativa, 1:42).

Disc 1 Tracks: 22–31 See *Cani arrabbiati*.

Disc 2 Tracks: See *Baron Blood*.

Ercole al centro della terra (1961)

Italy: ***Mario Bava Original Soundtracks Anthology Volume V: Ercole al centro della terra.*** Armando Trovajoli. Digitmovies #CDDMO72. Monaural CD, 2006. Length: 64:49.

Tracks: 1. *Preludio* (2:09), 2. *Titoli* (3:09), 3. *Apparizione Di Ercole* (1:47), 4. *Agguato & Battaglia* (1:40), 5. *Nel Regno Di Lyco* (1:53), 6. *Deianira Prigioniera Di Lyco* (1:28), 7. *Pazzia Di Deianira* (2:48), 8. *L'Oracolo* (2:01), 9. *Lotta Di Ercole & Salpando Verso L'Ade* (3:22), 10. *Risveglio Nell'Ade* (1:44), 11. *La Mela D'Oro* (2:56), 12. *Stratagemma Di Ercole & Il Mostro Di Pietra* (2:47), 13. *Tortura & Distruzione Del Mostro* (1:37), 14. *Ombre Dell'Ade* (1:00), 15. *Precipizio Di Fiamme* (1:33), 16. *Vento Infernale* (2:13), 17. *Appesi Al Vuoto* (3:43), 18. *Anima Perduta* (2:36), 19. *In Mare & Tempesta* (2:05), 20. *Arrivo Ad Ecalia* (1:28), 21. *Ercole E Deianira* (*Tema D'Amore*, 2:02), 22. *Oscuro Presagio & Uccisione Di Elettra* (2:01), 23. *Il Potere Maligno Di Lyco* (2:12), 24. *Deianira Contro Lyco & Amore Di Persefone* (1:45), 25. *Risveglio Dei Morti Viventi* (5:27), 26. *Ercole Contro Lyco* (1:37), 27. *Ercole Contro I Morti Viventi & Il Ritorno* (3:03), 28. *L'Amore Trionfa* (*Finale*, 1:15), Bonus Track: 29. *Ercole Al Centro Della Terra* (*Intervallo Film*, 0:19).

Ercole e la regina di Lidia (1959)

Italy: ***Ercole e la regina di Lidia***. Enzo Masetti. CAM #VSD 5310. Stereo 12" LP, 1958. Length: 37:00.

Tracks: 1. *L'avventura comincia* (2:13), 2. *Titoli* (2:24), 3. *Anteo, figlio di Gea* (3:30), 4. *La culla* (1:06), 5. *In navigazione per la Lidia* (1:59), 6. *Balletto* (2:56), 7. *Laerte sulla biga* (1:07), 8. *Orfeo e il coro dei Marinai* (1:48), 9. *Nella grotta* (1:53), 10. *Con te per l'eternità* (2:05), 11. *Aspettando il levar del sole* (1:05), 12. *A corte* (2:47), 13. *La regina di Lidia* (1:30), 14. *Tempesta* (3:07), 15. *La furia di Ercole* (0:57), 16. *Eteocle e polinice duellano* (2:38), 17. *I cavalieri tebani irrompono* (1:23), 18. *Finale* (2:32).

This soundtrack contains some recycled cues from *Le fatiche di Ercole*, appearing under new names.

US: ***"Evening Star"***. June Valli. Cetra Records. Monaural 45 rpm 7" single, 1960.

The song sung by Jole (Sylva Koscina) as heard in the English-dubbed Warner Bros. release, *Hercules Unchained*.

Italy: ***Ercole e la regina di Lidia***. Enzo Masetti. Phoenix Records PHCAM-07. Stereo 12" LP, 1986.

Limited edition of 1000 copies. Identical to CAM #VSD 5310, but possibly the first stereo release of this music.

Unknown: ***Hercules and Hercules Unchained***. Soundtrack Library #47. Stereo CD two-disc set, c. late 1990s. Length: 45:12 (Disc 1), 42:00 (Disc 2).

Disc 1 Tracks: See *Le fatiche di Ercole*.

Disc 2 Tracks: 1. *Untitled* (11:24), 2. *Untitled* (11:54), 3. *Untitled* (9:53), 4. *Untitled* (8:46).

Italy: ***The Italian Peplum Original Soundtracks Anthology Volume I: Le fatiche di Ercole / Ercole e la regina di Lidia***. Enzo Masetti. Conducted by Carlo Savina. Digitmovies #CDDMO57. Monaural CD, 2006. Length: 73:51 (Disc 1), 53:51 (Disc 2).

Disc 1 Tracks: *See Le fatiche di Ercole.*

Disc 2 Tracks: 1. *L'avventura comincia* (2:14), 2. *Con te per l'eternità* (Titoli, 2:24), 3. *Nostalgia* (0:46), 4. *Anteo, figlio di Gea* (2:25), 5. *Ercole e Polinice nella grotta* (1:05), 6. *Le porte dell'Averno* (0:44), 7. *Dopo il combattimento con la tigre* (0:25), 8. *La culla* (1:03), 9. *Il bosco magico* (1:07), 10. *Ulisse minacciato nel sonno* (0:38), 11. *In navigazione per la Lidia* (2:00), 12. *Balletto* (film version, 2:56), 13. *Entrata delle ancelle* (0:58), 14. *Laerte sulla biga* (1:08), 15. *Nella grotta* (1:54), 16. *In visita alla regina* (1:07), 17. *Oscuro segreto* (0:42), 18. *Aspettando il levar del sole* (1:06), 19. *Chiusura delle porte di Tebe* (1:07), 20. *A corte* (2:47), 21. *La regina di Lidia* (1:32), 22. *Fuga verso la Liberta'* (1:31), 23. *Rotta verso casa & Tebe assediata* (1:08), 24. *La furia di Ercole* (0:59), 25. *La sfida* (0:35), 26. *Eteocle e Polinice duellano* (3:39), 27. *I cavalieri tebani irrompono* (1:23), 28. *Conclusione della battaglia* (0:34), 29. *Finale* (2:33).

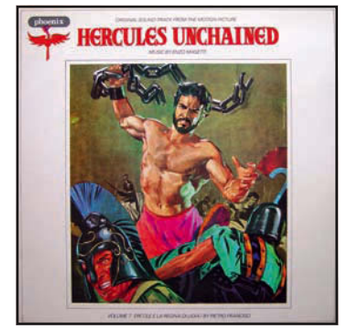
Disc 2 Bonus Tracks: 30. *Balletto* (senza coro, 2:56), 31. *Con te per l'eternità* (Titoli—mix no choir, 2:26), 32. *Balletto* (demo, 2:55), 33. *Finale* (senza coro, 1:45).





















Evil Eye (1963)

US: ***"Karen's Theme"*** *b/w* ***"Julie's Theme"***. Les Baxter. Test pressing. Monaural 45 rpm 8" acetate, 1964.

This unique test pressing contains a track designated as "'Karen's Theme' from *Evil Eye*." (A curious discrepancy here: there is no one named Karen in the picture.) The other side features "'Julie's Theme' from *Muscle Beach Party*," Julie being a character played by Italian actress Luciana Paluzzi. Only one reference copy of this recording is known to exist; it was never released commercially.

Le fatiche di Ercole (1958)

US: ***Hercules***. RCA Victor/Bluebird Records #LBY-1036. Monaural 12" LP, 1959.

Side 1 Tracks: *Part 1.*

Side 2 Tracks: *Part 2.*

A children's version of a soundtrack album, this "High Fidelity Sound" recording includes music, dialogue from English-dubbed version of film and narration by actor Conrad Nagel. Two different editions of the album were released, the first distinguished by a gatefold cover.

Italy: ***Le fatiche di Ercole***. Phoenix Records PHCAM-01. Stereo 12" LP, 1984. Length: 41:45.

Tracks: 1. *Titoli* (1:54), 2. *Racconto di Iole* (2:24), 3. *Il vello d'oro* (1:15), 4. *Atleti* (1:53), 5. *Iole dopo la vittoria nel disco* (1:01), 6. *Pelìa vendica la morte del figlio* (1:27), 7. *Funerale di Ifito* (1:29), 8. *Morte di Chisone* (1:42), 9. *Coro dei Marinai* (1:45), 10. *Uragano* (3:05), 11. *L'isola delle amazzoni* (1:32), 12. *Prigionieri delle amazzoni* (1:00), 13. *Inseguimento scherzoso* (1:00), 14. *Il laghetto* (2:10), 15. *Balletto* (1:44), 16. *Amore fra giasone e la regina* (1:21), 17. *Coro di amazzoni e canto di Orfeo* (1:45), 18. *Battaglia con gli uomini-mostro* (1:02), 19. *Navigazione e sbarco in colchide* (1:29), 20. *Ritorno alla nave* (1:05), 21. *Ritorno a Jolco* (1:00), 22. *Coro Marinai II* (1:47), 23. *Appare Ercole* (1:05), 24. *Pelìa prende la cicuta* (1:07), 25. *Uragano II* (3:05), 26. *Ercole distrugge il tempio e finale* (1:38).

Limited edition pressing of 1000 numbered copies.

Unknown:

Hercules and Hercules Unchained. Soundtrack Library #47. Stereo CD two-disc set, c. late 1990s. Length: 45:12 (Disc 1), 42:00 (Disc 2).

Disc 1 Tracks: 1. *Untitled* (10:37), 2. *Untitled* (12:44), 3. *Untitled* (10:45), 4. *Untitled* (11:03).

Disc 2 Tracks: See *Ercole e la regina di Lidia*.

One might surmise that this bootleg two-disc set offers digital rip-offs of the two Phoenix Records soundtracks, but the running times do not stack up, nor do their running times. Also, the anonymous producers of this set chose to conglomerate the various cues into a smaller number of lengthy "suites."

Italy: ***The Italian Peplum Original Soundtracks Anthology Volume I: Le fatiche di Ercole / Ercole e la regina di Lidia***. Enzo Masetti. Conducted by Carlo Savina. Digitmovies #CDDMO57. Monaural CD, 2006. Length: 73:51 (Disc 1), 53:51 (Disc 2).

Disc 1 Tracks: 1. *Titoli* (1:59), 2. *Apparizione di Iole & Ercola salva Iole* (1:52), 3. *Racconto di Iole* (2:26), 4. *Il vello d'oro* (1:17), 5. *Al tramonto* (1:17), 6. *Ricordo della strage & Oscura presenza* (2:03), 7. *Atleti* (2:00), 8. *Sfida con l'arco* (1:07), 9. *Iole dopo la vittoria nel disco* (1:04), 10. *Massacrati dal leone e rabbia di Ercole* (0:56), 11. *Pelìa vendica la morte del figlio* (1:27), 12. *Funerale di Ifito* (1:10), 13. *Gli dei ascoltano Ercole* (0:47), 14. *Ercole entra nella grotta* (0:43), 15. *Morte di Chirone* (1:45), 16. *Verso Iolco* (1:42), 17. *Ercole e Iole* (1:12), 18. *Coro dei marinai* (1:47), 19. *Tristezza di Iole* (1:00), 20. *Prima dell'uragano* (0:22), 21. *Uragano* (3:07), 22. *L'isola delle amazzoni* (1:37), 23. *Prigionieri delle amazzoni* (1:05), 24. *Marcetta e alla corte delle amazzoni* (1:56), 25. *Giasone e la regina & Arrivo di Ercole* (0:47), 26. *Inseguimento scherzoso* (1:03), 27. *Il laghetto (film version*, 2:12), 28. *Messaggero di un segreto* (0:29), 29. *Balletto* (1:46), 30. *Amore fra Giasone e la regina* (1:25), 31. *Ercole recupera i suoi compagni* (1:27), 32. *Ritorno alla nave* (1:06), 33. *Coro di amazzoni & Orfeo e il coro di marinai* (film version, 3:29), 34. *Navigazione e sbarco in Colchide* (1:29), 35. *Battaglia con gli uomini-mostro* (unused, 1:02), 36. *Giasone e il vello d'oro* (2:46), 37. *Ritorno a Iolco* (1:00), 38. *Ercole inprigionato & Battaglia nel tempio* (1:52), 39. *Appare Ercole* (1:05), 40. *Pelìa prende la cicuta* (1:09), 41. *Ercole distrugge il tempio e finale* (film version, 1:39).

Disc 1 Bonus Tracks: 42. *Coro marinai* (#2, 1:48), 43. *Uragano* (#2, 3:08), 44. *Il laghetto* (#2, 2:13), 45. *Coro di amazzoni e canto di Orfeo* (1:45), 46. *Ercole distrugge il tempio e finale* (#2, 1:39).

Disc 2 Tracks: *See Ercole e la regina di Lidia.*

La frusta e il corpo (1963)

Italy: ***"The Winsor Concerto, Parts 1 & 2"***. Carlo Rustichelli. CAM #CAM CA-2523. Monaural 45 rpm single, 1963.

This 7" single was pressed in a very limited edition with a picture sleeve depicting Daliah Lavi as Nevenka. It contains the film's main theme, here called "The Winsor Concerto," divided into two parts.

Italy: ***La frusta e il corpo***. Carlo Rustichelli. CAM #CMS 30.132. Monaural 12" LP, 1963.

So rare I've never seen a copy, but a complete soundtrack album was assigned a catalogue number by CAM. It is possible that the album itself was cancelled for release. No track listing available.

Italy: ***Carlo Rustichelli, ritrato di un autore***. Carlo Rustichelli. CAM #CAM 501636-2. Stereo CD, 2001. Length: 58:56.

A marvelous selection of the *Maestro*'s best music, selected by the composer himself. Track 11 is the entire 8:41 "Winsor Concerto" suite, played in its entirety without fades. It was reissued at some point, an identical disc except for the omission of Track 19, "Where Is My Fortune?" from *Dai nemici mi guardo io!* (1968). Look for the complete version.

Italy: ***Mario Bava Original Soundtracks Anthology Volume II: La frusta e il corpo / Sei donne per l'assassino***. Carlo Rustichelli. Digitmovies #CDDM041. Monaural/Stereo CD, 2005. Length: 61:07 (Disc 1, Monaural), 39:40 (Disc 2, Stereo).

Disc 1 Tracks: 1. *Windsor Concerto* (Titoli, 1:59), 2. *Il ritorno di Kurt* (0:47), 3. *Windsor Concerto* (piano solo, 1:20), 4. *Un ospite sgradito* (1:21), 5. *Windsor Concerto* (sulla spiagia, 3:12), 6. *Nella notte e uccisione di Kurt* (3:38), 7. *Il cadavere di Kurt e un'antica vendetta* (3:08), 8. *La tomba di Kurt e angoscia di Nevenka* (3:42), 9. *Windsor Concerto* (ricordo di Kurt, 2:17), 10. *Apparizione di Kurt e incubo dello notte* (3:48), 11. *"Le impronte erano lì!" e nella cappella* (1:52), 12. *Diabolica presenza e Nevenka nella cripta* (2:15), 13. *Windsor Concerto* (il fantasma di Kurt, 3:34), 14. *Il cadavere di Comte Menliff* (2:32), 15. *Terrore nella notte* (4:14), 16. *Nevenka, sepolta viva e il fantasma di Kurt* (3:26), 17. *Apertura della bara di Kurt e una lama nel buio* (2:08), 18. *Windsor Concerto* (l'ultimo incontro di Kurt e Nevenka, 2:49), 19. *Windsor Concerto* (finale, 1:54), 20. *Windsor Concerto* (versione alternativa, 1:35), 21. *Windsor Concerto* (versioni singolo—medley, 8:41).

Disc 2 Tracks: See *Sei donne per l'assassino.*

The title of Rustichelli's signature piece, spelled "The Winsor Concerto" on every previous release, is here spelled "The Windsor Concerto."

Inferno (1980)

Italy: ***"Inferno"***. Keith Emerson. Cinevox #MDF 130. Stereo 45 rpm 7" single, 1980.

Italy: ***Inferno***. Keith Emerson. Cinevox #MDF 33/138. Stereo 12" LP, 1980.

Side 1 Tracks: 1. *Inferno* (Main Title Theme, 2:56), 2. *Rose's Descent Into The Cellar* (4:48), 3. *Taxi Ride* (Rome, 2:15), 4. *The Library* (0:57), 5. *Sarah in the Library Vaults* (1:17), 6. *Bookbinder's Delight* (1:11), 7. *Rose Leaves The Apartment* (3:30), 8. *Rose Gets It* (2:04).

Side 2 Tracks: 1. *Elisa's Story* (1:10), 2. *A Cat Attic Attack* (3:13), 3. *Kazanian's Tarantella* (3:34), 4. *Mark's Discovery* (1:23), 5. *Mater Tenebrarum* (2:38), 6. *Inferno Finale* (2:26), 7. *Cigarettes, Ices, Etc.* (2:49).

France: ***Inferno***. Keith Emerson. Barclay Records #960027. Stereo 12" LP, 1980.

Tracks: Same as Cinevox #MDF 33/138.

Germany: ***Inferno***. Keith Emerson. Ariola 202079.320, Stereo 12" LP, 1980.

Tracks: Same as Cinevox #MDF 33/138, but packaged in a gatefold cover.

UK: ***Inferno***. Keith Emerson. Atlantic #K50753. Stereo 12" LP, 1980.

Tracks: Same as Cinevox #MDF 33/138.

Other vinyl editions also likely exist.

Italy: ***Inferno***. Keith Emerson. Cinevox Record CD-CIA 5022. Stereo CD, 1989. Length: 36:11.

First compact disc release, consists of same 15 tracks as Cinevox #MDF 33/138.

Japan: ***Inferno***. Keith Emerson. Jimco Records/Cinevox JICK 89035. Stereo CD, 1992.

Tracks: Same as Cinevox #MDF 33/138.

Italy: ***Inferno***. Keith Emerson. Cinevox #MDF 306. Stereo CD, 1998. Length: 47:26.

"The Complete Original Motion Picture Soundtrack Recording."

Tracks: Same as Cinevox #MDF 33/138, but adds Track 16: *Inferno* (Outtakes suite, 10:13).

Il ladro di Bagdad (1961)

Italy: ***Il ladro di Bagdad***. Carlo Rustichelli. Conducted by Carlo Savina. Phoenix/CAM #PHCAM 10. Stereo 12" LP, 1987.

Side 1 Tracks: *Titoli/Main Titles* (2:26), 2. *Karim Spia nel Cortile/Karim Spies in the Courtyard* (1:26), 3. *Oznam Avanza/Oznam Advances* (1:23), 4. *Lo Specchio/The Mirror* (1:23), 5. *Gamal si Offre a Oznam/Gamal Offers Herself to Oznam* (2:24), 6. *Karim Fugge/Karim Escapes* (1:37), 7. *Gamal/Gamal* (1:35), 8. *Dopo il Raccanto di Karim/After Karim's Tale* (1:23), 9. *Le Guardie/The Guards* (1:28), 10. *Tra Quattro Mura/Within the Walls* (1:06), 11. *Avvertimenti/Warnings* (1:05).

Side 2 Tracks: 1. *L'avventura Ricomincia/The Adventure Begins Again* (2:05), 2. *Il Risveglio di Oznam/Oznam's Wake* (1:03), 3. *Miraggio/The Mirage* (1:03), 4. *Bivacco/The Bivouac* (1:09), 5. *Tra Gli Alberi/Among the Trees* (1:50), 6. *Tranello sulle Rocce/Trap on the Rocks* (1:11), 7. *Karim cade nel Trabocchetto/Karim Falls Into the Trap* (1:04), 8. *Il Colloquio/The Talk* (1:02), 9. *Danza/Dance* (4:02), 10. *Amina Attende Karim/Amina Waits for Karim* (1:45), 11. *L'Invito di Karim/Karim's Invitation* (1:30), 12. *Finale/End Titles* (0:30).

This album, with liner notes by Carlo Piazza, was pressed in a "rigorously limited" edition of 1000 numbered copies. The track listings are offered bilingually on the album jacket.

Lisa and the Devil (1973)

Italy: ***Summer Dreams***. Carlo Savina and his orchestra. CAM # CML 174. Stereo 12" LP. Length: 36:12.

This 14-track release in CAM's "Italian Music ibrary" contains the main theme from *Lisa and the Devil,* under the title "Theme For You" (Track 13).

Italy: ***Mario Bava Original Soundtracks Anthology Volume IV: I vampiri / Caltiki il mostro immortale / Lisa and the Devil***. Carlo Savina. Digitmovies #CDDMO58. Monaural CD, 2006. Length: 46:12 (Disc 1), 44:54 (Disc 2).

Disc 1 Bonus Track: 19. *To Mirna* (Theme from *Lisa and the Devil*, Stereo, 2:34).

La maschera del demonio (1960)

Italy: ***Mario Bava Original Soundtracks Anthology Volume I: La maschera del demonio / La ragazza che sapeva troppo***. Roberto Nicolosi. Conducted by Pierluigi Urbini. Digitmovies #CDDMO35, CD, 2005.

Tracks: 1. *La leggenda di Asa* (Prologo, 1:03), 2. *La maschera del demonio* (Titoli, 1:57), 3. *Macabra sepoltura e apparizione di Katia* (2:38), 4. *La cripta di notte* (1:05), 5. *Resurrezione di Katia* (1:32), 6. *Resurrezione di Javutich* (2:51), 7. *La carozza nera* (1:45), 8. *Angoscia e passione* (1:13), 9. *Kruvajan, morto viviente* (1:19), 10. *Passaggio segreto* (1:29), 11. *Apparizione di Javutich* (1:05), 12. *Katia terrorizzata* (1:33), 13. *Katia prigioniera di Javutich* (1:37).

The first in a projected series of Bava-related soundtrack discs, licensed from the CAM library. Stunning Monaural sound quality, but noticeably lacking Nicolosi's signature composition "*Tema di Katia*," the original tapes for which could not be located among CAM's holdings. Includes a twelve-page full-color illustrated booklet with liner notes by Claudio Fuiano and Tim Lucas.

Moses the Lawgiver (1975)

Italy: ***"Tema di Mosè"*** *b/w* ***"Israel"***. Ennio Morricone. Conducted by Bruno Nicolai. RCA Records TBBO 1082. Stereo 45 rpm 7" single, 1975.

US: ***Moses***. Ennio Morricone. Conducted by Bruno Nicolai. RCA Victor Records #NL31106. Stereo 12" LP, 1976.

Tracks: 1. *Moses Theme*, 2. *Exodus One*, 3. *Battle and Red Sea,* 4. *Nocturnal Shouts*, 5. *Lamentation One*, 6. *In God's Voice*, 7. *Israel*, 8. *Moses' Theme* (Journey), 9. *Nocturnal Sounds*, 10. *Exodus Two*, 11. *The Ten Plagues* (Part 1: "The Insects"), 12. *Moses Theme* (Closing Titles), 13. *Lamentation Two*.

This excellent, abridged recording of Morricone's moving score appears to have been deliberately sequenced not in the order heard in the film itself, but to produce the best possible listening experience.

UK: ***Moses***. Ennio Morricone. Conducted by Bruno Nicolai. Pye Records #NSPH28503. Stereo 12" LP, 1976.

Tracks: Same as US RCA release.

Netherlands: ***Moses***. Ennio Morricone. Conducted by Bruno Nicolai. RCA Records #TBL 1.1106. Stereo 12" LP, 1977.

Tracks: Same as US RCA release.

Italy: ***Mosè***. Ennio Morricone. Conducted by Bruno Nicolai. RCA Records OST 113. Stereo CD two-disc/cassette set, 1992. Length: 99:16.

An expanded two-disc set containing 25 tracks.

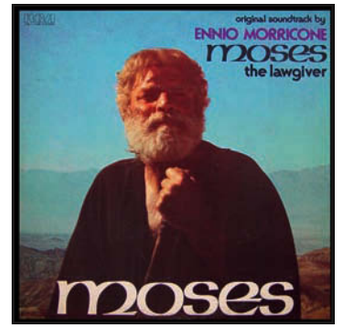
Disc 1 Tracks: 1. *Tema di Mosè* (4:03), 2. *Esodio primo* (3:08), 3. *Israel* (4:59), 4. *Nella voce di Dio* (4:44), 5. *Monodie sovrapposte* (3:35), 6. *Suonatori di flauto* (2:51), 7. *Battaglia e Mar Rosso* (6:31), 8. *Canto*





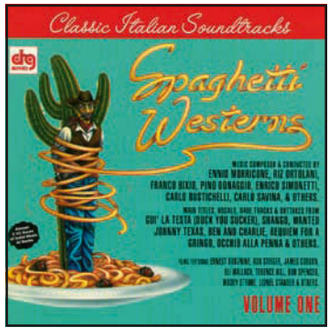
















notturno (2:17), 9. *Suoni notturni* (3:57), 10. *Lamentazione prima* (5:55), 11. *Le diece piaghe* (Parte 1: gli insetti, 3:30), 12. *Tema di Mosè* (viaggio, 4:24), 13. *Meditazione prima* (3:36).

Disc 2 Tracks: 1. *Tema di Mosè* (Titoli di coda, 4:03), 2. *Altri suonatori di flauto* (2:14), 3. *Le dieci piaghe* (Parte 2, 3:15), 4. *Salmodia* (5:10), 5. *Canto di donne* (5:02), 6. *Esodio secondo* (3:06), 7. *Urla notturne* (2:47), 8. *Lamentazione seconda* (5:11), 9. *Le dieci piaghe* (Parte 3, 4:02), 10. *Tema di Mosè* (rito della Pasqua, 4:29), 11. *Le quaglie* (2:29), 12. *Le dieci piaghe* (Parte 4, 3:58).

One of Morricone's most popular scores, individual cues and suites from *Moses the Lawgiver* can also be found on numerous Morricone anthologies and collections.

Operazione paura (1966)

Although this film attributes its "score" to Carlo Rustichelli, it was entirely composed of library tracks from the CAM music library, only some of which were penned by Rustichelli. (These originated in his earlier work for Bava, *La frusta e il corpo* and *Sei donne per l'assassino*.) Other composers whose work is heard in the film are Armando Trovajoli (from *Che fine ha fatto Totò Baby?*), Roman Vlad (from *I vampiri*), Angelo Francesco Lavagnino (sources undetermined), and Francesco de Masi (from *La lama nel corpo*/*The Murder Clinic*). The de Masi track that closes the film can be heard on CAM's rare 1966 soundtrack album for *La lama nel corpo* under the title "*Verso del speranza*."

La ragazza che sapeva troppo (1963)

Italy: ***Mario Bava Original Soundtracks Anthology Volume I: La maschera del demonio / La ragazza che sapeva troppo***. Roberto Nicolosi. Conducted by Pierluigi Urbini. Digitmovies #CDDMO35, CD, 2005.

Tracks: 1–13 See *La maschera del demonio.*

Tracks: 14. *Morte di Edith e Aggressione notturna* (2:22), 15. *Omicidio a Trinità dei Monti* (2:33), 16. *Risveglio in ospedale* (1:46), 17. *"Questo é Roma!" e Ricordo dell'omicido* (2:30), 18. *Al ristorante e Sospetto di Nora* (2:39), 19. *Preparando la trappolo e Un'ombra nel buio* (4:08), 20. *La belezze di Roma* (1:12), 21. *Mistero notturno* (3:22), 22. *Un caldo bacio dopo l'incubo* (3:04), 23. *Un ospite inatteso e I delitti dell'alfabeto* (2:03), 24. *Terrible scoperta e Angoscia di Nora* (3:33), 25. *Faccia a faccia con l'assassina* (2:16), 26. *E se fosse tutto un sogno?* (Finale, 2:19).

As with the *La maschera del demonio* soundtrack cues that occupy half this disc, an important cue is absent from Digitmovies' score for Bava's seminal *giallo*. Unfortunately, the company was unable to include Adriano Celentano's theme song "Furore" because it does not belong to the CAM archives.

Il rosso segno della follia (1970)

Italy: ***Mario Bava's Black Sabbath (I tre volti della paura)***. Sante Maria Romitelli. Conducted by Luigo Zito. RCA Records #OST-138. Stereo CD, 1997. Length: 59:29.

Tracks: 1–16 See *I tre volti della paura.*

Tracks: 17. *La Casa di Mode* (2:34), 18. *La Luna di Miele* (2:32), 19. *Ricordi o Incubi?* (1:04), 20. *Trauma* (2:18), 21. *Tessere di un Mosaico* (1:29), 22. *Seconde Nozze* (0:52), 23. *L'accetta e l'Abito da Sposa* (1:38), 24. *Il Piccolo Testimone* (2:34), 25. *Il Party* (2:23), 26. *Scavare nella Memoria* (1:08), 27. *Lineamenti di un Assassino* (1:16), 28. *John Harrington* (2:18), 29. *Ancora un'altra vittima* (1:16), 30. *Hatchet Shake* (1:29), 31. *Il Mosaico é Completo* (1:41), 32. *Un Accetta per la Luna di Miele* (1:16).

Though the cover art specifies this as a *Black Sabbath* soundtrack, only Tracks 17–32 of this CD present Romitelli's score for *Il rosso segno della follia*. In almost every case, the cues collected here are different takes to those heard in the film.

Roy Colt e Winchester Jack (1970)

Italy: ***"Roy Colt"***. Free Love. Cinevox #MDF-019. Stereo 45 rpm 7" single, 1970.

Italy: ***Spaghetti Western***. Various Artists. Cinevox Records #CIA 5051. Stereo 12" LP.

This compilation album presents only the title track, "Roy Colt" (3:30), in addition to themes from other Italian Westerns.

US: ***Spaghetti Westerns, Volume One***. Various Artists. DRG Records #32905. Stereo CD two-disc set, 1995.

Contains a 4:45 "suite" from the film.

Italy: ***Roy Colt & Winchester Jack***. Piero Umiliani. Cinevox #MDF 331. Stereo CD, 1999. Length: 36:14.

Tracks: 1. *Main Titles* (1:56), 2. *Seq. 2* (3:13), 3. *Seq. 3* (2:29), 4. *Seq. 4* (3:03), 5. *Seq. 5* (2:06), 6. *Seq. 6* (2:24), 7. *Seq. 7* (2:25), 8. *Seq. 8* (3:38), 9. *Seq. 9* (2:25), 10. *Seq. 10* (2:36), 11. *Seq. 11* (3:29), 12. *Finale* (2:54), 13. *Roy Colt* (theme song by Free Love, 3:30).

Italy: ***Cinevox—The History of Soundtrack***. Various Artists. Cinevox #CDMDF-346. Stereo CD four-disc set, 2003. Contains *Roy Colt & Winchester Jack* by Free Love (2:54).

Schock (1977)

Italy: ***Schock-Transfert-Suspense-Hypnos***. I Libra. Cinevox Records #MDF 33/113. Stereo 12" LP, 1977.

Tracks: 1. *The Shock* (4:08), 2. *L'Altalena Rossa* (1:28), 3. *Transfert I/Hipnos/Transfert II* (4:49), 4. *La Baia* (2:18), 5. *La Cantina/The Shock* (ripresa, 3:06), 6. *Tema di Marco I/II* (3:41), 7. *L'Incubo* (3:33), 8. *Transfert III* (1:34), 9. *Il Fant Suona il Piano* (1:56), 10. *Transfert IV/Tema di Marco* (ripresa, 4:00).

An uneven, dissatisfying documentation of I Libra's score for Bava's final feature film, with tinny production and a running time of less than thirty minutes.

Japan: ***The Shock***. I Libra. Seven Seas/King Records #FML 118. Stereo 12" LP, 1979.

Tracks: Same as Cinevox MDF 33/113, but packaged in a different sleeve.

Italy: ***Fantafestival Sampler Volume 1***. Various Artists. Cinevox Records #CIA 5083. Stereo 12" LP, 1992.

The first of four anthologies of horror and science fiction soundtrack music from Cinevox contains the title track only, which is credited to Walter Martino.

Italy: ***Lo Squalo, L'Escorcista e altri films della paura***. Various Artists. Cinevox Records #CIA 5014. Stereo 12" LP, c. 1990s.

Contains the title track.

Japan: ***Shock***. I Libra. Soundtrack Listeners Communications #SLCS-7155. Stereo CD, 1993. Length: 31:00.

Contains the same playlist as the original album release, with no extra cues, but the sound mix is greatly improved.

Italy: ***Mario Bava's Schock***. I Libra. Cinevox #CDMDF350. Stereo CD, 2000.

Tracks: Same as SLC #SLCS-7155, but with different cover art and superior sound quality.

Italy: ***Cinevox—The History of Soundtrack***. Various Artists. Cinevox #CDMDF-346. Stereo CD four-disc set, 2003.

This overview of the label's soundtrack releases includes the title track "Shock" (4:07).

Sei donne per l'assassino (1964)

Italy: ***La bellezza d'Ippolita***. Carlo Rustichelli. CAM Records #CAM CEP 4579. Monaural 45 rpm 7" EP, 1962.

The cha-cha accompaniment heard during the modelling show at Cristiana Haute Couture was originally composed by Rustichelli for this film, starring Gina Lollobrigida and directed by Giancarlo Zagni. This rare EP contained six cues from the film, one of which is undoubtedly the recycled cue.

Italy: ***"L'Atelier"*** *b/w* ***"Defile"***. Carlo Rustichelli. CAM Records #CAM CA-2559. Monaural 45 rpm 7" single, 1964.

This 7" single was pressed in a very limited edition with a picture sleeve depicting Ariana Gorini in the clutches of the killer, about to be struck with the clawed glove. Side A contains the main theme, "L'Atelier," and Side B contains "Defile," the suspense theme. Extremely hard to find, this single is THE jewel of Italian soundtrack releases. Contrary to the listing on Soundtrack Collector (www.soundtrackcollector.com), no complete soundtrack album is known to exist; the catalogue number they ascribe to an LP belongs to this single.

Italy: ***Mario Bava Original Soundtracks Anthology Volume II: La frusta e il corpo / Sei donne per l'assassino***. Carlo Rustichelli. Digitmovies #CDDM041. Monaural/Stereo CD, 2005. Length: 61:07 (Disc 1, Monaural), 39:40 (Disc 2, Stereo).

Disc 1 Tracks: See *La frusta e il corpo.*

Disc 2 Tracks: 1. *Atelier* (Titoli, 2:11), 2. *Inseguimento e morte di Isabella* (2:30), 3. *Nascondendo il cadavere* (0:31), 4. *Atelier* (riprisa, 2:38), 5. *Brutale aggressione* (1:26), 6. *L'indagine continua* (1:08), 7. *Terrore nella casa di moda* (1:33), 8. *Sospetti* (1:24), 9. *Attesa ossessiva* (1:05), 10. *Il killer colpisce ancora* (3:28), 11. *Defilè* (2:58), 12. *Assassinio* (0:52), 13. *Nuovi sospetti* (1:47), 14. *Attacco notturno* (1:50), 15. *Verso la verità* (3:12), 16. *Il volto dell'assassino* (finale, 2:10), 17. *Atelier* (singolo Side A—Monaural, 2:11), 18. *Defilè* (singolo Side B—Monaural, 2:58), 19. *Atelier* (versione alterativa in stereo, 2:10).

Le spie vengono dal semifreddo (1966)

Italy: ***"Bang Bang Kissene"***. Franco Franchi. Ester Records. Monaural 45 rpm 7" single, 1966.

Terrore nello spazio (1965)

Italy: ***Fantafestival Sampler Volume 2***. Various Artists. Cinevox Records #CIA 5084. Stereo 12" LP, 1991.

A long *Terrore nello spazio* suite (11:00) is included on this 1991 compilation album, which also includes music from Giorgio Ferroni's *La notte dei diavoli* (his remake of Bava's *I wurdalak*).

US: ***The Horror Films Collection***. Various Artists. DRG Records #32903. Stereo CD, 1995.

Track 22 is the 11:00 suite.

Italy: ***Cinevox—The History of Soundtrack***. Various Artists. Cinevox #CDMDF-346. Stereo CD, 2003.

A four-disc box set overview of the label's soundtrack releases, including a 2:40 title cue from *Terrore nello spazio*.

Italy: ***Terrore nello spazio***. Gino Marinucci Jr. Digitmovies #CDDMO07. Stereo CD, 2003. Length: 32:44.

Tracks: 1. *Main Titles* (1:14), 2. *Ship Landed on Planet Aura/Crazy Crew* (2:33), 3. *Astronaut Lands on the Surface* (0:54), 4. *A Very Strange Planet* (1:42), 5. *Exploring Aura/Dead Crewman Found* (4:54), 6. *Another Macabre Discovery/Ship's Abandoned Bridge* (1:27), 7. *The Living Dead* (1:15), 8. *Inside the Starship* (1:06), 9. *Evil Spirits* (0:46), 10. *A New Victim/Tiona Attacked by the Living Dead* (0:46), 11. *The Relic Ship/Aboard the Relic Ship* (2:01), 12. *"Where Are They?"/Tiona's Nightmare* (1:23), 13. *"I Know They're Dead"/Empty Grave* (1:18), 14. *Time Bombs* (0:39), 15. *The Living Dead Appears* (1:04), 16. *Battle on Planet Aura* (1:30), 17. *"You Are Both of Them!"* (1:30), 18. *"A Young, Primitive World..."* (finale 0:38), 19. *End Titles* (0:53).

The complete original soundtrack, issued without the 11:00 suite (the components of which are nevertheless found here).

I tre volti della paura (1963)

Italy: ***Mario Bava's Black Sabbath (I tre volti della paura)***. Roberto Nicolosi. Conducted by Luigi Zito. RCA Records #OST-138. Stereo CD, 1997. Length: 59:29.

Tracks: 1. *Black Sabbath* (1:58), 2. *Il Telefono* (1:23), 3. *Rosy e Mary* (1:40), 4. *Frank* (1:20), 5. *Wurdalak* (1:18), 6. *Vladimiro e Sdenksa* (2:06), 7. *Inizia la Strage* (0:56), 8. *Il Vecchio Gorka* (1:55), 9. *Nessuno si Salvara* (1:40), 10. *Vampiro!* (1:20), 11. *La Maledizione* (1:48), 12. *Il Volto della paura* (3:24), 13. *Sangue Viennese* (2:16), 14. *La Goccia d'Acqua* (2:24), 15. *L'Infermiera e l'Annello* (1:44), 16. *Il Cadavere di Miss Perkins* (1:47).

Tracks: 17–32 See *Il rosso segno della follia.*

"Mario Bava's Black Sabbath (I tre volti della paura)" is the title as it appears on the front of the disc; the spine of the CD reads "Il rosso segno della follia di S.M. Romitelli/I tre volti della paura di Roberto Nicolosi." A bravura sampling of Nicolosi's fine score, and solid evidence of how much Les Baxter derived from it while composing his replacement score. Only Tracks 1–16 are from *I tre volti della paura*; the remaining tracks are from *Il rosso segno della follia*, scored by Sante Maria Romitelli.

I vampiri (1957)

Italy: ***Mario Bava Original Soundtracks Anthology Volume IV: I vampiri / Caltiki il mostro immortale / Lisa and the Devil***. Roman Vlad. Digitmovies #CDDMO58. Monaural CD, 2006. Length: 46:12 (Disc 1), 44:54 (Disc 2).

Disc 1 Tracks: 1. *I vampiri* (Titoli, 1:35), 2. *Cadavere nella senna & Ultime notizie* (1:33), 3. *Nuova vittima* (1:19), 4. *Pierre d Giselle* (1:28), 5. *Prigioniero della droga* (1:15), 6. *Sulle tracce di berthier* (2:36), 7. *Ricatto e uccisione* (2:35), 8. *Tragica notizia & Funerale* (2:22), 9. *Chi giace nella bara & Passaggio segreto* (2:29), 10. *Rapimento & Appartamento vuoto* (3:25), 11. *Valzer* (1:18), 12. *Un vecchio disco che suona* (piano, 6:39), 13. *Identità rivelata & Diabolica trasfusione* (3:03), 14. *La misteriosa duchessa* (1:37), 15. *Notte da incubi* (2:52), 16. *Ispezione di polizia & Morte della duchessa* (3:03), 17. *Fine di un incubo* (1:32), 18. *Pierre e Giselle (ripresa) & Finale* (2:08).

Disc 1 Bonus Track 19. See *Lisa and the Devil.*

Disc 2 Tracks: *See Caltiki il mostro immortale*.

Addendum

Italy: ***Murder for Pleasure—Giallo and Thriller Themes***. Various. Gato Nero Records #BC001. Monaural CD, 1997. Length: 60:48.

This is a bootleg disc, reportedly of British origin despite its avowed Roman heritage, that collects music from various Italian *gialli* as collected from video sources. The disc's 28 cues includes samples from Mario Bava's *5 bambole per la luna d'agosto*, *Ecologia del delitto* (two cues), *Sei donne per l'assassino* and *Il rosso segno della follia*. The PAL sourcing of the material results in unwelcome changes of pitch. The disc itself is labelled "NOT FOR SALE—Promotional Use Only."













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Don Backy (Aldo Caponi)—October 21–23, 2002; email
Elena Bava (Mario's sister)—correspondence
Georgia Bava—various, 1985 – 2002; telephone and email
Lamberto Bava—various, 1980 – 2002; telephone and email
Roy (Fabrizio) Bava—various, 1993 – 2002; telephone—and April 2003 interviewed via Alan Jones
Norma Bengell—January 2001; email
William Berger—1992, interviewed via Peter Blumenstock
Laura Betti—April 23, 1985; correspondence and May 14, 1990; telephone
Erika Blanc—telephone (comments translated by her daughter)
Peter Blumenstock—October 29, 2002; telephone
Gianna Maria Canale—September 28, 1996; correspondence
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Gabriella & Germana Dominici—1992; telephone
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Stephen Forsyth—May 17, 2002; email and May – November 30, 2002; telephone
Riccardo Freda—1984 – 1985; correspondence and telephone
Ivo Garrani—June 21, 2001; interviewed by Luca Rea
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Ernesto Gastaldi—various, 1997 – 2002; email
Daniela Giordano—December 12–17, 1997; email
Armando Govoni—1998, email via Ernesto Gastaldi
Brett Halsey—August 25, 2002; telephone and August 28 – September 13, 2002; email
Richard Harrison—May 12, 2000, July 2, 2001; telephone, email
Louis M. "Deke" Heyward—August 15, 1989; telephone and September 1, 2001 – February 26, 2002; email
Martin Kitrosser—May 19 – July 6, 2002; email
Daliah Lavi—October 7–11, 2000; telephone
John Phillip Law—October 10, 1993; August 2004, both in person
Christopher Lee—correspondence
Alfredo Leone—various, 1984 – 2002; telephone and email
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◀ MARIO BAVA *consults his shooting script on the set of LA MASCHERA DEL DEMONIO.*

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Acknowledgments

THIS BOOK would be nothing more than a daydream, were it not for the many friends I have made around the world in the many years this project has been my introduction and passport.

I would like to thank, first and foremost, Mario's family—his son and assistant Lamberto Bava, his late sister Elena Bava (Mother Superior of the Ancelle del Sacro Cuore, who passed away in early 2007), and his grandchildren Georgia Bava and Fabrizio "Roy" Bava—for their memories, cooperation, trust, and extraordinary patience with this project and its widely scattered author.

I am deeply honored that the late Riccardo Freda, Mario Bava's mentor and father of the Italian gothic horror movement, and Martin Scorsese, the outstanding Italian-American director of our time, both understood the need for this book and agreed to endorse my research with prefatory statements. The assistance of Kent Jones in obtaining the Introduction from Mr. Scorsese is also much appreciated.

MARIO BAVA *self portrait, 1970s.*

Acknowledgments

I am grateful to the more-than-one-hundred people whose statements and recollections have helped to inform this work: Mary Dawne Arden, Dario Argento, Samuel Z. Arkoff, Marcello Avallone, Don Backy, Corrado Bartoloni, Norma Bengell, William Berger, Laura Betti, Alberto Bevilacqua, Erika Blanc, Peter Blumenstock, Penny Brown, Samson Burke, Tim Burton, Gianna Maria Canale, Anthony Carras, Roger Corman, Callisto Cosulich, Luigi Cozzi, Joe Dante, Ennio De Concini, Massimo De Rita, Catherine Deneuve, Ruggero Deodato, Dante Di Paolo, Gabriella Dominici, Germana Dominici, Nicoletta Elmi, Corràdo Farina, Mimsy Farmer, Philip Jose & Betty Farmer, Fiorenzo Fiorentini, Stephen Forsyth, Riccardo Freda, Cesare Frugoni, Edy Galleani, Christophe Gans, Ivo Garrani, Ernesto Gastaldi, Tudor Gates, Marcello Gatti, Daniela Giordano, Armando Govoni, Brett Halsey, Richard Harrison, Louis M. "Deke" Heyward, Martin Kitrosser, Lea Lander, Dagmar Lassander, Daliah Lavi, John Phillip Law, Christopher Lee, Michel Lemoine, Alfredo Leone, Fulvio Lucisano, William Lustig, Giuseppe Maccari, Antonio Margheriti, Eduoardo Margheriti, Elsa Martinelli, Sergio Martino, Aristide Massaccesi, Gabriele Mayer, the dear Harriet White Medin, Ib J. Melchior, Cameron Mitchell, Lucia Modugno, Luigi Montefiori, Roberto Natale, Daria Nicolodi, Alan Ormsby, Filippo Ottoni, Irene Papas, Alessandro Parenzo, Reg Park, Renato Pestriniero, Andrea Piazzesi, Luciano Pigozzi (a.k.a. "Alan Collins"), Maurice Poli, Vincent Price, Franco Prosperi, Carlo Rambaldi, Steve Reeves, Thomas Reiner, Antonio Rinaldi, Renato Rossini (a.k.a. "Howard Ross" a.k.a. "Red Ross"), Tony Russel, Carlo Rustichelli, Dardano Sacchetti, John Saxon, Rosalba Scavia, Martin Scorsese, Mario Silvestri, Brigitte Skay, Michele Soavi, Elke Sommer, Jean Sorel, Charles Southwood, Barbara Steele, Anthony Steffen, John Steiner, Barry Sullivan, Duccio Tessari, Jacques Tourneur, Goffredo "Freddy" Unger, Armando Valcauda, Emilio Varriano, Mel Welles, Richard Wyler, and Bernardino Zapponi. I interviewed many of these people (several of whom have since passed away) personally, while others were interviewed on my behalf by friends in faraway places. Still others are quoted herein from other published sources, but it seems only fair to include them here as part of this book's brain trust. The information and insights shared by all is equally appreciated.

The vast majority of these interviews were conducted in only one or two sessions. However, there were also cases in which my interviewees stuck with me as valued friends, involved in the gestation of this work over a period of decades. On this score, I would like to single out Joe Dante, Ernesto Gastaldi, John Phillip Law, Alfredo Leone, and the late Harriet Medin and Deke Heyward for special acknowledgment. Particular thanks are also extended to Stephen Forsyth for his personal encouragement of a more recent vintage, and the gift he made to this book of an original Photoshop collage composed of cutting room trims that he was given during the production of *Il rosso segno della follia/Hatchet For the Honeymoon*.

For the duration of this project, my correspondence with Lorenzo Codelli has been my lifeline to Italian cinema. He has been a true and constant friend in his offerings of help, news and information. My most enduring research associate and sounding board during this long voyage, Lorenzo assisted me in compiling the Eugenio Bava chronology, and was also this book's first reader; he made many excellent editorial suggestions, and I will always be appreciative.

Like my subject, I am a homebody uncomfortable with travel and unfamiliar surroundings—a fact that has sometimes compelled me to rely on distant friends like Daniela Catelli. Heaven sent Daniela to me; there is no other explanation. One day, she turned up in my email box offering help and friendship and, despite sometimes trying conditions, she has never failed to keep that promise. She translated many Italian texts and video materials for this book, including Mario Bava's original *Viy* treatment, his complete *L'Ospite dalle due* interview, the reminiscences of Mario's sister Elena, and much more. She also took my questions to composer Carlo Rustichelli at his Roman penthouse, where the *Maestro* treated her to a live piano performance of "The Winsor Concerto" from *La frusta e il corpo*, which he played from memory. I am greatly indebted to Daniela for her ready willingness to help and the unflagging warmth of her camaraderie.

Alan Jones has been another important ally over the years. He contributed two supreme gifts to this book in its final years of preparation. While I labored for the better part of three decades in Ohio, carrying out most of my research at long distance via telephone, fax and computer, Alan won a dream assignment in 2000 to conduct interviews for a Channel 4 television documentary, which was eventually called *Mario Bava Maestro of the Macabre*. I provided Alan with all of the addresses and phone numbers he needed, and in just a few whirlwind weeks, he was able to shake the hands of all the colleagues and family members I had never met and visit all the key places I had never been. He also found time to come here to Cincinnati to interview me for the program. Once his work was finished, he provided me with the unedited transcripts of all the interviews he had conducted—thus availing my research of interviews with some people I hadn't succeeded in contacting, and follow-ups with those I had. Secondly, after several of my own attempts to interview Dario Argento had fallen through, Alan prevailed upon his own friendship with Dario to complete the task. I'm beholden to Alan for his kindness and generosity, all motivated by his boundless enthusiasm for Italian horror and its *Maestri*.

Another of this book's primary interviewers was Kit J. Gavin of Diabolik Film Research, who interviewed Lea Lander, Elsa Martinelli, Maurice Poli, Jean Sorel, Rosalba Scavia and Brigitte Skay on my behalf, and also forwarded some helpful comments from his interviews with Mimsy Farmer and Penny Brown. Kit not only interviewed these people, but also transcribed and translated their comments. He also provided various contact addresses, phone/fax numbers, and important biographical data about other European actors discussed herein. I also wish to extend my thanks to Mike Baronas, Kit's partner in another book venture, who provided us with some much-needed digital photographs of archival materials and generously allowed this project to share barracks with his and Kit's work on some important interview dates.

Other research associates who conducted interviews exclusively for this book were Uwe Huber, who interviewed Thomas Reiner and sent other crucial information that led me to interviews I later conducted on my own; Robert Monell, who put me in touch with Richard Wyler and shared relevant quotes from his own interview with Charles Southwood; Luca Rea, who interviewed Ivo Garrani and translated a recent television interview with Bava's former camera operator Corrado Bartoloni for my use, as well as locating copies of some elusive films and newsreels; and Andrea Carpentieri, who forwarded comments from his friend, *5 bambole per la luna d'agosto* star Edy Galleani. My thanks to them, and to Luigi Boscaino, who interviewed Marcello

Avallone for a *Video Watchdog* retrospective on Riccardo Freda's *L'orribile segreto dal Dr. Hichcock/The Horrible Dr. Hichcock* in 1999, which yielded information I have incorporated here, as well.

In addition to being an interviewee of this book, Peter Blumenstock provided me with rare photographs from *Cani arrabbiati* and helped to compile the Bava discography, which can be found in this book's Appendices. I would also like to thank Peter for giving me the undreamed-of opportunity of collaborating with Mario Bava, in a sense, by inviting me to write the English subtitles of Lucertola Media's DVD release of *Rabid Dogs* in 1997. I'm also beholden to Marc Morris, who assisted me in compiling the Mario Bava Videography.

Stephen R. Bissette first wrote to me in 1985 in response to a two-part Bava article I published in *Fangoria*, and has been a profound helpmate, sounding board, and confidant over the years. Steve is one of those people always on the lookout for books, tapes, magazines, newspaper clippings—anything that might be of use to his friends' various projects. His materials have helped to broaden the net of my research and my mind, educating me in unfamiliar fields like stage lighting, and bringing to my attention seemingly unrelated films like *The Queen of Spades* (1949) and *Freud* (1962), which may have influenced Bava's work. He also provided the rare *Carnage* newspaper clipping found herein, proving that he was collecting data for this book even before I conceived of writing it. Of equal importance is everything that Steve taught my wife Donna and me about publishing, which planted the seeds of *Video Watchdog* magazine, thus giving us the tools that made this book possible.

When my friend John Bender told me that he and his wife Karen Emmerich would be travelling to Rome in the summer of 1999, he made a point of asking if there was anything he could do for me while they were there. Not knowing if I would ever reach Rome myself, I asked John—if it was at all possible—to locate and photograph Mario Bava's final resting place. Armed with my nebulous directions, and only after great difficulty, John and Karen achieved the impossible. I am obliged to them for so perfectly accommodating the needs of this book on their vacation. With his friend John Nudge, John was also extremely helpful in adding information to the pages devoted to Ennio Morricone's score for *Diabolik*.

One of this project's earliest supporters was Steve Jarvis, one of those amazing people who seem to casually know more about the cinema than most of those who make their living writing about it. Steve and I conducted an intense, off-and-on, Bava-related correspondence during the first ten years of this project. He shared information, challenged my perspectives, even arranged for some foreign articles and interviews to be translated. He read the earliest material I wrote for this book and will know, better than anyone, what this book has gained by ripening on the vine for so long. Steve's knowledge and research pointed me in numerous directions where I would never have thought to look otherwise, and over the years, he has never failed to send me a Christmas card with an extra handwritten note expressing his continued belief that I would someday make good on the promise of completing this book. It will give me special pleasure to finally ship him a copy.

This book may seem unwieldy, but it was far less manageable in manuscript form. Imagine, if you will, the challenge of making this book consistent, of ensuring that all its production dates were correct and identical throughout, of checking Italian film titles for spelling. I am deeply indebted to Joe Dante, Lorenzo Codelli, John Charles, Richard Harland Smith, and Tom Weaver for reading the book in its rawest state and offering their helpful notes and corrections.

Crucial assistance came to bear on the visual dimension of this book from Charlie Largent, Simonida Perica Uth (*moje sestra*) and Matthew Bradshaw, who worked independently on the digital restoration of the thousand-plus stills and paper materials reproduced herein. You have to do this work, or know the condition the original materials were in, to fully appreciate how painstaking it can be. Suffice to say, some of the materials were literally falling apart. Charlie, Simonida and Matt treated this book like their Sistine Chapel ceiling, and their craftsmanship deserves all possible praise.

Special acknowledgment is also due to my fellow reviewers at *Video Watchdog* magazine—Anthony Ambrogio, John Charles, Bill Cooke, Shane M. Dallmann, Charlie Largent, Kim Newman, Richard Harland Smith, Brett Taylor, Nathaniel Thompson, Rebecca & Sam Umland, and Douglas E. Winter. Each of them has rallied behind me and assumed a good deal of my monthly burden, so that I could devote all possible time and energy to the completion of this manuscript. Time to work is the greatest gift of all, and this book would still be years away from completion if not for their particular support.

Many others have generously assisted the progress of this book with the provision of 16 mm prints, videotapes, interview leads, paper materials, photos, articles, quotes, or other information which might otherwise have escaped my notice, long-term encouragement and—considering the number of years I have invested in this effort—even the refreshment of memory. In these categories, I am indebted to Gabriele Acerbo, Cathy Atwood, Kim Aubry, Lucas Balbo, Holger Bals, Mme. Barsanti of Lyre Cinematographique (Paris), Gian Piero Brunetta, Joe Busam, Nick Clooney, David Colton, Joe Dante, Guillermo del Toro, David Del Valle, Frédéric Durand, Glenn Erickson, Jay Fenton, Harris Forusz, Julian Grainger, Rob Hambrecht, Lars von Hegnet, Henrik Hemlin, Eric Hoffman, Paul Hutchings, Paul M. Jensen, Christian Kessler, Richard Klemensen, Russ Lanier, Craig Ledbetter, Michael Lennick, Frédéric Albert Levy, Mirek Lipinski, Mike MacCollum, Eric Mache, Maitland McDonagh, Mike Mariano, Jean-Claude Morlot, Stefan Novak, José Luís Silva Ortiz, Chris Ostermeier, Nancy Parke-Taylor, Michel Parry, Jan Perry, the late Wayne Perry, Renato Pestriniero, Alain Petit, Alberto Pezzotta, Roberto Pisoni, Simone Romano, Wade Sanders, the late Thomas Scofield, Gavin Smith, Olaf Strecker, the late Steve Swires, Gary Teetzel, Tony Timpone, the late Mark Upchurch, Robert and Simonida Uth, Bart van der Put, Fábio Vellozo, Donnie Waddell, Marc Walkow, Bill Warren, Miles Wood, Michael O. Yaccarino, and after all this time, undoubtedly others whose names I should have taken better care to record.

A word of separate thanks is owed to the late Frederick S. Clarke, editor emeritus of *Cinefantastique*, the first person who encouraged me to write something about Mario Bava, and who also instilled in me the criteria of "definitive" research.

And then there are the late friends to whom this book is dedicated, who spent much of their lives daydreaming of it with me, but who did not live to see this dream realized. Carlos Sylva, whom I never met, devoted much of his short but adventurous life to rescuing the films of Mario Bava from oblivion. During one of our few transatlantic phone calls, Carlos told me the hair-raising story of the day he found the 35 mm camera negative of Bava's *Four Times That Night* covered in

mushrooms. After hearing that chilling account, which brought home to me just how close to extinction Bava's filmic legacy might be, I told Carlos that I would like to interview him for this book about his adventures in preserving Bava's work for future generations. He was a young man; I thought we had all the time in the world, and I missed that opportunity. While I cannot presume to tell Carlos' story, suffice to say, if you ever see a pristine print of *Blood and Black Lace*, *Knives of the Avenger*, *Four Times That Night*, or *Lisa and the Devil*, you can thank Carlos Sylva. That much I know.

I never met Bill Kelley in person, but we were close friends by telephone for the better part of twenty years. Throughout that time, Bill was a valued research associate on this project, sending me videocassettes of relevant films that turned up on Florida television stations and sharing stories with me. A close friend of actor Christopher Lee, Bill was instrumental in arranging my interview-by-letter with Lee, and obtaining answers to later questions whenever they spoke. Several times over the years, Bill mentioned that he had once interviewed actor Barry Sullivan in 1975 about working with Mario Bava on *Planet of the Vampires*, and was hopeful of finding the misplaced document. Literally within one week of his passing, the transcript arrived in my mailbox and became the last substantial interview material added to this book.

Christopher Sven Dietrich interviewed the elusive Barbara Steele for this project, translated the original Italian dialogue of *La maschera del demonio* (his favorite film) and *I tre volti della paura* for my use (long before either film was available subtitled in this country), as well as two recently published interviews with Ennio De Concini and Massimo De Rita, and arranged for me to speak by telephone to the daughters of actor Arturo Dominici. In 1980, long before we met, it was Chris who first informed me by letter of Bava's untimely death. In addition to informing and encouraging this book for more than two decades, Chris shared rare poster art and photographs, and not least of all, he provided me with a place to stay when I visited Los Angeles for a Mario Bava retrospective in 1993. I've never known anyone who was a bigger Bava fan than Chris, and it grieves me that he missed seeing this book realized by only a couple of years.

Of the many people who involved themselves in the furthering of this project, none was more helpful or actively collaborative than Alan Upchurch. Back in 1985, like Steve Bissette, Alan wrote an appreciative letter in response to my *Fangoria* overview of Bava's career. It was the enthusiasm and unusual scholarly grounding apparent in his side of our early correspondence that brought my mission with this book into its fullest focus. My association with Alan opened many unimagined avenues in my research and greatly expanded the frontiers of this study. Alan translated the original dialogue from *I tre volti della paura*'s "The Telephone" episode (which was censored for the English-language version *Black Sabbath*) for this book, more than a decade before the Italian version was subtitled on DVD, and he was also my most invaluable research associate, converting foreign standard cassettes of rare films and bringing to my attention numerous obscure clippings that would otherwise have escaped my notice. The majority of the illustrations in this book are culled from his impressive collection of international posters, stills, and pressbooks for Italian productions.

In 1993, the year before his death from AIDS, Alan was the prime mover behind the first retrospectives of Mario Bava's films ever held in the United States, at San Francisco's Roxie Cinema (April 17–18), at New York City's Film Forum (July 23 – August 5), and at Los Angeles' Director's Guild Theater (October 8–10). It was not until the first of these events—quite late in this book's gestation—that I first saw Mario Bava's films in a theatrical setting; it was a profoundly moving experience. When Alan died, he bequeathed his collection of stills and paper materials to me, which he always intended to be used as illustrations for this book, as well as his multi-standard VCR, so that I could complete my research for this book without obstacles. When he was here, no one was more effective than Alan at goading me toward the finish line. Since his death, the things he entrusted to me have continued to be his voice, and my most effective encouragement. He once told me that he would haunt me until I finished this book; now that I have done so, I hope he will continue.

My wife Donna—my partner in this and all Video Watchdog ventures—has been a witness to this endeavor every step of a very long way. The promise of this book has hovered like the North Star over the first thirty-two years of our marriage; it was my brainchild, but our pregnancy, and it was she who took the greatest pains in bringing it to term. After all, this book was my passion and that passion carried me through; Donna's passion for this book was her wish to see my passion realized and justified. Over the decades, she has saved these pages from the jaws of oblivion more than once, rescuing them from hard drive crashes and file corruptions, and also gently steering me back on course whenever I gave in to depression and told myself that this project could never be finished. When early samples were rejected by several mainstream publishers, we weathered those disappointments together. It was always Donna's belief in this project—or, more to the point, her belief in me—that kept it moving forward, against all odds. In the end, it was her expertise with desktop publishing, learned over a seventeen-year period with our magazine, that made this book possible, much as our magazine has cultivated and organized the audience that now exists for this book and makes it commercially feasible. To put it succinctly, this book is as much Donna's achievement as it is mine—it's my words and research, her design, my dedication, her willpower, our baby. In many ways, the years that were spent transforming my manuscript into this book were sheer hell, and not a hell either of us could have endured in solitude, or working so closely with anyone else. To thank her for her role in all this would be like thanking her for loving me, but my appreciation and admiration and love for her is boundless.

Over the years, Donna and I have received—truly—countless letters and phone calls of encouragement and remarkable patience from Video Watchdog readers aware of this developing project. With this in mind, I would like to thank, finally, anyone who ever wrote or called to inquire about this book's progress, or to encourage me toward this achievement—especially those who supported it by pre-ordering a copy. *Mario Bava—All the Colors of the Dark* is a dream in which we all have shared—one from which it sometimes seemed we might never awaken—and it's my hope that all the people involved in this endeavor, however peripherally, will find it as happily concluded as the relationships founded upon it are happily ongoing.

Tim Lucas
Cincinnati, Ohio
1975 – 2007

PATRONS



It goes without saying that a book of this size, scope, and presentation is not for the average reader and thus falls outside the commercial considerations of most publishing companies. That this book exists at all is due not only to our commitment, but to the financial and emotional investments of the following people, who pre-ordered this book and waited patiently and trustingly for production to be carried out. We thank them all for their faith, forbearance, and encouragement, as should all future readers of this book. Without their support, *Mario Bava—All the Colors of the Dark* as it stands, would have remained an impossible dream.

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About the Author



TIM LUCAS is a novelist, critic, and film historian whose work reflects a lifelong preoccupation with fantasy and horror. His articles, interviews, reviews, and essays have appeared in *Sight & Sound*, *Film Comment*, *Cahiers du Cinema*, *Fangoria*, *Cinefantastique*, *American Cinematographer*, *Heavy Metal*, *Cinefex*, *Spin*, and many other publications.

In 1985, he introduced "Video Watchdog" as a monthly column; in 1990, he and his wife Donna launched *Video Watchdog* as a magazine in its own right. This award-winning monthly review of fantastic cinema defined the way home video releases are reviewed and stands out as one of the most original and influential publications of its kind.

Also in 1985, he edited Signet Books' *Your Movie Guide to Tapes and Discs* paperback series, writing the introductions for all twelve books and personally authoring the *Movie Classics*, *Horror*, *Science Fiction & Fantasy*, and *Mystery & Suspense* volumes. These were followed by *The Video Watchdog Book* (1992, a collection of magazine columns and articles) and guest chapters written for *The BFI Companion to Horror*, *The Shape of Rage: The Films of David Cronenberg*, *Obsession: The Films of Jess Franco*, *Fangoria's Best Horror Films,* and *Horror: Another 100 Best Books*.

His debut novel, *Throat Sprockets* (1994), now considered a cult classic, has been included in several surveys of the finest contemporary horror fiction. *The Book of Renfield: A Gospel of Dracula*, a work of dark Victoriana written in the style of Bram Stoker, followed in 2005. "A superb storyteller, Lucas mimics Stoker's style so well that it's hard to distinguish his own writing from passages interpolated from *Dracula*," praised *Publishers Weekly*.

An experienced audiovisual commentator, Lucas has recorded numerous DVD audio commentaries and appeared in several film-related programs, including A&E's *Biography* and the 2000 documentary *Mario Bava Maestro of the Macabre*. He also wrote the English dialogue for Mario Bava's *Rabid Dogs*, the first film to be released exclusively in the DVD format. His popular weblog *Video WatchBlog* won the Rondo Hatton Classic Horror Award for Best Website of 2006.

The work of a lifetime, *Mario Bava—All the Colors of the Dark* is the culmination of a project first undertaken by Lucas in 1975. He resides in Cincinnati, Ohio.



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ISBN 0-9633756-1-X